SOCIAL WORK SCHOLARS' REPRESENTATION OF RAWLS: A CRITIQUE

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Although Rawls is the most cited social justice theorist in social work, he is not always accurately represented in the literature. To clarify this claim, the author reviews social work scholars' views about social justice, shows social work scholars' representation of Rawls, and highlights aspects of Rawls' theory of social justice. The author's critique reveals that there have been and continue to be more differences than similarities between Rawls and social work scholars. Consequently, the article recommends revising the social work knowledge-base in relation to social justice and Rawls so that his ideas are authentically represented in future social work education and scholarship.

RAWLS (1971) IS THE MOST cited social justice theorist in social work, but he is not always accurately represented in the social work literature. To illuminate this assertion, this article reviews social work scholars' views about social justice, presents social work scholars' representation of Rawls, and highlights aspects of Rawls' (1971, 1999, 2001) views on social justice. A critical review suggests that there have been and continue to be more differences than similarities between Rawls and social work scholars who cite Rawls to discuss social justice. Consequently, it recommends revising the social work knowledge base related to social justice and Rawls so that his ideas are more authentically represented in future social work scholarship and education. This article paves the way for social work scholars to move in that direction.

Rawls' treatise on social justice, *A Theory of Justice*, was first published in 1971. Social work scholar Lewis (1973, p. 113) reviewed the book and wrote, "It hardly needs another enthusiastic review to recommend it to potential readers. I suspect that from now on no serious discussion of justice . . . will be complete without some reference to this seminal work." Lewis was right in his observation. Since then, Rawls has been extensively cited in social work. It is not surprising that social work scholars have cited Rawls and written extensively about social justice, for at least

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two reasons. First, Rawls is regarded as the most important social justice theorist of the 20th century (Nussbaum, 2001; Sen, 1999). Second, social justice is a primary mission and a driving force for social workers (Brieland, 1990; Reamer, 1998; Reisch, 2002; Wakefield, 1988a). The NASW's *Code of Ethics* requires social workers to promote social justice, and the Council on Social Work Education mandates the infusion of social and economic justice content into the social work curriculum (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2001; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2005).

However, Galambos (2008, p. 1) noted that although social justice is one of six core values of the social work profession, "The profession's attempts to define social justice now and in the past demonstrate an inconsistency and lack of clarity." Similarly, Reisch (2002) pointed out that it is difficult for social work educators to teach about social justice, and for social work professionals to act purposefully towards enhancing social justice, when the profession of social work is unclear about its meaning. Instead of clarifying the meaning of social justice, this article identifies another major problem that confounds our social justice literature. It relates to social work scholars' reliance on Rawls (1971) to discuss and promote social justice in a manner which is not always consistent with his entire social justice framework.

An internet search of *Social Work Abstracts* from 1978–2009 showed that the term *social justice* appeared 336 times in abstracts and 93 times in titles, while Rawls was mentioned nine times in abstracts (searched June 2, 2009). A review of all these abstracts showed that a vast majority of them mainly used the term *social justice* to indicate how certain ideas or interventions could promote it, and only a few abstracts discussed the concept of social justice in more depth. A detailed review of this latter group of articles led to some interesting findings. First, Rawls (1971) was cited in 21 separate publications, and these articles referenced other articles and books in which Rawls was mentioned. Second, it appeared that over time some social work scholars were deemed as authorities on social justice or on Rawls because later writers routinely cite them. For example, Morris (2002, p. 365) stated, "Today, John Rawls' (1971) *A Theory of Justice* is typically cited as the social justice theoretical framework embraced by social work (Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Swenson, 1998; Wakefield, 1988)." Such extensive reliance on Rawls to discuss or promote social justice could lead readers to believe that Rawls' theory of justice provides answers to our major social justice concerns.

However, a comparative review of the social work literature on social justice and Rawlsian justice (Rawls, 1971, 1999, 2001) showed two major discrepancies. First, social work scholars have largely misread Rawls' theory, including those aspects of it which have the most significance for social work. Second, Rawls (1999, 2001) has revised, clarified, and updated his theory of justice since its seminal publication in 1971; but, the most recent social work literature on social justice continues to represent his 1971 ideas (Galambos, 2008; Hollingsworth, 2003; Larkin, 2004; Mulroy, 2004; Reisch, 2002; Solas, 2008; Van

Soest & Garcia, 2003). Continued citation of Rawls' original ideas is problematic because the changes are highly significant for social work's conception of social justice. In the preface for the revised edition, Rawls (1999) stated that he still accepted the 1971 edition's "main outlines and defend(ed) its central doctrines" (p. xi). However, he has made five major changes to the 1971 thesis pertaining to liberty, social primary goods, just savings, argument from the original position, and the basic structure of society.

More importantly, in the preface to the 2001 edition, Rawls (2001) stated that one of the two aims of this book was "to rectify the more serious faults in *A Theory of Justice* that have obscured the main ideas of justice as fairness . . . I try to improve the exposition, to correct a number of mistakes, to include some useful revisions, and to indicate replies to a few of the more common objections. I also recast the argument at many points" (p. xv). In 2001, Rawls revised four ideas that are especially noteworthy for social workers as will be shown in this article. Together, these two problems appear to undermine the significance and relevance of the current social work literature related to social justice and Rawls.

The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast social work scholars' views on social justice, their representation of Rawls, and Rawls' own perspectives on social justice to examine whether these three spheres overlap. It is important to examine this issue because if the three spheres do not overlap then it would indicate problems with how Rawls is represented and applied to social work. Such a problem would need to be corrected (NASW, 2005). Scholars who have written on Rawls and social work deserve recognition for attempting to bridge the gap between abstruse philosophy and action-oriented practice. This article attempts to constructively critique existing scholarship, and argues for a more nuanced understanding of Rawlsian justice in relation to social work. The cost of silence is a continued misunderstanding of Rawls in future social work scholarship and education related to social justice.

