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Perspectives on Social Work

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From The Editor

In the current issue, I am pleased to welcome our new dean of the Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW), Professor Alan Dettlaff. As the only graduate social work program in Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in the nation, we are extremely proud to have Professor Dettlaff lead our college as we continue to cultivate critical and creative thought that contributes to our social work profession. Under the leadership of Dean Dettlaff, we are optimistic about the future of the GCSW and the opportunities for innovation and prosperity that are to come!

During the delivery of the Aaron Rosen Lecture at the Society for Social Work and Research 19th Annual Conference, Matthew O. Howard (2015), asked, “What is the single crowning research discovery in social work?” Such a complex question instantly captivated the interest of the audience and left me with a curiosity that could not be easily satisfied. To this day, I believe that our social work identity continues to evolve and the best is still to come. We continue to study many of the most complex social challenges of humankind. We also continue to discover solutions and develop best practices. Moreover, the rigor of our social science continues to be evidenced in the results of innovative social work research. *Perspectives on Social Work*, our GCSW doctoral students’ online journal, offers doctoral students around the nation an opportunity to leverage their research and extend the shared vision of excellence within our profession.

The current mini-series reflects the passion of three contributing authors. Miranda Cunningham’s article leads this issue and draws our attention to important aspects of teaching first-generation college students. She links our social work values, at the core of the profession, to skills that may be utilized when considering the needs of these students. Sara Jo Helba shares her classroom experience of teaching undergraduate students and demonstrates how self-awareness and authentic presence helps in her own development and that of her students. Finally, Noe Mojica challenges researchers to reconstruct the definition of masculinity and to move away from models that stereotype the caregiving provided by Latino fathers. He provides suggestions to increase diversity in approaches to research.

These articles encourage us to evaluate our current practices and utilize our unique social work skills in the delivery of human services and teaching. Social work scholars are uniquely positioned to identify gaps that improve the translation of services in the classroom and in the community. I encourage my fellow doctoral student colleagues to continue to conduct, replicate, critique, and contribute to the social work research and knowledge base. It is because of our commitment to advocacy, our service to the most vulnerable, and our ability to evoke empathy and heighten awareness of societal injustices, that I remain optimistic about the scholarship and future of our social work profession. I hope these articles provide you a piece of intellectual stimulation and I wish you a summer filled with a balance of self-care and innovative teaching, research and practice!

Maurya, Glaude, MSW, LCSW
Editor

Editorial Policy:

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Perspectives on Social Work
Graduate College of Social Work
University of Houston
Houston, TX 77204-4492
swjourna@Central.UH.EDU

(Why) Should Social Work Be Concerned About First-Generation College Students?

Miranda Cunningham, MIT

Abstract

This article presents an argument for attention to the experiences of first-generation college students in the context of social work. The needs of first-generation college students are explored as well as their strengths in connections to families and community. Attention to first-generation college students is important to social work for at least two reasons: because of who first-generation students are and because of the values held by social work as a profession. The social work values of social justice, the dignity and worth of each person, as well as the value of human relationships provide a framework for social work to consider the needs of first-generation college students.

Keywords: social work, teaching, first-generation college students

Educational attainment is an increasingly important part of ensuring one's self-determination in the contemporary United States. The link between educational attainment and income is well understood (for an example, see Day & Neuberger, 2002), but educational attainment has also been shown to be one of the most powerful social determinants of health (Mirowsky & Ross, 2005). Haveman and Smeeding (2006) argue that one of the most valued goals of higher education in the United States is supporting social mobility. However, these authors also lament the fact that family background is increasingly a strong predictor of educational attainment. Students whose families lack experience with higher education may be unable to navigate access to college for students or support them in persisting and completing college (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Reid & Moore, 2008). To date, the needs of these students have been the focus of fields other than social work. This paper examines the experiences of first-generation college students and reveals connections to several core values of social work, adding a social work perspective to the literature on first-generation students.

In the past few decades, access to higher education has improved for students who come from groups which have typically been underrepresented on college campuses. Approximately one-third to one-half of these students are first-generation college students (Berkner & Choy, 2008; Strayhorn, 2006). A growing body of literature details the challenges of first-generation college students, with these students reporting lower levels of academic preparation for college (Bui, 2002; Reid & Moore, 2008), earning lower GPAs, completing fewer credits, and withdrawing or repeating courses at higher rates than their peers whose parents completed college (Chen, 2005). First-generation college students report lower levels of psychological well-being following their first year in college (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012) and were more likely to leave college by their second year (Choy, 2001). While more recent analyses of National Educational Longitudinal Study Data have revealed that first-generation college students are just as likely to stay in college as their peers, these analyses also demonstrate that first-generation college students move through college much more slowly. A follow up study in 2000 of students who had graduated from high school in 1992 found that first-generation college students had earned approximately half as many credits as their peers whose parents had completed college (66 compared to 112) (Chen, 2005).

