

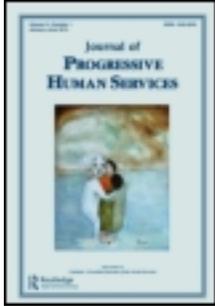
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Social Work Under Nazism: An Analysis of the 'Profession-in-the-Environment'

David D. Barney
Lisa E. Dalton

ABSTRACT. Social work practice, while focused on the “person in environment,” often overlooks the fact that social work itself functions as a profession within the greater context of political choices and changes within national and international environments. Close examination of social work practice within this greater macro socio-nationalistic context is imperative to take into account the intricate workings of politics within the profession. This paper uses a historical analysis of the social work profession in Germany, during the development of social welfare in the Weimar Republic, and changes that incurred when the Nazi Third Reich came to power. Analysis of social work practice in Nazi Germany provides essential implications for current ethical social work practice, as well as issues for further research. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com>*

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Social work is a profession that helps individuals to effect a positive change within the larger context of social environment. Practitioners usually identify the “person in environment” model of social work as the dominant intervention approach for the profession. However, social work itself also functions as a profession within the greater context of political choices and changes within national and international environments. Examining these issues would be looking at the profession of social work from a “profession-in-the-environment” perspective. Examining professional practice within this greater macro socio-nationalistic context would strengthen the profession of social work.

This paper presents, through historical analysis, an extreme example where professionals practiced social work in a different place, time, and social/political environment. As such, it is possible to examine the process and outcomes, offer comparisons, and learn how political and social environments can influence social work practice. The actions of the social work profession in transition from a liberal democratic government to that of a totalitarian nationalistic regime will serve as the case example. Specifically, a historical perspective of the social work profession under the German Weimar Republic and its subsequent transition into German National Socialism (Nazism in the Third Reich) will serve as the foundation of this analysis. Data used in this paper were acquired from both primary and secondary sources. The paper concludes with implications for social work practice, and issues for further research.

Much of the written history of social work as a social movement begins with the Charity Organization Societies (COS) during the late 1800s in Great Britain. There is also much known about the emigration of the social work profession from England to the United States (Levine, 1988). In the United States, the emerging social work profession consisted of the COS, under the direction of Mary Richmond and the Settlement House Movement under the direction of Jane Addams and Ellen Starr. However, less is known among English-speaking peoples about the emergence of the social work profession in Germany.

SOCIAL WELFARE DEVELOPMENT IN GERMANY: 1880-1932

There appear to be three major issues related to the early development of the social work profession in Germany. The first issue is an intrinsic link between social work as an emerging profession and the women's suffrage movement. The second issue is the development of "professional" status of social work as a women's profession. The last important issue is the "internationalizing" emphasis and its effect on the emerging social work profession. Brauns and Kramer (1986) have written about the very earliest development of social work education:

The beginnings of education in the social professions in Germany go back as far as the first courses of the "Girls' and Women's Groups for Social Assistance-Work" founded in Berlin in 1893 by Jeanette Schwerin and the German Society for Ethical Culture. In 1899, a one-year program was first established under the direction of Alice Salomon. In 1905, the Protestant Church in Hannover founded the first real Women's School for Social Welfare. (p. 173)

The development of social work as a profession was intrinsically tied to the women's suffrage movement in Germany, just as it was in Great Britain and the United States. From women's suffrage, equal rights were written into the Constitution. Unfortunately, this legal reform had no real effect on the status of German women. Subsequently, during the depression, the emancipation of women was once again replaced by a mood of anti-feminism (Thönnessen, 1969). In response to women's continuing political interests, the Social Democratic Party designated social work as a "specifically female" activity. Yet, in effect, the latent interest of the government was to create a monopoly for women in the social profession, thereby pacifying radicalized women, so that other, more powerful professions would remain reserved for men (Thönnessen, 1969).