Social Work Scholars and Social Justice

It is difficult to define *social justice* concisely because it is a complex idea. There is no agreement about whether "liberty, equality or solidarity is the primary cornerstone on which the edifice of justice is to be constructed" (McCormick, 2003 as cited in Finn & Jacobson, 2008). Finn and Jacobson (2008) discuss how social justice has been conceptualized from dominant philosophical approaches and for various purposes and contexts. In social work, CSWE and NASW require teaching, promoting, and practicing social justice, but neither defines it. NASW's *Code of Ethics* lists social justice as a core value of the profession, and identifies its scope as "issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice" (2005, p. 4). It supports equality in certain areas and equity in others: "equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities" to "meet basic human needs and to develop fully," and "promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all

people" (NASW, 2005, p. 20). On the other hand, Barker succinctly defined social justice as "an *ideal* condition in which *all* members of a society have the *same* basic rights, protections, opportunities, *obligations* and *social benefits*" (1999, p. 451; italics added). This definition appeared in some later discussions related to social justice (Barusch, 2002; Finn & Jacobson, 2008; Galambos, 2008; Gibelman, 2000; Karger & Stoesz, 2002). Although this definition was couched under ideal circumstances, it indicated that from a social work perspective equality in all spheres is the most desirable form of social justice. One wonders how, even in an ideal condition, same obligations and benefits are possible when there are so many differences among people. This is an important issue given social work's commitment to appreciate all forms of human diversity.

However, other social work scholars have focused on equality, or on fairness, or on both to discuss social justice. For example, Reeser and Leighninger's (1990) definition of social justice reflected a concern for equality as well as fairness: "a commitment to equal rights and to an equitable distribution of wealth and power among all citizens" (p. 71). Although Van Soest (1994, 1995) did not define social justice, she too promoted it as an issue of equality and fairness. She advocated for equality in social, economic, and political spheres as well as for special consideration for poor people in meeting their basic needs. Beverly and McSweeney (1987) stated that justice required fairness and the government must prioritize its resources to allow poor people to meet their basic and developmental needs. Similarly, Wakefield (1988a) viewed social justice as an issue of fairness and suggested that disadvantaged people need equal access to various services and opportunities to meet their basic needs. Saleebey (1990) suggested that social justice requires redistribution of resources to help individual citizens develop their basic and growth needs. Thus, there was no agreement on the scope or meaning of social justice among scholars, but it appeared that for social work scholars social justice meant better living conditions and life circumstances for people who are poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized in society. Better living conditions and life circumstances require access to food, clothes, housing, health care, education, and job opportunities (Beverly & McSweeney, 1987; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Wakefield, 1988a).

Reisch (2002) defined a just society as one where people

> can live decent lives and realize their full human potential. This requires the elimination of those policies that diminish people's sense of control over their lives . . . expansion of those programs that enable people to exercise personal freedom by removing the fear of economic and physical calamity from their lives and making them feel integral and valued parts of society. (p. 351)

He identified five principles for such a just society: (1) holding the most vulnerable populations harmless in the distribution of societal resources, (2) expressing mutuality, (3) emphasizing prevention, (4) stressing multiple ways to access services and benefits, and (5) enabling clients and constituencies to

define their own situations as well as to contribute to the development and evaluation of solutions (Reisch, 2002).

Social work scholars also discussed varied grounds for social justice. In keeping with the professional mission, some believed that poor people deserve better life circumstances because of equal moral worth and dignity (Beverly & McSweeney, 1987; Saleebey, 1990; Van Soest, 1994). Others promoted the intuitive notion that all people's basic needs should be met, and some suggested that redress, altruism, egalitarianism, and citizenship were grounds for social justice (Saleebey, 1990; Van Soest, 1994; Wakefield, 1988a). To bring about social justice, they offered many strategies ranging from micro to macro levels of practice. At the macro level, they called for redistribution of resources by the government to help poor people, and suggested that such funding should have priority over military, social, or natural resource development (Beverly & McSweeney, 1987; Saleebey, 1990; Van Soest, 1994). Approaching from these varied perspectives, scholars drew on Rawls to substantiate or further their visions of social justice.

Social Work Scholars' Representation of Rawlsian Social Justice

Wakefield (1988a, 1988b) is the first social work scholar who wrote extensively about Rawlsian justice. He is considered an authority on Rawls because later scholars routinely cite him. Wakefield's primary contribution lies in extending a domain of Rawls' idea tied to social primary goods—the social bases of self-respect. Through an elaborate discussion, he justified psychotherapy by clinical social workers to enhance people's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-knowledge as a social justice function. Although most social work scholars claim that poor people's basic needs must be met in a just society, drawing on Rawls' idea of social primary goods (to be elaborated later), Wakefield (1988b) promoted a much more extensive list of needs that must be met in a just society. He stated that when social workers help their clients to get a minimal level of these social primary goods, "minimal distributive justice" results (1988b, p. 353). Further, he stated, "social work can be conceived as a profession engaged in alleviating deprivation in all its varieties, from economic to psychological; social workers identify people who fall below the social minimum in any justice-related good and intervene in order to help them rise above that minimally acceptable level" (1988a, p. 194). In addition to social primary goods and social minimum, he referred to Rawls' principles of justice with particular attention to the difference principle. Further, Wakefield explained Rawls' views on individuals by stating that for Rawls, "every rational person is taken to be morally equal and deserving of respect" (1988a, p. 196). Last, drawing on Rawls, he noted that distributive justice means that a state has obligations to citizens for "fair allocation of the benefits of social cooperation" (1988b, p. 355).