Traditionally, the needs of first-generation college students have been documented by sociologists and education researchers; social work has not been active in the discussion (P. Collier, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2013)¹. Cole's (2008) narrative analysis of the educational stories of low-income first-generation college students provides one of the few examples of research in social work documenting the needs of first-generation college students. In her interviews with 22 first-generation college students, academic challenges were prominent among the stories of students who left college. Students attributed their academic challenges to pre-college ability, balancing the many demands on their time, their inability to meet the standards of their chosen majors, and lacking strategies to improve academic performance. Distress related to grade performance was an underlying feature of all of the stories of students who had faced academic challenges. Attention to the needs of first-generation college students is important to social work for at least two reasons: because of who first-generation college students are and because of the values held by social work as a profession. Social work's values of social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, and the value of human relationships suggest that the needs of first-generation students are within the scope of social work and that social workers may be equipped to address those needs (NASW, 2008).

Social work's value of social justice asks social workers to focus on social change, particularly when that change addresses the needs of members of groups who face oppression, discrimination, and marginalization (NASW, 2008). Demographic patterns in the group of people who are first-generation college students indicate the need for attention to the ways that race, class, and gender structure opportunities for educational attainment. First-generation students are more likely to face educational barriers related to institutional racism, with African-American and Hispanic students overrepresented in some samples of first-generation students (Chen, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora., 1996) and Asian and Latino students overrepresented in others (Bui, 2002). First-generation students are more likely to come from low-income families (Bui, 2002; Chen, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996) and women tend to be over-represented among first-generation college students, with the proportions of women in samples of first-generation students ranging from a low of 55% (Bui, 2002) to a high of 71% (Padgett et al., 2012). Terenzini and colleagues (1996) noted the higher proportion of women among first-generation students in their sample (61%) than in their sample of traditional students (53% were women). As Cole (2008) noted, first-generation students are often members of groups that social workers are likely to interact with in their day-to-day work. That is, first-generation students are more likely than traditional students to experience marginalization, discrimination, and oppression because of one or more aspects of their identity (race, class, and gender). Investing in the education of first-generation students is one of the most lasting and effective interventions possible, and social workers are uniquely suited to address educational barriers related to both historical and contemporary experiences of racism, classism, and sexism (Cole, 2008). Social work compels scholars and practitioners to consider not just an individual's

¹ For more on this, the reader is directed to the works of Howard London (1989, 1992, 1996), a sociologist who studied transformations experienced by first-generation students, or Peter Collier and David Morgan (2008), sociologists who have studied academic integration of first-generation students and the of place of cultural capital in fulfilling the student role. The reader is also directed towards the publications of Ernest Pascarella or Patrick Terenzini, both in education, who have written at length about the cognitive and psychosocial outcomes of first generation students.

abilities, behaviors, and characteristics, but to also notice the larger social contexts individual experiences arise from at the interpersonal, organizational, and structural levels. Furthermore, the value of social justice compels social work to consider the needs of first-generation college students as members of groups who have traditionally been excluded from higher education. Social change focused on addressing issues of poverty and unemployment are central to the value of social justice, and the links between educational attainment and economic need are clear. Supporting first-generation college students in the pursuit of higher education is the work of social work.

Second, social work's value of the dignity and worth of the person suggests that the needs of first-generation college students are important to social work. Central to this value is the responsibility for supporting the self-determination of individuals as well as a responsibility to larger society (NASW, 2008). Educational attainment, particularly the completion of a bachelor's degree, is one of the most reliable methods of ensuring economic independence and a level of self-determination. But research detailing the experiences of first-generation college students suggests that for many first-generation college students, they are not the sole beneficiaries of their college education. Several studies describe the centrality of family relationships to first-generation college students (Bradbury & Maher, 2009; Bui, 2002; Stieha, 2010); "carrying" family is a common theme among students (Orbe, 2004). In one of the few accounts of a first-generation student in social work, Carter-Black (2008), describing her journey through undergraduate education, recalls

"I carried much more than just the things in my suitcases that day as I left home. I also carried the hope of my family all bundled up and neatly tucked away inside where no one else could see. I was keenly aware of my precious cargo" (p. 113).

As the first in their family to attend college, many first-generation college students report feeling that their academic success had a bearing on the futures of family members (Orbe, 2004). An analysis of Bui's (2002) reasons that students give for attending college also supports connections to and responsibility for family. First-generation students were more likely to report attending college so they could bring honor to their families, and help their families out financially after college. They were less likely to report attending college because their siblings had also attended, and less likely to report that they were attending college out of a desire to leave home. Some first-generation students may serve as a bridge to college for their families and larger community. In focus groups of first-generation college students, students reported being asked to translate their experiences for community members who had no lived experiences of college (Orbe, 2004).

