An Introduction to Integral Social Service

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One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will

have sought and found how to serve.

Albert Schweitzer

The present article seeks to explore the question of integral social service, its

meaning and applications. The plan is to by exploring the nature of social service, the

theoretical constructs of quadrants and levels or the AQAL (all quadrants, all levels) or

integral model, and the application of the integral model to social service. The essence of

integral social service, however, is this: to serve the whole person and the whole of

society with the whole of our being. This means to develop ourselves and help others and

society develop in as full, high, and healthy a way as possible.

What is social service?

Social service, also called social work, is a concept that has undergone many

transformations and permutations over time. Since social work is the more commonly

used term, it will be the more commonly used one in the present article.[1]

A simple working definition of social work is that social work seeks to promote

the well-being of individual and society (National Association of Social Workers, 1999).

Gibelman (1999) notes that there are multiple ways of defining social work (by fields of

practice, practice settings, agency-types, functions performed, clients served, methods

used, practice goals, services provided, and types of presenting problems). These are

highly various, and they have changed over time, but underlying all definitions of social

work is a focus on the person in the environment. That is, both the individual and the

social setting in their interactive complexity are of interest, and the task of social work is to effect the best, most just, person-environment interactions possible.

The levels of intervention extend from the world of direct "micro" practice with individuals, couples, and families, to indirect "macro" practice, involving policy and administration at agency, local, national, and international levels. Visionary social workers such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond have long been aware of the importance of both micro and macro practice and their interaction, although the social work has tended to veer back and forth in terms of general emphasis, a trend Richmond described and criticized as early as the 1920s (see Richmond, 1930).

It should also be noted that Gibelman (1999) emphasizes that social workers need to engage actively and consciously in the ongoing definition and redefinition of social work. The present article constitutes a contribution to that ongoing discussion.

Integral theory: Quadrants and Levels

Integral theory is a complex metatheory seeking to integrate empirical findings and theories from a range of disciplines. For more detailed expositions, the reader is referred to the writings of Ken Wilber (e.g., 2000) and of other theorists and investigators on whom he draws. Although the full theory seeks to explore and explain the concepts of quadrants and levels (explained below), it also addresses the notion of multiple lines of development (drawn from A. Freud, 1965), states of consciousness, and types of personality and social structure (see Wilber, 2000). For social work, a major advantage of integral theory is that it can include and integrate available contributions of the different schools of thought addressing human behavior in the social environment.

Quadrants

Implicit in the above discussion of social service are the notions underlying quadrants in integral theory: the interior and the exterior, the individual and the collective. These quadrants represent major perspectives available to persons at all times. A heart perspective, for instance, emphasizes the subjective, or interior, desire to help, while a head orientation emphasizes the objective, or exterior, understanding of the functioning of individuals and societies. The micro approach emphasizes the individual far more than does the macro approach, while the macro approach emphasizes the collective (of course, the micro approach also emphasizes the collective on a small but important scale).

These dimensions, interior-exterior and individual-collective, can and naturally do interact, and when they do, the interaction can be represented as creating quadrants (see Figure 1). Wilber (2000) represents these quadrants with individual-interior in the upper left, individual-exterior in the upper right, collective-interior in the lower left, and collective-exterior in the lower right. As human beings, we possess all quadrants at all times. We are individuals with interior experiences of physical feelings, emotions, and thoughts (UL). We are also individuals whom we and others can observe from an exterior perspective, examining our behaviors, our brainwaves, our facial features, and so forth (UR). We are also communal beings who have experiences with others just as they have interior experiences with us—encompassing, but not limited to, our mutual physical, emotional, and cognitive experiences (LL). Finally, we are communal beings whose interactions with others can be studied observe from an exterior perspective — sociologically, politically, economically, physiologically, and so forth (LR). As a sort of

shorthand, the individual-interior quadrant can be called "I," the individual-exterior could be called "it," the collective-interior could be called "we," and the collective-exterior could be called "its."