Wakefield (1988a, p. 196) clarified that "several caveats should be noted" before applying Rawls' theory to social work:

> Rawls writes at a highly theoretical level and says nothing about social work, so that applying his ideas to social work involves borrowing, adapting,

> and extending his insights. Some of the ideas I will cite . . . are to be found in the works of other writers, but Rawls' account provides a convenient systematization and point of reference.

He added, "It would be absurd to either change our concept of justice or adjust the basic purpose of our profession to fit some theory.... But such changes in our concepts are not at all what these philosophical accounts aim to accomplish" (1988a, p. 195). He critiqued Rawls very briefly stating that his theory also fails to get around the problem of utilitarianism where it is possible to abuse people who are in the minority in order to benefit a majority (1988a).

Reisch and Taylor (1983) referred to Rawls (1971) even before Wakefield did (1988a, 1988b). They drew on the Rawlsian ideas of distributive justice, need, maximin theory, and the principle of redress to promote humane management in the context of scarce resources. Later, Reisch (2002) referred to Rawls' 1971 and 2001 works, and promoted Rawls' conceptions of distributive justice, difference principle, principle of redress, and attempts at equalizing life chances for people with adjectives such as "appeal[ing]," "compelling," and "particularly well suited to the social work profession's goal of eliminating racial, gender, and economic inequalities" (p. 346). Reisch substantiated his argument in quoting Rawls:

> Undeserved inequalities call for redress; and since inequalities of birth and natural endowment are undeserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for. Thus, the principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide for genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality. (Rawls, 1971, as cited in Reisch, 2002, p. 346)

Figueira-McDonough (1993) stated that, "equality in the distribution of basic social goods is necessary. . . . The list includes food, shelter, healthcare, education, and work. Access to such goods becomes the operationalization of equal opportunity. . . . For Rawls, only under conditions of equal opportunity can individual choice be considered an exercise in freedom" (p. 180). This idea is extensively cited in social work.

Van Soest (1995, p. 1811) compared libertarian, utilitarian, and egalitarian views of justice, and stated that Rawls' egalitarian principles of justice "make redistribution of resources a moral obligation." As such it is the most consistent view of justice for social workers. Further, Van Soest (p. 715) stated that for Rawls "the primary concern is needs, particularly those of the worst off, and how the need arose is not relevant to development of the theory. . . . Social work is most compatible with the central egalitarian value of distributive justice that supports people's rights to at least the basic resources for living." She continued, "Even though Rawls (1971) does not address the issue of deservedness, social work's advocacy of such a right is grounded in a belief that people deserve the basics

because of their inherent worth and dignity" (1994, p. 715).

Van Soest and Garcia (2003) discussed Rawls' theory of justice, including principles with an emphasis on the difference principle, social primary goods, and moral philosophy as:

> The first principle requires that basic liberties must be equal, because citizens of a just society have the same basic rights to freedom, to fair equality of opportunity, to access to goods and services, and to self-respect. The second principle asserts that although the actual distribution of income and wealth need not be equal, that any inequalities in power, wealth, and other resources must not exist unless they work to the absolute benefit of the worst off members of society . . . redistribution of resources is a moral obligation. The unmet needs that should be redressed first should be of those who are most in need. This means that to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions . . . greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent students in our schools, at least in the earlier years, to ensure equality of opportunity in life. (p. 47)

Based on social work scholars' representation, Rawls clearly appears to champion our cause of social justice. Scholars state that because of high congruence between the two viewpoints, they have borrowed and adapted his ideas to promote our vision of justice. Next we turn to Rawls' perspectives on social justice related to concepts borrowed by our scholars.

Overview of Rawlsian Social Justice: 1971, 1999, 2001

Distributive Justice

In a nutshell, Rawlsian distributive justice (Rawls, 1971, 1999, 2001) is about fairness to all citizens. Broadly, distributive justice requires citizens and institutions to cooperate in the marketplace, and the government to regulate social, economic, and political institutions while also determining these institutions' and citizens' duties and obligations to each other based on Rawls' two principles of justice. When all these conditions are met, the benefits and burdens of social cooperation are fairly distributed among all citizens and distributive justice results.

Thus, social cooperation is a key concept in distributive justice. For Rawls, such cooperation entails that the state should, for the most part, refrain from regulating markets. Rawls stated that the basic structure or the government should regulate the economy only to prevent the formation of monopolies that could fix prices; otherwise it should be allowed to run its course. Rawls espoused the neo-classical economic theory that markets will coordinate, and stabilize demand and supply in the most efficient way possible (Rawls, 1971, 1999, 2001). Further, social cooperation means wage labor for those who do not have the capital to invest and investment by those who have the capital to produce

goods and services. For wage earners, pay and benefits package are a predetermined contract between two parties and tied to an individual's ability, merit, effort, and contribution as well as what the market is willing to pay for such labor based on demand and supply. When some people are more talented and as such are in higher demand, they should be paid more than those who are less talented and more easily available. Further, if some people are unhappy with their wages they should enhance their educational and occupational skills so they can earn more. However, although work is such a critical component in distributive justice, the government is not required to have a full employment policy, or to set a minimum wage standard because both these actions would interfere with the functioning of a free market economy (Rawls, 1971, 1999, 2001).

Principles of Justice

Rawls (1971, 1999, 2001) formulated two elegant principles of distributive justice to make society egalitarian and required the government to apply these principles accurately to all decision making so that the justice obligation of fairness to all citizens could be met. The evolution of language and the ordering of these two Rawlsian principles of justice are reported in Table 1.