In addition to pacifying feminist women, the government was able to find another purpose for relegating women to social work that would satisfy the government's need to control dangerous classes. Specifically, women social workers provided charitable support for "worker's welfare." Women social workers, functioning from the private sector, satisfied the welfare needs of the blue-collar, working-class poor, and unemployed, whom the government was either unable or unwilling to assist. To achieve this goal, 120 women were given a training course in

social work. The attitude of the day towards the role of women in social work was expressed by Frau Schöfer (*Proceedings of the SPD Party Conference, 1921*) during the 1921 National Women's Conference:

Woman is the born guardian and protectress of human life; that is why social work must seem so very appropriate to her. By allocating to women the task of guarding over human life we simultaneously provide a positive answer to the question whether women have a task in politics at all. (p. 43)

The ideal outcome of this meager token effort, however, was never to become a reality. Thönnessen (1969) states, "Social work was merely a way of providing limited training in welfare practices, and with the exercise of these practices with inadequate means, served to channel women's activity into the harmless sphere of 'useful' work" (p. 134).

By the late 1920s, women were at risk of losing their privileged status in social work. Brauns and Kramer (1986) describe these differences in social work gender roles further:

In Germany, strong interest groups attempted to restrict the first (female) specialists in social work to subordinate positions in health, social or judicial administrations under the direction of male supervisors. These tendencies could be held in check under the relatively favorable conditions of the Weimar Republic, especially by virtue of the Prussian directions for social work education of 1920. But, in the Nazi period they came again to the fore in some areas. Attempts to recruit males through special programs leading to a professional qualification in social work began in the mid-1920s, but they were not very successful in the years before 1945, in part due to the low status of the programs. . . . (p. 173)

Internationalization was another dominant objective of the new social work movement. Brauns and Kramer (1986) wrote, "prior to the Third Reich, the German social work profession had contributed substantially to the internationalization of social work . . ." (p. 173). Social work in the Weimar Republic was a profession that crossed national lines, thereby subjecting the profession to attack by later pro-nationalist forces.

During the Weimar Republic, the social work profession continued to expand. Fairchild (1987) provides a reference to the existence of the Federation of German Social Workers and their official journal, *Soziale*

Berufsarbeit. One of the more valuable English references about women social workers during Weimar is provided by Fairchild. She described the efforts of women social workers in German police departments to protect “endangered populations” (women and children). Women were granted entry into a men’s profession provided that they respect the limits of working only with the less important women and children populations. As these women social workers expanded their role in police departments and crossed traditional gender roles, they came under vicious public criticism. This all occurred at a time when the conservative anti-feminist National Socialist party was gaining favor and political power. Ultimately by 1933, the women social workers were dismissed from their jobs in public disgrace. According to Fairchild, these actions demonstrated how women were more visible targets—and that the actions of these women social workers served as lightning rods of societal disapproval leading to the inevitable declining status of women under the Third Reich.

Alice Salomon—Founder of the Emerging Profession

Alice Salomon is considered to be one of the founding mothers of professional social work and particularly social work education. Her efforts stand as an icon of pre-Nazi social work practice and much of what the Nazi party leaders would come to disfavor about social work under the previous Weimar administration. Salomon started the first full one-year course in women’s social work in 1899 while completing her own controversial dissertation entitled *Unequal Payment of Men’s and Women’s Work* (Wieler, 1988). Brauns and Kramer (1986) wrote, “In 1908, Alice Salomon opened the first social women’s school with a two-year program in Berlin—a program which was soon to be emulated all over Germany” (p. 173). By 1917, Salomon established the German Conference of Schools of Social Work.

Salomon was also active in international organizations with her efforts taking her to many foreign countries. During one of her visits to the United States, she was impressed by Mary Richmond’s work that attempted to create a theoretical basis for social work practice. Salomon returned to Germany with a copy of Richmond’s *Social Diagnosis* and subsequently translated this volume into German for local practitioners (Wieler, 1988). In 1928, Salomon led a section on social work education during the Paris worldwide social welfare organization congress. This group evolved to become the International Committee of Schools of Social Work (now the International Association of Schools of Social

Work-IASSW), of which she became the first president. The major objective of this committee was to create international schools of social work (Wieler, 1988).

In addition to the internationalization of social work, Salomon became an outspoken advocate in the world women's movement—promoting both women and the internationalization of women's concerns. Salomon was an activist for world peace at the close of World War I, and worked with Jane Addams in the peace and disarmament effort for which Addams later received the Nobel Peace Prize (Wieler, 1988). It was Addams who arranged an invitation for Salomon to address the International League for Peace and Freedom at The Hague. Later, the Institute for International Relations in London made Salomon the first German and first woman invited to address that distinguished forum (Wieler, 1988).