[Figure 1 about here]

Different social workers place emphasis on different aspects of the different quadrants, and historically, social workers have tended to oscillate between the "upper" individual quadrants and the lower communal or "collective" quadrants. To some extent, as well, some social workers have tended to emphasize the "left hand" interior quadrants, while others have tended to emphasize the "right hand" exterior quadrants. To their credit, many social workers have attempted to keep in mind the importance of all quadrants. Mary Richmond, for example, emphasized the importance of: the client's feelings, memories, and hopes (individual-interior/ UL); careful study of the client's behavior and objective life circumstances (individual-exterior/ UR); the respectful-collaborative relationship between caseworker and client and the importance of compassionate social values (collective-interior/ LL); and the careful study of social circumstances and the importance of social reform (collective-exterior/ LR). These she saw as interpenetrating and mutually influential (Richmond, 1930).

Levels

The developmental theories used by social workers are replete with stages, phases, levels, and the like (see Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998). It seems to be that those who study any sort of development (e.g., psychosexual, psychosocial, cognitive, moral, social, spiritual, economic, and societal) see similar patterns: healthy development

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involves a move from simpler to more complex forms of organization and function. The new forms add new capabilities that were perhaps latent in earlier forms but now achieve a new clarity of definition, with greater differentiation of capacities and higher-level integration of these capacities. The process involves new levels transcending and including older levels.

Unfortunately, development does not always occur in a healthy or functional way. Damage, such as trauma, occurring in early phases of development can compromise later phases of development. New, higher-order capacities can be used to dominate, suppress, or deny older, lower-order capacities. Older, lower-order capacities, especially if pathologically developed, can subvert higher-order development. Development can be inhibited or undone through resistance to further development, the failure of the environment to support further development, fixation, and regression. And, as systems of any kind become more complex, the potential increases not only for positive outcomes but also for negative (see Wilber, 2000).

In terms of positive potential, Gandhi as a child lacked the sophistication of Gandhi the adult. As a child, he could suggest to his mother that untouchability seemed contrary to the inner meaning of religion (Gandhi, 1948/ 1956). But not until he was an adult was he ready to confront the British Empire and lead his nation to independence through a sophisticated program of spiritual and political development and action. In terms of negative potential, the toddler whapping a playmate with a plastic block cannot inflict nearly the damage that an adult wielding an automatic rifle or ruling a dictatorship can.

There appears to be a general sequence of development for human individuals and societies from one level of organization to another. This pattern emerges particularly if one combines multiple developmental theories. The sequence can be divided into any number of stages, but for the sake of simplicity, a three stage sequence will be used here: egocentric, sociocentric, and worldcentric (Wilber, 2000). Most developmental theories focus on only parts of the sequence. For example, Freud's theory of psychosexual development (Freud, 1905/ 1962) concentrates primarily on a detailed exploration of egocentric levels and, to some extent, sociocentric levels. Erikson and Erkson's (1997) psychosocial developmental theory encompasses egocentric, sociocentric, and worldcentric concerns, as does Weber's (1925/1962) theory of societal development.

It will be important to keep in mind that any individual may operate simultaneously on multiple levels along different lines of development; individuals will, however, tend to have a center of gravity more at one level, unless they are in a process of transition from one level to another. Likewise any given society may contain members who are at various levels, but the society itself will be likely to have a center of gravity at a particular level.

At the egocentric level, the self is experienced as the center of the universe, with others as only semi-distinct extensions of the self. Worldview and moral span (the sense of what morally valuable) are limited and fundamentally relates to how the individual feels, what the individual wants, and so forth. Societal organizations at the egocentric level are characterized by impulsivity of members, gratifying short-term impulses for safety or power. External norms, to the extent they exist at all are fairly crude.

As the person develops, he or she moves to the sociocentric level, becoming more oriented to the social group (family, peer group, tribe, subculture, professional group, city, nation, co-religionists, etc.) as the reference point, with the self being seen as part of the social group. Worldview and moral span expand and fundamentally relate to the feelings, values, goals, and norms of the group. The group itself develops clear norms for interaction, which include a special status for the group and its members; persons who are members of the group, especially those who fulfill the group's values well, are valued above non-members or those who violate group norms.

As the person develops further, he or she moves to the worldcentric level, becoming more oriented to the world community as the main reference point, with the self and all social groups being seen as part of a vast web of beings. Worldview and moral span expand still further and fundamentally relate to the needs and aspirations of humanity (or the living world) as a whole. A full-fledged worldcentric society has not yet emerged, although certain worldcentrically envisioned institutions have, such as the United Nations. These institutions and the ideals supporting them suggest that an increasingly worldcentric consciousness has been developing over time. It seems that the world as a whole is undergoing a difficult and complex shift from sociocentric perspectives to worldcentric perspectives, with a substantial number of societies still struggling with egocentric orientations.

