

Abstract

The Limits of Neutrality: Rethinking Gift-Giving and Reciprocity in Social Work Practice

An Abstract of the Thesis by

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Gift-giving in client-professional relationships of social work is not as uncommon, as the lack of discussion about it within social work literature might suggest. While it might be initially apparent, why gift-giving is often framed as ethically problematic in professional guidelines, this work invites a critical examination of the assumptions that underlie this stance.

This work is based on anthropological perspectives on gift-giving and hospitality, and explores the relational significance that gifts can hold in human interactions. Through the lens of decolonial social work, it examines whether prevalent considerations of impartiality and professionalism in social work practice may stand in conflict with relational principles of reciprocity, recognition or relational accountability. The research combines ethnographic vignettes with qualitative interviews and participatory research, to explore how gift-giving is experienced and negotiated in practice. It integrates anthropological insights with decolonial social work theory and aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of gift-giving in professional relationships.

Keywords

Gift-giving, decolonial social work, hospitality, reciprocity, relational accountability, neutrality