SOCIAL WELFARE ADMINISTRATION UNDER NATIONAL SOCIALISM: 1933-1945

Public relief and social welfare programs under the Third Reich were essentially a continuation of the Public Assistance Orders passed in 1924 by the Weimar Republic (Guillebaud, 1941). Two notable exceptions of Nazi social policy were the special extension of benefits to disabled soldiers, and the new requirement of all business firms to reserve a certain proportion of jobs for severely injured persons, which included both ex-soldiers and the victims of industrial accidents (Guillebaud, 1941). Prior to the Weimar Public Assistance Orders of 1924, the First Reich provided relief under the German Poor Law of 1870. While a dominant objective of the German Poor Law was to address the substantial social problem of agrarian poverty, equally as important was the goal to bring about German unification of differing states into one nation (Levine, 1988).

Concern about a declining German birth rate also led to the creation of “population policy” that developed marriage loans and other family support policies (Guillebaud, 1941). Thus, the National Socialist party's interests began to focus on family and child welfare services. Friedlander and Myers (1940) wrote:

The whole National Socialist policy emphasizes the intent to have children as the nucleus of the family, supplying this emphasis by wide propaganda through the press, the radio, speeches, pamphlets

and books, and last but not least, through the staff of the social services. Every physician, every midwife, nurse, and social worker in public or relief services, in the state health bureau, or the child welfare bureau is supposed now to carry on this propaganda of the obligation of parents to have more children. (p. 17)

After Weimar, social work continued, in similar and dissimilar ways, to be a part of the National Socialist movement's public agenda. Friedlander and Myers (1940) provided a poignant description of the effects on the social welfare profession after the Nazi takeover. They wrote,

After the shift of government to a dictatorship, there were, at first, strong tendencies toward the almost complete abolition of the public welfare, and particularly of the child welfare programs. The official propaganda of the Nazi party proclaimed that the "effeminate welfare policy of the Weimar Republic" should be abandoned, and that all activities in public relief and child care would be given to private organization. (p. 17)

In reality, however, just the opposite occurred when new Nazi party-related social welfare agencies were established, expressly, the National-Socialist People's Welfare Association (*National-sozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* or NSV). Reher (1938) states, "Private enterprise alone can no longer hope to deal effectively with the situation. Present conditions point to the necessity of interference on the part of the State and the adoption of a systematic State policy in social matters" (p. 5). Friedlander and Myers (1940) illustrate National Socialist party activities further:

Tendencies to eliminate the public child welfare activity and transfer this task to private agencies appeared in 1933 throughout Germany. In spite of these trends, the public child welfare administration has remained intact during the years of the National-Socialist government. The reason is that very soon after coming to power the National-Socialist party developed close party associations in the field of public welfare work. As the party colleagues took over the positions in public welfare administration, the party became rather favorable to the maintenance of public welfare work, which it had earlier attempted to abolish. (p. 17)

The Nazi party saw the goal of social policy to make the economic distress of the individual at least tolerable (Reher, 1938). The justification

for government intervention for the impoverished and disadvantaged was expressed, as “the Christian principle of love for the neighbor.” The Third Reich acknowledged that civilized countries have organizations for social assistance originating from private initiative. However, they viewed private philanthropy with suspicion. They noted a problem with social welfare in England and France where there were “thousands of institutions and association that serve the poor. The people were very generous, however, because these organizations are not organized and coordinated, many take as much as three times more than they should” (p. 4). Overall, they believed the distribution of charity lacked uniform control over the whole system.

In the perception of the Third Reich, the purpose of welfare was to bring lower classes and other disadvantaged into closer “spiritual touch” and sympathy with the state. For example, the Nazi party would have liked to believe that the old age benefit programs instituted in the Weimar Republic (similar to the Social Security Act of 1935 in the United States) would have brought about greater cohesion of differing social classes with the goals of the government. Nevertheless, this was not the reality. However, the Nazi party observed that old age and other relief programs under the Weimar Republic actually brought about increased antagonism to the government (Reher, 1938).