<center>Integrating social work and the AQAL model</center>

If social work seeks to promote the well-being of individual and society and human functioning (and therefore well-being) is an integrated, interpenetrating, interacting, all quadrant, all level (AQAL) affair, what does this mean? Basically it means

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that social work needs to find ways to promote well-being individually and collectively, interiorly and exteriorly, and to promote it at all levels. Because of the integrated, interpenetrating, interacting nature of human well-being, human well-being can be promoted in many ways at once, as suggested in the discussion of integral practice by Wilber (2000). This section will seek to address the promotion of well-being in the individual client, the social worker, and the larger social system that includes them. For this we will address two general phases: assessment and intervention.

It is axiomatic that the social worker must start where the client is. But where is the client? This is the question we attempt to answer through assessment of all quadrants at all levels: individual-interior (UL), individual-exterior (UR), collective-interior (LL), collective-exterior (LR) and in terms of functioning at egocentric, sociocentric, worldcentric, and theocentric levels. And from the viewpoint of intervention, integral intervention would address needs and encourage development to the extent possible in all quadrants at all levels.

This becomes easier to understand if applied to a case. Consider the case of an immigrant family in which the formerly studious teenage daughter has become involved in drugs and theft. She has started staying out past curfew and using drugs with delinquent friends, and her enraged and highly traditional father has severely beaten her in order to get her to comply with family and community expectations. The girl has appeared at school bruised, and the Department of Social Services (DSS) has become involved and has placed her in foster care, with a goal of family reunification.

The integrally-informed social worker assigned to this girl's case will seek to understand and intervene in the situation of the girl in all quadrants at all levels. What is

the girls' subjective experience (UL)? What are her physical sensations, emotions, thoughts, spiritual experiences? These questions may be asked about others in the person-environment configuration, such as the girl's father, other family members, the foster family, the school personnel, and the social worker; however, for the balance of this analysis, the focus will be on the girl. Let us say that the girl is experiencing intense drug cravings and withdrawal symptoms, as well as fear for her future and shame about her past, bewilderment at the actions of DSS (which would have been inconceivable in her native land). She is also experiencing a sense of spiritual crisis.

What is observable about the girl (UR)? The girl has been taking drugs herself, and this is reflected in her behavior (seeking to procure drugs, withdrawal behavior) and in drug screen results. She has also been stealing. At the moment, she is acting immobilized and her body is undergoing complex changes.

How do the girl and other important persons feel about each other and their interactions (LL)? How do the subjective experiences and social values they have interact? Let us say that the girl and father share a deep sense of loving connection beneath their conflicts but they also see themselves as deeply shamed. They also find themselves in the awkward position of having once shared a worldview in which children should unquestioningly obey their parents and parents have the absolute right to use any means to enforce obedience, but now their worldviews are at odds. The girl feels torn between her father's traditional obedience values, her peer group's immediate gratification values, and her social worker's (and the larger U. S. society's) unfamiliar modernistic values of individual responsibility and pluralism.

How do the girl, and others in her environment interact (LR)? Let us say the following: the girl and her father, to the extent they have contact, trade recriminations. The girl interacts secretly with her drug using, criminal friends and succeeds in her attempts to involve other children in the foster home in arranging meetings. In addition, in a far larger context, companies that had employed many in the community are moving operations overseas, leaving many unemployed, and crime rates are rising, contributing to the delinquent behavior of the girl's peer group.

Finally, to what extent and in what ways, healthy or unhealthy, is the girl operating at the egocentric, sociocentric, and worldcentric levels? At a time when developmentally she would be expected to undergo a difficult process of moving from a more egocentric orientation to an increasingly sociocentric orientation, the process is breaking down. As implied above, in addition to having and acting on intense egocentric impulses and having an alliance with friends who share a similar orientation, the girl also is struggling with the difficult transition between a traditional world of sociocentric values and a modern U.S. world incorporating an uncertain mix of worldcentric values. That is, having come from a highly sociocentric culture in which social rules and roles were clearly defined and perhaps divinely given, the girl may have been exposed rather suddenly to a wide range of lifestyles and viewpoints in her school.