The first principle is known as the equal liberty principle. It guarantees equal basic political and civil liberties such as freedom of speech, assembly, religion, property ownership, and political participation to all. However, these freedoms are not anything more than what the U.S. Constitution already provides to citizens. The second principle has two parts. In the 2001 version the first part of

TABLE 1. Evolution of Rawls' Principles of Justice: 1971, 1999, 2001

Principles of Justice, 1971 and 1999
First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others (Rawls, 1971, p. 60; slight change but similar wording in Rawls, 1999).
Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971, p. 83; slight change but similar wording in Rawls, 1999).
Principles of Justice, revised in 2001
(a) Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all; and
(b) Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle) (Rawls, 2001, pp. 42–43).

the second principle is known as the fair equality of opportunity principle and it guarantees fair access to education and work for all citizens with equal ability and talent, irrespective of their socioeconomic background. The second part of the second principle is known as the difference principle, and it accepts some inequalities in social and economic institutions as fair, but requires that these inequalities benefit poor people to the greatest extent possible. So, Rawlsian justice is egalitarian insofar as every citizen has the same basic political and civil freedoms, but everything else should be fairly but not necessarily equally distributed. The second principle is designed to tighten the gap between rich and poor and this tightening of the gap is egalitarian.

It is important to note two important changes in Rawls' principles of justice. First, Rawls dropped the term *right* in the first principle and strengthened it further by referring to it as an "indefeasible claim" in 2001 (p. 42). Thus, equal civil and political freedoms that cannot be annulled or taken away are extremely important in his final thesis. Second, he moved the difference principle from its first position to second/last position. This shift is highly significant because these principles have always had a lexical ordering, which means that the first principle must be fulfilled first, followed by the order of the second principle. Thus, in the revised version, ascertaining whether socioeconomic inequalities are to the greatest benefit of least advantaged people is of lesser importance than ascertaining fair equality of opportunity.

The fair equality of opportunity principle addresses two primary Rawlsian concerns: education and work, which might allow higher income and wealth. However, it does not guarantee equal access for all, but it guarantees fair access to education and work. This means that all people with equal ability and talent, irrespective of their class background, would have equal access to education and work. However, recognizing that people's class background might interfere with their opportunities to realize their abilities and talents, Rawls recommended, but did not require, that the government should spend extra resources on economically disadvantaged children's education until they complete high school. But, this noteworthy justice concern is marred by a reciprocity clause attached to the difference principle, which stated that any extra expenditure for less advantaged people must benefit more advantaged people as well.

Rawls (2001, p. 62) introduced the difference principle in terms of an OP curve or a contribution curve for the "more advantaged group" (X axis) and the "less advantaged group" (Y axis). O is the point of origin, and P is the contribution curve. The OP curve rises at a 45-degree angle and reaches a line JJ parallel to the X axis, which is the highest equal-justice line. About the middle of this line is point D, which is the maximum equal-justice point. He clarified that "equal-justice lines represent how claims to goods cooperatively produced are to be shared among those who produced them, and they reflect an idea of reciprocity" (2001, p. 62). In other words, all citizens must cooperate appropriately in a free market economy and earn a just income or wage. Consequently, some will earn more than others because of their skills and abilities. However, the resulting socioeconomic

inequalities are to be to the greatest benefit of poor people. Thus, for example, those who have more should invest their capital and labor so that poor people can get a job and earn a market wage. At the same time, people who have less income and few assets should not resent those who have more. This is because the idea of social cooperation and reciprocity in societal living are key features of Rawlsian justice.

A critically important clause in the difference principle is the principle of reciprocity. In 1971, Rawls stated that "the difference principle expresses a concern for reciprocity. It is a principle of mutual benefit" (p. 102). In 2001, Rawls explained that "reciprocity is a moral idea situated between impartiality. . . . and mutual advantage" (p. 77). Thus, the difference principle expresses a "concern for all" (2001, p. 71). As such socioeconomic inequalities are to benefit "others as well as ourselves . . . even if it uses the idea of maximizing the expectations of the least advantaged, the difference principle is essentially a principle of reciprocity" (2001, p. 64). Further, he stated that the difference principle is in a certain sense a principle of fraternity. Instead of focusing on rights, the sense of fraternity helped to convey certain "attitudes of mind and forms of conduct" such as "not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of others who are less well off" (2001, p. 90). Similarly, "it is not to the advantage of the less fortunate to propose policies which reduce the talents of others. Instead by accepting the difference principle, they view the greater abilities as a social asset to be used for the common advantage" (2001, p. 92). Rawls expressed similar ideas in 1971 as well (see pp. 100–108).

Rawls considered redress or compensation for "those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality" (1971, pp. 100–101; 1999, 2001). However, he also clearly stated that

> the difference principle is not the principle of redress. It does not require society to try to even out handicaps as if all were expected to compete on a fair basis in the same race. But the difference principle would allocate resources in education, say, so as to improve the long-term expectation of the least favored. If this end is attained by giving more attention to the better endowed, it is permissible; otherwise not. (1971, p. 101)

Primary Goods

Rawls (2001, p. 57) stated all citizens require five primary goods, which are "various social conditions and all-purpose means necessary and required to enable citizens to develop." Earlier, Rawls (1971, 1999) had distinguished between natural and social primary goods. He had emphasized that five needs were social primary goods because they were within the purview of societal influence. These needs were basic rights and liberties; freedom of movement and free choice of occupation from diverse opportunities; powers and prerogatives of offices, and positions of authority and responsibility; income and wealth; and social bases of self-respect. But he had considered health, vigor, intelligence, and imagination as natural primary goods because he believed

that society had little influence over them. However, he was criticized for making this distinction between natural and social primary goods because it can be argued that health and intelligence are influenced by social conditions as well. Thus, he dropped the term social from primary goods and referred to them only as primary goods (Rawls, 2001).