The Nazi party acknowledged that conditions during the 1920s and 1930s mandated government welfare intervention. They recognized that religious denominations had been unable to address adequately continuing poverty, and the Nazi party thought that the post-war period brought “social distress into the foreground.” They came to believe that social policy of the traditional type (as under the Weimar Republic) would not be adequate to solve social problems. For the Third Reich, the Great Depression was a labor issue resulting from the “substitution of manual work by the machine. . . . Unemployment or partial unemployment is always the chief cause of social distress among the masses. The only way of dealing with the situation is to find a place in the national economic system for those who are still capable of working” (p. 4).

According to de Witt (1978a), the National-Socialist People’s Welfare Association (NSV) was created when Führer Adolf Hitler issued a decree on May 3, 1933, establishing, “the N.S.V. as the official party organization for all questions appertaining to social welfare and relief.” The NSV, was entrusted with the task of uniting the whole population, the well-to-do and the destitute alike, in one national public benefits program for the “sake of the commonweal.”

There were three philosophical issues motivating the NSV First, assistance or help to an individual “must not be given as alms.” It was believed that indiscriminate charity would lead to dependency. Second, the individual had a relationship of reciprocity with the community. Reher (1938) stated that the, “need of the individual is an affair that concerns the community as a whole” (p. 8). Third, the community, as a whole, was the preferred target or social intervention. Reher (1938) continues, “The community of the people is the primary and essential object of care. The well-being of the community is a necessary precondition for the well-being of the individual” (p. 8). De Witt (1978a) states, “It was the Volk’s duty to help the indigent, not for charitable reasons . . . but because every sick or impoverished member of the organic community affected the health of the whole body and thus detracted from the nation’s economic vitality and military potential” (p. 260).

However, the Third Reich was careful to state that the NSV had different goals from that of sectarian private philanthropy. According to Reher (1938), those who would receive the services of the NSV were “principally confined to those who are congenitally sound in health and who are potentially useful members of the community” (pp. 8-9). The permanently disabled and not useful would be cared for by private sector charities. This classification of individuals into a hierarchical differentiation for potential welfare benefits (e.g., worthy vs. unworthy) was a major function of social workers and welfare workers (Kunstreich, 2003).

There were two major programs in the NSV The first program, established in the winter of 1933, was titled German People’s Winter Help (Winter Relief). By 1938, the Winter Relief utilized eight mission volunteer and professional staff. Guillebaud (1941) describes this program, “Like everything else of this order which is done by the Nazis it is organized on a vast scale and is given the maximum publicity and propaganda so as to enhance its popular appeal” (p. 98). The second, and much smaller program, Mother and Child Institution (*Mutter und Kind*), was oriented to provide services during the summer months when the Winter Relief program was inactive.

On September 13, 1933, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels announced government plans for what he called a new winter relief action “unparalleled” in the history of mankind (de Witt, 1978a). The Winter Relief program continued the Weimar practice of distributing goods instead of cash, thus, the government could take advantage of bulk purchases, resulting in construction of an elaborate network of offices and storage facilities. The principle subsidies were potatoes and coal, followed by clothing and general foodstuffs. Additional services included

soup kitchens, free school lunches, concerts, circuses, and other entertainment. Under the Third Reich, the Winter Relief program was to become a massive campaign to re-educate the nation and to reassure the destitute of the regime's social conscience. Additionally, the Winter Relief program was to strengthen "the nation's moral fiber." Guillebaud (1941) estimates that in the Winter Relief Campaign of 1933-34, up to twenty-five percent of all Germans became beneficiaries, and that as the German economy improved in subsequent years, this percentage decreased.

