

## **Actions Needed to Imbed Social Work's Ethical Principles into the Undivided Whole Worldview of Interconnected Webs of Relationships**

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### **Abstract**

Pre-20th century Western science emerged out of a divided whole worldview embedded with colonizing elements of self-determination and solidarity that still persist in social work practice. This view links to ancient atomism and ontological beliefs that all things exist independently in space and time. Together, sums of independent parts equal the whole. Social work's 19th century origins were influenced by the dominance of Western science. Quantum sciences in the 20th century have shown the divided whole view to falsely rely on analytical summing of independent parts. Even transformations to whole person perspectives and interdependent collaboration have yet to see social work fully transition to an undivided whole worldview. Evidence of boundaries still to be pushed are tracked through the profession's progressive Ethical Principles transformations in the 20th and 21st centuries. These transformation pushes are significant but remain insufficient in shrinking the presence of colonizing elements in science from social work practice. As the second quarter of the 21st century nears, The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World founded on the prefix principle of 'co-and its four priorities is a significant nudge toward more practice actions that will remove the dominance of these colonizing elements from social work principles and practices.

### **Indigenization Statement**

Richard Ramsay is a Canadian born descendant of 19th century paternal-side Ulster-Scots and German-American settler immigrants. As a retired social work academic, he used synergistic, whole systems advocacy most of his academic career for social work paradigms to advance beyond the early influences of Divided Whole ontology of materialism science focused on separation and exploitation toward an Undivided Whole paradigm of interweaving webs of relationships on the evolutionary path of social work in the 20th and 21st centuries.

### **Land acknowledgement**

With gratitude and respect for the intended and still in progress mutual agreement to live in peace and to have good will between First Nations Peoples, settlers and the Government of Canada, I acknowledge the ancestral home, culture, and kinship teachings of the First Nations Treaty 7 signatories, which includes the Niitsitapi Nations (Siksika, Piikani, Kainai) and the Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut'ina First Nations. I acknowledge my residence in the City of Calgary

is also the homeland to the historic Northwest Métis and to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government and Métis Nation Battle River Territory, Nose Hill Métis District 5 and Elbow Métis District 6.

### Introduction

Much of my social work story has focused on the detrimental side of Western science's dominance in the history and evolution of the profession. Colonial elements found in pre-20<sup>th</sup> century science were embedded in social work's evolution of ethical principles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remain there (for a deeper look at colonialism and science, see Starrs et al., 2021). How this happened requires an understanding of ontology; what is reality? Two worldviews of reality are addressed, the Divided Whole and Undivided Whole, linked to 20<sup>th</sup> century physicists, David Bohm and David Peat (Bohm, 1983; Bohm & Hiley, 1993; Peat, 2002a & b). One view relates to pre-20<sup>th</sup> century science, and the other to ancient Indigenous and more recent complexity sciences.

Social work's *Global Statement of Ethical Principles* (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] & International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2018) needs boundary pushing to better align with the Undivided Whole view of reality and removal of the embedded colonization elements. Two of its principles are realigned as illustrations: Building Solidarity and Right to Self-Determination. Resistance is expected. Solidarity is the rallying cry when sticking together or when holding to a position is required. The belief in voice and agency, free from control, is deeply entwined with self-determination and reclaiming it in the context of decolonization (see IFSW, 2025, Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination). However, reclaiming a principle that needs the caveat "provided it doesn't threaten rights and legitimate interests of others" (IFSW-IASSW, 2018) doesn't make sense. Principles must stand free from caveats.

Bohm and Peat spent time with Leroy Little Bear and others in Alberta, learning about Undivided Whole similarities with Blackfoot views of reality. In writing *Blackfoot Physics*, Peat (2002b) became one of the first Western scientists to address complexity science advances catching up with Indigenous science. Betty Bastien, one of the others, had this to say about their physicist visitors.

For so long our culture has been ignored, dismissed and laughed at, ...and we have been referred to as primitive people .... But now a physicist ... says that he respects the way we look at the world, ... and that he can see connections with things from the frontiers of his own science. ... other people should know this. (Peat, 2002b, p. 18)

Shortly before he died, Bohm met with Algonkian speakers and realized that what he thought were breakthroughs in his Undivided Whole view of reality “were part of the everyday life and speech of the Blackfoot, Mic Maq, Cree, and Ojibwaj” (Peat, 2002b, p. 238).

An Undivided Whole view of reality is needed to make room for decolonized ways of knowing to be recognized, respected, and applied by social work practitioners and policy makers. The challenge doesn't have to be daunting. Giving greater voice to the meaning of the prefix 'co' can remove colonizing influences. Before Western science dominance, many ancient knowledge systems followed (and still do) the worldview that reality is a complex web of interconnected and reciprocal relationships. This view of reality is powerfully communicated in Indigenous views like “all my relations” (Peat, 2002b, p. 286) and ‘I am because we are’. Peat and Bohm knew that “science begins with our relationship to Nature (Peat, 2002a, p. 208). Peat also knew that a science created by other cultures (e.g. Native Americans or Africans) would not deny Western science, “rather it would be more like a different framework for knowing the world” (p.209). Peat (2002b) was refreshingly clear in understanding that “Indigenous science also holds that there is no separation between individual and society, between matter and spirit, between each one of us and the whole of nature” (p. 6). Mainstream social work has yet to fully articulate

the Undivided Whole view in manifesting its recognition and support of different frameworks.

Progress is underway. In social work education, Gail Baikie's (Inuit and European heritage) (2020) research and teaching on the borderlands is a good way example:

“Indigenous social workers use both their Indigenous knowledge and their knowledge of mainstream perspectives, systems, and institutions to strategically navigate practice situations (p. 328).”

Social work's adherence to colonizing entanglements embedded in science is under examined. Even in IFSW's (2020) *2020-2030 Social Work Global Agenda on Co-Building and Social Transformation*, the mention of colonizing elements in science that continue to be part of social work's ethical principles is absent. In spite of emerging decolonization practices, social work, and its multicultural practice contexts, continues to be over influenced by pre 20<sup>th</sup> century reductionism, machine-model mindsets, and the Divided Whole view of reality.

Social worker voices need to fully lean into the Undivided Whole worldview. Sticking with the principle of solidarity links social work to one of the most enduring ties to Western science's adherence to the 'building block' view of reality. Social workers are proud of belonging to a relationship-centered profession. Solidarity in a social cohesion sense, means networks of people working closely and tightly together for a cause or purpose. This is more aligned with 20<sup>th</sup> century science advances and Undivided Whole views of 'All My Relations' and 'I Am Because We Are'. Transforming embedded values so that language and meaning are aligned is not easy. Social workers can have an impact by changing the language and practice of solidarity to the language of webs-of-togetherness.

Self-determination too is linked to the worldview that everything is independent in space and time. Everything is entity/thing-centred. Entity-centredness has its roots in the clockwork

machine worldview. When we 'see' reality as something separate and independent, we are inclined to think of the divided part first: my nation, my race, my cultural beliefs, my family, my way. Deep interrelatedness corresponds to knowledge long known by other worldviews. Self-determination requires participation; participation requires other. By replacing 'self' with the prefix 'co' to become co-determination or to add 'reciprocal' to become reciprocal self-determination, the view of independence changes to the Blackfoot Physics flux of interconnectedness between individual rights and collective responsibilities.

In 2022, IFSW adopted boundary pushing with others in co-sponsoring the Co-Building Summit and its open support for Ubuntu, Africa's Indigenous science worldview. The entire profession needs to keep pushing boundaries; to keep working for good ways benefits for all peoples.

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