It is important to note that in 1999, Rawls had stated, "All these primary goods are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" (1999, p. 54). However, this critically important clause is missing in 2001. In the revised thesis, Rawls stipulated that the primary goods are "indexed" (2001, p. 59). This means that a ratio of shares would be created on the basis of citizens' "appropriate contributions . . . to the good of others by training and educating their native endowments and putting them to work within a fair system of cooperation" (2001, p. 68). Thus, a citizen's index of primary goods could be low, medium, or high based on the market value of his or her contributions.

Citizens and Least-Advantaged People

According to Rawls, citizens are people who are free, equal, normal, reasonable, rational, and willing to work together. Least-advantaged people are those who have the least income and wealth (1971, 1999). In 2001, Rawls clarified that least-advantaged people were those who had the lowest index of the five primary goods. Rawls (2001) noted that the term *least advantaged* was not a rigid designator; rather, it represented people who were worst off under a particular scheme of social functioning, but who might do well under a different system. Most importantly, they were not identifiable by gender, race, or nationality (2001, p. 59). In other words, least-advantaged people are any working poor citizen.

Rawls classified nonworking poor citizens into two groups: able-bodied adults who were able but unwilling to work and "hard cases." With regard to the first group, Rawls' words are worth noting. He stated, "The index of primary goods does not mention work" and "the least advantaged are those with the lowest index"(2001, p. 179). Thus, he asked, "Are the least advantaged, then, those who live on welfare and surf all day off Malibu?" He answered that if that is the case, then "surfers must somehow support themselves" (2001, p. 179). Rawls did not support public assistance for people who do not work. He viewed "surfers" as able but unwilling to work; he did not discuss people's inability to work because he viewed all citizens as so-called "normal" working people.

Also, it is very important to note that although it was unclear in the 1971 edition, in 1999 Rawls strictly restricted his discussion of justice to people whose physical and mental capacities were "within the normal range, so that questions of health care and mental capacity do not arise" (1999, pp. 83–84). He stated that a consideration of such "hard cases" was distracting in a discussion of a theory of justice because the fate of people "distant from us . . . arouses anxiety and pity" (p. 84). Instead, he believed that the difference principle should address the needs of such "hard cases" because if it worked for least advantaged people it should work for hard

cases. In a footnote, Rawls (2001) stated we have a duty to help such people, but it cannot be covered under a political conception of justice which is his revised conceptualization of social justice.

Grounds for Justice: Valid and Invalid

Citizens have a valid claim or entitlement or legitimate expectation for distributive justice only when they cooperate with the system by contributing their labor or capital or both to socioeconomic productivity (Rawls, 1971, 1999, 2001). But, a free market economy may not always meet their "claims of need" (1971, p. 277). A valid claim of need arises only when people cooperate with the economy and work, but fail to make a living wage; people are unable to work temporarily because of ill-health; or people are unable to work because of seasonal or temporary nature of their jobs. Only under these three circumstances of conscientious effort is the government required to pay a "social minimum" (1971, p. 276). Rawls did not address how much or what constituted the social minimum, or public assistance, but he expected the second principle of justice to address this issue. However, he was clear that the social minimum should be less than the value of market wage in order to retain the incentive for work.

According to Rawls, people's moral worth, need, and allocative justice have no place in distributive justice. Rawls' discussion on these topics is both intriguing and elusive. Despite Rawls' strong and clear standpoint on how legitimate expectation, or claim and entitlement to justice, comes about, he also maintained that justice as fairness does not reject the ideas of moral desert, or need. He clarified that the theory recognized at least three forms of moral desert: (a) "the moral worth of a person's character as a whole . . . as well as the moral worth of particular actions"; (b) "legitimate expectations and its companion idea of entitlements"; and (c) "deservingness as specified by a scheme of public rules designed to achieve certain purposes" (2001, p. 73). But, he clarified that his theory accepted "only the second and third ideas of desert" (p. 74). Such clarity was lacking earlier, but this sentiment was clearly present in 1971 as well. Because the two latter ideas have already been presented, the discussion herein focuses only on moral worth, need, and allocative justice.

Rawls did not question the concept of moral desert; however, he clarified that, "moral desert as moral worth of character and actions cannot be incorporated into a political conception of justice in view of the fact of reasonable pluralism" (2001, p. 73). In fact, he stated, "moral worth would be utterly impracticable as a criterion when applied to questions of distributive justice. . . . Only God could make those judgments" (2001, p. 73). In other words, because there are conflicting versions of what is good character and behavior, there cannot be any agreement on the nature of moral worth. Thus, he proposed the idea of legitimate expectations, or entitlements, or claims that arise out of contributions to society as its replacement because it belongs to a political conception of justice (i.e., where the government is responsible for ensuring justice to all citizens).

Notably, Rawls did not consider any need, whether basic or developmental, for adults within his framework of distributive justice, but accepted "claims of need" arising out of effort and required that a social mini-

mum be paid (2001, p. 73). In the context of need as social workers define it, it is instructive to note Rawls' distinction between allocative and distributive justice.