The Mother and Child program had 1.5 million volunteer and professional staff by 1938. Whereas, the Winter Relief program was essentially a simple redistribution of incomes for supplemental food and clothing to the poor, the Mother and Child program was a stronger expression of Nazi ideology of racial or biological social structuring. Guillebaud (1941) describes the Mother and Child program as follows:

The chief purpose of this is to provide a nationwide service of advice, instruction and help for young mothers and for children, especially those below school age. Recuperation homes are made available for mothers after child-birth, nurseries and kindergartens have been provided, in particular in the country districts, for looking after the young children during harvest time when the mothers are in the fields, and a network of advisory health centres has been established all over Germany. In general the aim is to diminish infant and child mortality, to raise the standard of health in the early years of child life, and to emphasize the importance of preventive and remedial measures as a means of diminishing poverty. (p. 100)

SOCIAL POLICY EFFECTS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST AGENDA

It could be concluded that the impact of National Socialism on social welfare and social work practice was both profound in some aspects and minimal in other aspects. In spite of Nazi propaganda to the contrary, most of the social policy administered by Third Reich bureaucracies was simply a continuation of laws enacted during the Weimar Republic. De Witt (1978a) stated, "With the socialization of German poor relief under the Weimar Republic, a foundation was laid for Nazi experimentation and reform" (p. 287). Clearly, there were extraordinary excep-

tions including the Third Reich's emphasis on biological determinism and exhibited genocidal capacity that were a definite departure from the liberalism of the Weimar Social Democrats.

Evaluation of the popularity or efficiency of the Winter Relief campaign is difficult due to limited availability of non-government data sources. According to de Witt (1978b), it can be concluded, however, that the program helped the disadvantaged to the extent that "few Germans faced the grim prospects of starvation and cold" (p. 378).

As with other nation's social welfare policies, the Third Reich maintained humanitarian along with unilateral interests in using social policy to regulate poor and dangerous classes and extend the power of social control from the Third Reich's bureaucracies into the lives of the middle and upper classes. The government determined the types of goods to be distributed based on types of seasonal industries that were to be put into full operation year round under the auspices of the Winter Relief program. This allowed the government to control industry through a highly systematic Nazi social service network.

Winter Relief also extended the power of government into the lives of German citizens by creating an informal, additional taxing mechanism where Germans were intimidated into voluntarily donating to Winter Relief or suffer consequences. This allowed the government to shift the burden of cost for Nazi social services to citizens through supplemental government channels. The working classes were forced to make pledges to Winter Relief through payroll deductions under the premise of "official voluntary guidelines" based on income levels (de Witt, 1978a). Even the lowest-paid employee was expected to make the minimal contribution or risk retribution from the government. De Witt (1978b) states:

despite repeated pronouncements regarding the voluntary nature of Winter Relief, there is ample evidence to confirm the use of widespread use of intimidation to extract contributions. Donations were registered on lists, and donors were advised that "the lists will be closely examined and contributions considered too small will be rejected." The consequences would range from charges of treason to mere harassment . . . (p. 366)

The upper classes were also coerced to fulfill their social obligation to the less fortunate through generous donations.

Nazi welfare relief programs existed to create a “physically strong *Volk*”—along with the latent desire to maintain racial purity. While the physically strong *Volk* incorporated the physically and mentally able-bodied, it also clearly excluded Jews, foreign-born workers and others with international allegiances. Nevertheless, there were other complex issues juxtaposed in NSV policy. The concept of public relief and social welfare gained widespread public support through Nazi social services to meet community needs while improving the state’s political image and gaining public approval for broader economic, political, and military policies.

At the same time, strong social control maximized government income and influence. In return, the Third Reich used the practice of social work to assist the worthy strong often at the expense of the unworthy underclass, therein, eliminating further need for costly social expenditures. Again, this meant that the strong (but temporarily disadvantaged) would be helped, while the weak, who were of no value in the Nazi ideology, would perish. For example, the racially impure, (e.g., children of “race defilers” such as “Aryan” and Jewish couples—a criminal offense) did not receive help through the NSV. Many of the truly disadvantaged received no assistance of any kind (de Witt, 1972). In the early years of the Third Reich, social welfare for Jews was acceptable to the extent that it was provided by private charities only (Kunstreich, 2003). However, even this aide to Jews diminished over time as the NSV came to control the functioning of church and other private sector charities.