Unable to make the leap to a more complex and serviceable cosmopolitan worldview, unable to find and join a social group that shared such a complex worldview, and unable to accept unquestioned sociocentric verities any longer, she may have retreated to the relative simplicity of egocentricity and a social group that celebrates immediate gratification.

The social worker would need to find ways to help the girl and her family deal with their situation, addressing their problems and making use of resources and strengths in all quadrants and at all levels. At the egocentric level, the social worker might help the girl meet security and gratification needs (UL) by helping to link her, through community organizations (LR), to more positive peers through shared interests (LL) and activities (LR), as well as by helping her, through family therapy and culturally appropriate rituals and practices, to reconnect with her family (LL and LR). The social worker may help at the sociocentric level by helping the girl, through arranging mentoring by an understanding community elder, to learn more about her culture (LR) and its values (LL) and to find ways to embrace its values in a personally enriching, non-stultifying way (UL). As part of this process, the social worker would need to work with the father through private discussions to help him find methods (UR and LR) of upholding cultural norms and values (LL) and reward appropriate behaviors (UR and LR). Both girl and father will need to understand (UL and LL) and negotiate (LR) the partly worldcentric larger U.S. society with its multiplicity of norms and values (LL) and behavioral patterns (LR).

Perhaps also they can be introduced to community, ethnic, and more broadly based organization that can encourage them (LL) to take political and economic action at the micro and macro levels to empower themselves, their community, and workers everywhere to cope with global economic changes (LR) and find creative ways of minimizing their negative effects and maximizing prosperity (LR) and justice (LL).

Our integral social worker is mindful of the macro dimensions of the girl's situation, and may herself be actively involved in advocating for policy changes that can

enhance the girl's well-being, as well as society's (LR). To be brief, she might work for policies supporting community-based businesses, to help with creating positive opportunities for the girl, her peers, and her community. She also might work for policies that support drug treatment opportunities, both within and outside the correctional system. She also might work for policies supporting restorative justice (see Judah & Bryant, 2004), so that should the girl face charges, she will have an opportunity to do good for those she has wronged, to regain self-respect, and to build her sociocentric sense of responsibility. In any case, to the extent she works for committed change according to her own social values. Insofar as the social worker advocates for, develops, and implements policies, she will also need to be alive to the all quadrant, all level realities of the world in which policy is approved, developed, and implemented.

It should be noted, if only briefly, that the integrally informed social worker, in order to be of maximum help to her clients, is often engaged in transformational activities of her own. The difficulty and complexity of this one case should make it clear that avenues to further healthy development and renewal will always need to be found. One of the most important of these transformational activities is the very helping process she undertakes with her clients. In all quadrants and at all levels practicable, she may seek to cultivate her own well-being, through personal (e.g., exercise and nutrition, meditation, psychotherapy, healthy and caring relationships) and communal practices (e.g., community volunteering, political action, participation in spiritual community) to enhance her own person-in environment bio-psycho-social-spiritual functioning. The complex and intense demands of social work could be said to require it.

Conclusion

Integral social service, the service to the well-being of the whole individual and the whole society with the whole being of the social worker, is a complex matter. Human beings function in interacting quadrants (individual-interior, individual-exterior, collective-interior, and collective-exterior) at multiple interacting levels (egocentric, sociocentric, and worldcentric). This complexity demands that social workers find ways to understand and intervene in integrally-informed ways that do justice to the person-environment realities social workers face.

Figure 1. Quadrants

I Individual-Interior *What is my personal* *experience?*	IT Individual-Exterior *What about the individual* *can be observed and* *measured?*
WE Communal-Interior *What is our interpersonal,* *intersubjective experience of* *relating to one another?*	ITS Communal-Exterior *What about the group of* *two or more (on up to* *infinity) can be observed or* *measured?*

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[1] Social work is the term used by professional organizations and state licensing boards. Social service could be seen as the larger vocation of serving individuals and society, although it is also used by professional schools of social work, such as the National Catholic School of Social Service and by governmental departments of social service. Social work is also a term frequently used by non-professionals who seek to serve individuals and society.