Also Rawls has always distinguished between allocative and distributive justice. In 1971 he stated, "the concept of moral worth is secondary to those of right and justice, and it plays no role in the substantive definition of distributive shares" (p. 313). Also he stated, "equal moral worth does not entail that distributive shares are equal. Each is to receive what the principles of justice say he [sic] is entitled to, and these do not require equality" (1971, p. 312). He explained that allocative justice is concerned with the distribution of "a given collection of goods" which is to be "divided among definite individuals with known desires and needs," and "the goods to be allotted are not produced by these individuals" (1971, p. 88). Rawls reasoned that because the collection of goods to be allocated is not "the product of these individuals," they do not have any "prior claim" to the goods, and the collection of goods can be distributed according to need or desire (2001, p. 50). At that time he rejected allocative justice because it led to "the classical utilitarian view" (1971, p. 88). In his final thesis on justice, Rawls stated, "We reject the idea of allocative justice as incompatible with the fundamental idea by which justice as fairness is organized" (2001, p. 50). He rejected allocative justice primarily because it contradicted two of his basic assumptions about citizens and government: (a) "society as a fair system of social cooperation" where citizens work together "to produce the social resources on which their claims are made" (2001, p. 50), and (b) "reciprocity," an auxiliary idea in the difference principle, wherein inequalities benefit "others as well as ourselves" (2001, p. 64).

As noted, distributive justice implies that all citizens cooperate, meaning contribute or work and get paid what a capitalist economy decides is the right value for their ability and effort. When market wage fails to meet expenses, they become entitled to claims of need provided by the social minimum. Before concluding, it is important to note Rawls' (2001) clarification that his revised thesis of distributive justice is not about applied moral philosophy; instead it is a "political conception" (p. 14). This means his theory is grounded in reason and includes a family of political values that can be publicly defended. Consequently, the revised Rawlsian theory of distributive justice is still about fairness to all citizens, but now morality has no place in it.

Discussion and Implications

Comparing and contrasting social work scholars' views on social justice with Rawls' theory of justice suggest that there have been and continue to be more differences than similarities between these two perspectives. Moreover, a close reading suggests that social workers may have been misreading Rawls for decades. Table 2 shows that both discuss social justice, distributive justice, government's role, grounds for social justice, and enhanced life chances for disadvantaged people. Because of this common ground social work scholars have borrowed, adapted, and extended Rawls' ideas to promote their own views of social justice grounded in social work values. Through this process, social work scholars have contributed to the social justice

literature by identifying important Rawlsian concepts such as distributive and egalitarian justice, social cooperation, the two principles of justice, principle of redress, social primary goods, social minimum, least advantaged people, need, moral worth, and allocative justice (refer to Table 3). When we read about these Rawlsian ideas from social work scholars' vantage point, they appear well-suited to promote our cause. However, when we delve into the Rawlsian assumptions, stipulations, and details related to these concepts, as shown in Table 3, we realize that Rawls' perspective on social justice is far removed from the social work vision of social justice.

A critical difference between the two perspectives is situated on their focus on people for whom social justice is being promoted. Table 2 shows Rawls' primary focus is on all citizens, and his theory attends towards bringing about fairness both for advantaged and disadvantaged citizens who live in an unjust society. However, social work scholars primarily focus on advancing social justice for vulnerable, marginalized, oppressed, and poor people, and in doing so rightly seek special consideration for them to level the playing field. But this key difference with regard to emphasis leads to strong incongruence and results in omissions and inaccuracies in interpreting and applying

TABLE 2. Comparison of Social Work Scholars' and Rawls' Views on Social Justice

Social Work Scholars' Views	Rawls' Views
Social justice primarily means better life circumstances for poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people	Social justice primarily means fairness to all citizens, or getting one's fair and due share through social cooperation
Silence	Work-related contributions in a market economy are required to acquire social justice
The government should redistribute resources in such a way so that poor people's basic and developmental needs are met first	The government should regulate social, economic, and political institutions and determine these institutions' as well as citizens' duties and obligations to each other according to (his) two principles of justice
People deserve social justice because of equal moral worth, human dignity, redress, gift of citizenship, or altruism to meet their basic and developmental needs.	Citizens deserve justice because of social cooperation; citizens have a valid "claim of need" only when they work, but do not earn a living wage, or are temporarily ill, or are temporarily out of work; need, moral worth, allocation, and redress are not grounds for justice

TABLE 3. Problematic Aspects of Social Work Scholars' Representation of Rawlsian Justice

Rawlsian Concepts	Social Work Scholars' Representations	Rawls' Views
Distributive Justice	"Redistribution of resources is a moral obligation" (Van Soest, 1995, p. 1811; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003, p. 47).	In his revised thesis, distributive justice is not about applied moral philosophy; instead it is a "political conception" where morality has no space (2001).
Social Cooperation in Distributive Justice	"Fair allocation of the benefits of social cooperation" (Wakefield, 1988b, p. 355). All scholars are silent about obligation to work.	Social cooperation in distributive justice means wage labor or capital investment or both in a market economy (1971, 1999, 2001).
Principles of Justice		
Equal Liberty Principle	"The first principle requires that basic liberties must be equal, because citizens of a just society have the same basic rights to freedom, to fair equality of opportunity, to access to goods and services, and to self respect" (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003, p. 47).	Equal basic liberties for all (See Table 1).
Fair Equality of Opportunity	"Only under conditions of equal opportunity can individual choice be considered an exercise in freedom" (Figueira-McDonough, 1993, p. 180).	Fair equality of opportunity principle (See Table 1).
Difference Principle	"The second principle asserts that although the actual distribution of income and wealth need not be equal, that any inequalities in power, wealth, and other resources must not exist unless they work to the absolute benefit of the worst off members of society" (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003, p. 47).	Difference principle (See Table 1).
Reciprocity Clause	All scholars are silent about the Reciprocity Clause.	"The difference principle expresses a concern for reciprocity. It is a principle of mutual benefit" (1971, p. 102). As such, socioeconomic inequalities are to benefit "others as well as ourselves" (2001, p. 64).