Social workers and welfare workers were agents of social control under the Third Reich; a first-generation survivor commented:

In our Austrian village (Weyregg am Attersee) we had an N.S.V. worker who helped my mother as she gave birth to me. The N.S.V. worker was assigned to help with any and all support to local village people. So their involvement was quite extensive and reached even into the smallest of villages. This particular N.S.V. worker was liked by the people in the villages, but there were stories told of others that acted as informants, while doing social work. Even with “*Tante Bertha*,” as she was called, I remember my mother talking about having to be careful. The use of the word “aunt” made her more familiar, but also turned the position into this social judge of behaviors, since the elder aunts, often not married, held that role in their families (J. Riediger, personal communication, December 15, 2005).

This is one example of NSV social workers and their social control functions at the home-visit or community level. However, social workers and welfare workers also actively participated in social engineering (called “social hygiene”) at a broader level consisting of certification for compulsory sterilization and diagnostic recommendations for euthanizing disabled and infirmed mentally ill, mentally retarded, and aged in institutions such as hospitals, pediatric wards, and prisons (Kunstreich, 2003). Ultimately, Nazi social welfare policy, however, was just one method of social control. The objectives resulting from a belief in biological determinism and the need for racial purity were also accomplished through military expansionism and government practices of genocide.

Effects of the Nazification of the Social Work Profession

If the experience of Alice Salomon was typical of professional social workers of the Weimar Republic, then it is known that women members of the German Federation of Social Workers would have endured great losses under control of the National Socialist party. For Salomon, one of the first acts against her was the removal of her name from the school she had founded in Berlin, the *Alice Salomon School of Social Work* (Wieler, 1988). Salomon’s efforts on behalf of peace and disarmament were antithetical to the Nazi desire for military expansion. Salomon was another threat because of her struggle for women’s rights that came into direct conflict with the party’s new defined role for women. She was dismissed from her offices and public honors. She was also pressured to resign her presidency of the International Committee of Schools of Social Work.

In 1937, Salomon completed an international survey of social work education and gave a speaking tour in the United States. Upon return to Berlin, Salomon was questioned by the Gestapo with the result being an ultimatum to leave Germany permanently or be placed in a concentration camp (Wieler, 1988). She emigrated to England and later to the United States. At the same time, the Third Reich cancelled her German citizenship and revoked her university degrees.

This was one of many ways that the Third Reich brought an end to the internationalizing efforts of the social work profession. Salomon’s International Committee of Schools of Social Work’s goal of creating international schools of social work was terminated by economic and political events of the time (Wieler, 1988). Brauns and Kramer (1986) stated:

This positive trend (internationalization) was abruptly terminated by the Nazi dictatorship. After the war, German social work came under considerable influence of Anglo-American ideas without, however, completely freeing itself from the provinciality which had been imposed by the Nazis. (p. 173)

Table 1 summarizes the key changes in the shift of social welfare under the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

The question must be asked: What are the parallels between 1921 Germany and today? What were the early warning signs that led to the horror of Nazism? How did social workers, psychiatrists, physicians, nurses, educators, and other helping professions work for the Third Reich and still adhere to their professional code of ethics? The answer to these and other questions lie in the complex motives that cause good people to do evil deeds. Kunstreich (2003) acknowledges two important structural elements that facilitated passive adoption of Nazi ideology by social workers. First, he notes that change was slow. In general, major changes did not occur overnight—thereby calling attention to governmental policy issues. Second, there was really nothing new since 1933. Existing laws from Weimar were liberally interpreted and construed to different shades of meanings—all within a context of political compromise. Additionally, many existing Weimar laws already had a racist or discriminatory focus. For example, Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code under Weimar criminalized male homosexuality. This preexisting discriminatory law received minor revision by the Third Reich to become more harsh and resulted in an increase in the already existing persecution of male homosexuals (Kunstreich, 2003; Lautmann, 1981; Porter, 1995). Kunstreich (2003) continues with an additional noteworthy concern, wherein social workers embraced their role as classification agents for the government through use of their specialized, professional knowledge and skills. This specialized knowledge was constructed upon adapted scientific models of practice extending from Richmond and Salomon. He states that social workers also lacked personal responsibility for their actions, as they were only one part of a much larger system where they themselves did not actually conduct the internment or euthanizing. He states that social workers substituted their technical and specialist knowledge for their moral responsibility.

TABLE 1. Key changes in the shift of social welfare

<i>Pre-Nazi (Weimar Republic)</i>	<i>Nazi–National Socialism (Third Reich)</i>
Internationalization of social work	National interests only for social work
Women’s leadership of profession	Men’s leadership through Nazi party structures
Focus on women’s and children’s welfare issues	Focus on family and children as expressions of ‘population policy’ to promote welfare of the state
Profession’s goal of maximizing individual human potential	Social workers become predominately agents of social control
Assistance to disadvantaged is a governmental or public responsibility (with private sector assistance)	Assistance to disadvantaged should be private sector responsibility—but this later changes to Nazi political party control over social welfare and the social work profession

Nazism emerged as a solution to economic and political problems, very similar to the problems that face the world today. The National Socialist (Nazi) reform efforts directed at social welfare and establishment of a new social concept of the state add an important dimension to the way that social work embraces social reform movements. Yet, events of the last half of the 20th Century and early 21st Century inform us that limited or token reform policy have no real impact on the disadvantaged. The experience of Nazi Germany shows us that even extreme reform measures are likely to be ineffective—if not destructive and socially suicidal. Ultimately, the social work profession can use this information from past and contemporary reform movements to question the effectiveness and vitality of such approaches when the goal is betterment of the human experience.

Social work could specifically benefit from examining the way that existing gender roles determine different social functions and responsibilities. The social work profession today, remains and operates as a women’s profession. While inherently this may be a substantial asset of the profession, it may also be similar to both Weimar and Nazism in that subtle factors in society continue to use the social work profession to

pacify women and curtail their participation in more powerful realms of political activity in legislatures and executive administrations. These past historical occurrences can serve as a guide for us today to identify more effectively the influences of gender upon the profession's leadership and the related social welfare policy and programming.

The public welfare system under control of the Nazi party failed to achieve desired outcomes of a greater synthesis between individuals and their communities. The NSV also failed in reducing desired social class differences. Poverty did diminish, but this was due to macro-economic policy that forced increased productivity under totalitarian threat, rather than influences from helping professions. If a public welfare system fails to adequately alleviate distress under a totalitarian government, then administration of social welfare and the practice of social work in the social democracy might be a substantially more difficult objective to achieve.

There would also be benefits in the analysis of the rhetoric that was used under National Socialism and the rhetoric of contemporary social policy designers and other political leaders today. Perhaps there exists a viable link between the state's rhetoric and the subsequent reality of social welfare administration. (If so, we need to carefully examine this link and analyze specific situations where rhetoric becomes practice.) For example, the NSV's emphasis on providing assistance only to the "congenitally sound in health and potential useful members of the community" exists in subtle ways in the present public welfare system where the temporally disabled receive greater resources (through vocational-rehabilitation programs) than those who are permanently disabled.

Furthermore, there are other parallels where Nazi rhetoric mirrors the concepts of contemporary social policy. An example is the "empowerment" jargon used by Nazi social workers. It appears that Third Reich social policy was supportive of the "self-help" concept. Nazi propaganda is replete with rhetoric that calls for the disadvantaged to help themselves become self-sufficient and eliminate the risk of dependency. Clearly, this rhetoric is closely similar to the rhetoric of contemporary U.S. political administrations in their shifts toward more conservative policies.

The Nazi experience calls for a deeper understanding of contemporary moral dilemmas and an evaluation of social work's response to these issues. The profession of social work must be vigilant in the examination of possible socio-political oppression and discrimination so as not to succumb to the pressures of conforming out of fear or ambition. Denial of civil liberties of any group should alert social work to the pos-

sible misuse of power, and this denial should be a motivator for professional advocacy, and individual and collective response. The lesson of Nazi Germany for the social work profession may be not so much in the horrific atrocities that occurred, but rather in the individuals and professions that acquiesced to the social and political policies that allowed the atrocities to occur.

CONCEPTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We know much about the administration of public social welfare in the Third Reich. However, less is known about the actual individual social workers who filled the ranks for the NSV. It is known that some, such as Salomon, suffered substantially under the policies of the Nazi party, but this may be because these individuals were legally defined as Jews under Nazi law, rather than their professional interests in public social welfare. There are some limited references to Nazi leadership supervision of the NSV, such as Führer Adolf Hitler's speech to the *Winterhilfswerk* 1936-37, opening the Winter Help Campaign, or Joseph Goebbels' attendance at the distribution of parcels to the aged by the Berlin NSV chapter. But, overall, descriptions of the average NSV worker are seldom archived in historical references.