Continued

TABLE 3. Cont.

Rawlsian Concepts	Social Work Scholars' Representations	Rawls' Views
Principle of Redress	"Undeserved inequalities call for redress; and since inequalities of birth and natural endowment are undeserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for. Thus, the principle holds that in order to treat all persons equally, to provide for genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality" (Reisch, 2002, p. 346, quoting Rawls, 1971, p. 100). "The unmet needs that should be redressed first should be of those who are most in need. This means that to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. . . . greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent students in our schools, . . . to ensure equality of opportunity" (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003, p. 47).	"The difference principle is not the principle of redress. It does not require society to try to even out handicaps as if all were expected to compete on a fair basis in the same race. But the difference principle would allocate resources in education, say, so as to improve the long-term expectations of the least favored. If this end is attained by giving more attention to the better endowed, it is permissible; otherwise not" (1971, p. 101).
Social Primary Goods	"Equality in the distribution of basic social goods is necessary. List includes . . . healthcare. . . ." (Figueira-McDonough, 1993, p. 180).	Social primary goods are basic rights and liberties; freedom of movement and free choice of occupation from diverse opportunities; powers

	Scholars (Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Wakefield, 1988b) justify health care and psychotherapy as a distributive justice concern.	and prerogatives of offices, and positions of authority and responsibility; income and wealth; and social bases of self-respect. Health and intelligence are natural primary goods. Criticized for distinction between social primary goods and natural primary goods. In 2001 he dropped the term *social* and referred to them only as "primary goods." Originally stated all primary goods are to be distributed equally, later dropped the term *equally* and stated that they are "indexed" (2001, p. 59) based on "appropriate contributions . . . within a fair system of cooperation" (2001, p. 68).
Social Minimum	"Supports people's rights to at least the basic resources for living" (Van Soest, 1994, p. 715).	Social minimum is to be provided by the government when people have "claims of need." A valid claim of need arises only when people work but fail to make a living wage, or when they are temporarily unable to work because of illness, or because of the seasonal nature of their jobs. Social minimum should be less than the value of market wage to retain incentive for work (1971, 1999, 2001).
Citizens	Every rational person is morally equal and deserving of respect (Wakefield, 1988a, p. 196).	Citizens are people who are free, equal, normal, reasonable, rational, and willing to work together.
Least Advantaged	Scholars focus on poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people.	Least advantaged people are those who have the lowest index of primary goods (2001).

Continued

TABLE 3. Cont.

Rawlsian Concepts	Social Work Scholars' Representations	Rawls' Views
Least Advantaged (continued)	"Particularly well suited for eliminating racial and gender inequalities" (Reisch, 2002, p. 346).	Least-advantaged people are not identifiable by their gender, race, or nationality (2001).
Surfers		Nonworking poor people are "surfers" and "must somehow support themselves" (2001, p. 179).
Hard Cases	Scholars (Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Wakefield, 1988b) justify psychotherapy and health care.	Citizens' physical and mental capacities are "within the normal range, so that questions of healthcare and mental capacity do not arise." Consideration of such "hard cases" is distracting in a discussion of theory of justice (1999, pp. 83–84).
Need, Moral Worth, Allocation	"Even though Rawls does not address the issue of deservedness…" (Van Soest, 1994, p. 715). "The primary concern is needs, particularly those of the worst off, and how the need arose is not relevant to development of the theory" (Van Soest, 1994, p. 715).	People's moral worth, need, and allocative justice have no place in distributive justice. "Moral worth would be utterly impracticable as a criterion when applied to questions of distributive justice" (2001, p. 73). Rejected allocative justice as "a given collection of goods . . . are not produced by these individuals" (1971, p. 88).

Rawls' perspective to social work, as shown in Table 3.

It needs to be noted that social work scholars' emphasis on poor, oppressed, vulnerable and marginalized populations led this author to study Rawls in depth. The author's intent was to examine how Rawlsian justice could be applied to extend justice for welfare recipients who faced the stipulations of work first, lifetime limit, and sanctions after the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Act was passed in 1996. A detailed study of the author led her to understand that it was not possible to do so as least advantaged people in Rawlsian justice were working poor citizens. This is a limitation of this article as it influenced the author's understanding of Rawlsian justice and is reflected in this critique.

Given Rawls' overall perspective of social justice, it is hard to understand how he could assist social workers to promote social justice for disadvantaged people. In some aspects Rawlsian justice appears to be more suitable for better off citizens than for worst off citizens; it amounts to trickle down justice for less advantaged people. Further, some of Rawls' language related to disadvantaged people, such as referring to nonworking poor people as "surfers" or people with health or mental health disabilities as "hard cases" and restricting his discussion of justice to "normal" working poor people, is demeaning. Empty spaces as well as spaces identified as Silence under the column representing social work scholars in Tables 2 and 3 indicate differences with social work values. There are clear value conflicts between social workers and Rawls; this idea deserves further scholarly explication.

It appears that social work scholars noted here have overlooked these value conflicts. It is difficult to understand how or why scholars have represented Rawls in such a positive light in social work literature. It is possible that the absence of any social justice theory grounded in social work values prompted scholars to borrow and adapt from Rawls—an esteemed social justice theorist. However, in doing so in some areas they have added more than what Rawls had in mind, and in other areas they have subtracted or ignored or been silent about some of his critical assumptions and statements. Further, Rawls' (2001) revisions and updates to his theory of justice further complicate the picture. Table 3 summarizes the problematic aspects of social work scholars' representation of the Rawlsian perspective of social justice.