In further study of National Socialist Social Workers, it would be valuable to concentrate on the issues of professional adaptation. Previous studies, such as Lifton's (1986) *Nazi Doctors*, suggest that the Nazi professional person's actions and beliefs in totalitarian Germany were an example of deviance and individual pathology. Such a depiction, however, fails to account for the influence of greater social concerns and issues. Again, the issue centers around the actions of good people who are caught in a downward social anomie.

There are many questions that remain unanswered in the existing body of literature. For example, who were the "line workers" who filled the paid staff social work positions in the NSV? What happened to the social work members of the German Federation of Social Workers, trained in the women's school of social work, as the National Socialist party gained political prominence in the early 1930s? As a whole, to what degree did the social work profession support or oppose the change of government from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich?

Since the Nazi were reformers, and not initiators of radical change, it is reasonable to believe that they adapted existing social structures to their own ideological objectives. It may also be a reality that the Third

Reich adapted the German Federation of Social Workers organization to serve their own goals and objectives. If so, was the social work profession's code of ethics rewritten? Did the NSV social workers follow a state-imposed professional code of ethics that was complementary to the Nazi vision of a people united in harmony with the state?

Hampton-Turner (1981) wrote, "The systematic, drawn-out, gloating destruction of nearly seven million people in Nazi concentration camps dashed, at one stroke all conceptions of ethical progress in human culture" (p. 174). Thus, in the 21st Century, it remains difficult to comprehend fully the German experience of the Third Reich. Hunt (1978) states that some scholarly efforts have successfully bridged perceived differences from differing decades and generations and can provide meaningful insight for individuals in later epochs. While attempting to conceptualize the real impact of Nazi actions hidden under their powerful rhetoric, it remains important to be aware of benefits to be derived from the knowledge that we can learn from this human experience. Social work, with its emphasis on the well-being of the individual in a social context, would benefit with expanded scholarship on the role of social workers and the administration of the profession during the Third Reich. Additionally, social work scholarship could benefit humanity with further development of knowledge about the human experience under the most adverse and extreme conditions.

AUTHOR NOTES

Dr. Barney's previous experience includes positions as Medical Epidemiologist for Alameda County in California and Assistant Statistician at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. Previously, as Director of Research at the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center he conducted evaluation activities for a network of 12 Special Projects of National Significance throughout the U.S. that served American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Other major research and evaluation efforts include the HRSA U.S./Mexico International Border HIV/AIDS Initiative, and the HRSA National American Indian and Alaska Native HIV/AIDS Technical Assistance Center. He has conducted HIV/AIDS evaluations for adherence issues and Title III programs under the Ryan White CARE Act. Dr. Barney has made more than 50 presentations on HIV/AIDS at national conferences, published two articles on HIV-care evaluation methods, and published numerous articles on HIV/AIDS case management.

Currently, Dr. Barney is the principal investigator for two research projects. First, he is Project Evaluator on the CDC funded *Latino Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Project*. Second, he serves as multi-site evaluator for the Paso del Norte Health Foundation *Two Should Know: Healthy Human Sexuality Initiative*.

Dr. Dalton's research, publications and presentations focus on Sexual Identity Minorities, Sexual Identity Development, Chronic Mental Illness, and Secondary Traumatic Stress. She is a National Institute of Health post-doctoral fellow. Dr. Dalton is an accomplished speaker having presented over 400 workshops on mental illness and effective interventions with clients.

In addition to her academic pursuits, Dr. Dalton is a Master Social Worker—Advanced Clinical Practitioner in the state of Texas, is nationally certified in the Academy of Certified Social Workers and pending independent licensure in the state of New Mexico. Her therapeutic specialization is clinical supervision of clinical social workers. Her urban and rural practice experience encompasses chronic mental illness, sexual identity issues, domestic violence, play therapy with children, clinical adolescent counseling, medical social work, home health care, training and development, and program administration.

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