First and most importantly, scholars are silent about two important Rawlsian stipulations: a work requirement (Tables 2 and 3) and the reciprocity clause (Table 3). A lack of work requirement in welfare policies prior to 1996 could be responsible for this silence. However, the complete omission of any discussion related to the reciprocity clause in the difference principle is difficult to justify. Second, there is misinterpretation related to the fair equality of opportunity principle as an equal opportunity principle. Third, an emphasis on the principle of redress in a manner not supported by Rawls is an inaccurate representation of Rawls. Fourth, revisions and clarifications by Rawls make some social work scholars' statements related to Rawlsian justice outdated. For example, although Rawls' (1971) focus on moral philosophy might justify scholars' emphasis on need and

moral worth as grounds for allocative justice, Rawls was very clear at that time that they were not grounds for justice. Similarly, Rawls' (1971) statement about equality in distribution of social primary goods justifies scholars to promote equality in access to resources and services, but it is inaccurate to include health and mental health care. Rawls has always clearly excluded health care and mental health issues from his basket of primary goods, and later (1999) he attached it to the idea of "hard cases"; even later (2001) he identified it as a duty but not as a social justice concern. Thus, future social work scholarship and education related to Rawls and social justice need to be clear about these changes, inaccuracies, and misreadings.

Implications for Social Work Education and Future Scholarship

Based on a revised understanding of Rawls, which includes his revised theory of justice, social work students and scholars need to view Rawls in a new light. Social work educators and scholars discuss social justice concepts in micro to macro level social work courses and issues. In keeping with our professional mission and values, they may discuss distributive or egalitarian justice. If they referred to Rawls then an accurate and updated representation of Rawlsian justice would need to include the following ideas. First, social cooperation is a critical component in distributive justice. For our clients, social cooperation means work in a market economy. People who cannot work are not eligible for distributive justice. Second, Rawls developed two principles of justice to make society more egalitarian. The first principle guarantees equal civil and political freedoms to all citizens. The second principle has two parts. In the final version of Rawls' theory, the first part of the second principle focuses on fair equality of opportunity in education and work. This means people with equal ability and talent have the same or equal access to education and work; it does not mean that people with less ability and talent have the same access as people with more ability and talent. The second part of the second principle is known as the difference principle. It accepts socioeconomic inequalities because of differences in ability and merit of people, but requires these inequalities be to the maximum benefit of least advantaged people. Although this principle appears to help social workers advance social justice concerns for client groups, it is weakened by a reciprocity clause in the difference principle which states that socioeconomic inequalities must benefit rich and poor people alike. Third, Rawls promotes a vast array of work-related primary goods that are not equally distributed but are indexed depending on people's work-related contributions. Rawls does not include health care in his basket of primary goods. Fourth, need, moral worth, dignity, and redress are not grounds for Rawlsian distributive justice. For Rawls people have "claims of need" when they work but do not earn enough, or they are unable to work temporarily because of sickness, or because of the seasonal nature of their jobs. Only under these three circumstances are they eligible for public assistance. Otherwise they are "surfers" and not eligible for public benefits. Last, Rawlsian least advantaged citi-

zens are so-called "normal" and working poor people. Thus, Rawlsian justice is applicable for social workers when our work focuses on "able" working poor adults.

A thorough analysis of Rawls' ideas can help students to consider whether they are relevant to social work, even when adapted. For example, Rawls' assumptions about social justice are not applicable for helping any nonworking poor people with health, mental health, or substance abuse issues; job readiness training or education; elderly poor; homeless people; and victims of domestic violence. Also, it is not applicable in advocating for people of color, women, recent immigrants, migrant workers, and noncitizens. Thus, Rawlsian justice does not appear to assist us in advancing social justice for many poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people with whom we work. We need to either develop our own theory of justice or review other theories of justice to promote social justice for client groups.

To conclude, knowledge builds on others' shoulders. Given that Rawls is considered as the most important social justice theorist of the 20th century, it is appropriate to borrow as well as adapt and extend his ideas to build our social justice knowledge base. However, references to his work are inaccurate when the social work literature is silent about or ignores, or selects fragments of Rawls' fundamental propositions about social justice. As Wakefield (1988a) stated, it is true that Rawls is hard to read and understand. It is also true that his theory is very elaborate, he digresses a lot, and he forwards abstruse arguments. So it is easy to lose track of his ideas unless one makes a determined effort. Nonetheless, some scholars appear to have selectively adapted Rawlsian ideas to promote their own views of social justice. This confounds Rawls' ideas and weakens the foundation of the social work knowledge base related to social justice and Rawls. Other social work scholars who read these published works extend such inaccurate representation of Rawls and further weaken the social justice knowledge base.

Reisch (2002) notes we cannot adequately teach or promote social justice when we are unclear about its meaning. Galambos (2008) calls for manuscripts to clarify social justice. I recommend we clarify our scholarship on social justice as it relates to Rawls. This article contributes to the social work knowledge base by beginning the clarification process and by providing an update on Rawls.

As Wakefield (1988a) stated, it is not necessary to change our vision of social justice in order to accommodate Rawls. Social work scholars commonly suggest that social justice means arranging social, economic, and political institutions in such a way that all people, especially poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people, are able to meet their basic and developmental needs including democratic participation in decision making processes. This requires equal political and civil freedoms, fair equality of opportunity in socioeconomic–political spheres, as well as special consideration for access to material and nonmaterial resources, services, and opportunities for differently able people. To promote this vision, we need to identify justice theories that fully allow us to do so. If such a theory does not exist, which seems

probable, we need to develop our own theory of justice in future scholarly work.

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