However, the literature on first-generation college students also reports that some feel the need to break away from families (London, 1989) and several authors note the struggles first-generation college students face in integrating within the college setting. In Stuber's (2011) interviews with white, working class, first-generation college students, approximately one-quarter of her sample reported persistent feelings of alienation and marginalization in college. Often these experiences of marginalization were centered on economic needs that felt out of place in college, such as working up to 35 hours each week or living at home to save money.

Relationships with faculty may be a critical piece of integration for first-generation college students, who were less likely to report feeling supported by faculty than their peers, (Terenzini et al., 1996). Padgett and colleagues (2012) noted that teaching interactions with faculty did not have the same beneficial effect for first-generation students as they did for peers. While traditional students benefitted from “good practices,” such as increased faculty interaction, these practices were related to lower levels of well-being among first-generation students. Collier and Morgan’s (2008) work sheds light on one aspect of this disconnect between first-generation students and faculty: first-generation students struggled more with understanding and meeting faculty expectations about workload and priorities, interpreting assignments, communicating with faculty and solving problems as they arose. Many researchers have employed a cultural capital model in understanding the experiences of first-generation college students, emphasizing the ways that families impart knowledge that ensures or limits success in the classroom based on the values that structure higher education (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004, Stuber, 2011). But few studies to date have explicitly focused on the relational worlds of first-generation college students. Social work recognizes the important roles that human relationships play in strengthening individuals, families, organizations, and communities, and as such is especially positioned to increase understanding of the relationships that support first-generation college students, and may in turn support others as well.

Higher education classrooms are increasingly open to students who are the first in their families to pursue education beyond high school. For these students, college presents the opportunity for self-determination and potential social mobility, but it also carries risk. An examination of the experiences of first-generation college students with attention to the core values of social work suggests that these experiences are within the scope of social work, and that social work may be well suited to attend to the needs of first-generation college students. This paper invites social work scholars to consider research that focuses on the experiences of the growing numbers of first-generation students. This paper also has pedagogical implications for social work educators: who are our students? Attention to first-generation students in schools of social work is important for recruiting and retaining a diverse group of social workers and professional helpers (Casstevens, Waites, & Outlaw, 2012), and infusing social work values of justice and diversity in higher education (Saulnier & Swigonski, 2006).

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Miranda Cunningham is a doctoral candidate in Social Work and Social Research at Portland State University. She recently defended her dissertation proposal focused on the relational worlds of first-generation students in a school of social work, and is an instructor in the Child and Family Studies Department in Portland State's School of Social Work. Her background is in human development and education, and she is focused on educational access for members of groups who are underrepresented in higher education.

If You Give a Social Worker a Classroom: Reflections of a First-Time Social Work Educator

Sara Jo Helba, MSW

Abstract

This article explores the reflections of a social worker during her first semester as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate social work course during her doctoral studies. It presents her narrative experience in adapting to the role of educator and integrating this role with her identity as a social worker. Specifically, it discusses purposefulness, balance of interests and concerns, dual role issues, self-awareness, and challenges in grading and ethics for a social worker turned educator by means of relating subjective experiences and reflections.

Keywords: social worker, identity, roles, gatekeeping, educator, instructor, challenges

I am a social worker. Even before I began practicing social work, it seemed that this field was in my blood. As is the case for many social workers (Litten, 2008), I felt I had a calling to the field. So when I went back to school to begin my PhD in social work, I was prepared to learn, work, and study like a social worker: long hours, great responsibility, and tons of paperwork. What I was not as prepared for was teaching undergraduate social work students as a teaching assistant. I had never taught in an official capacity before, and certainly not as a primary instructor at this level.

To prepare, I researched numerous techniques and strategies for beginning instructors. One of the most useful techniques for me became that of personal reflection through journaling. As Boud (2001) and Purcell (2013) have discussed, self-reflection can help teachers prepare themselves, increase their confidence, enhance their learning, and evaluate their practices, among other benefits, and my experience with journaling was no different. I chronicled my experiences and reflections each week I taught, and I found in my reflections an overarching theme of how my identity as a social worker informed my role as an instructor for others.

She's Going to Want to Have a Purpose

By our third class, I felt the course seemed to be going well. The students were willing to discuss the material ad nauseam with wonderfully critical thoughts and insights that I was joyfully overwhelmed at hearing, and I was already impressed by the culture the class and I had created in our first two meetings.

I began this particular lesson using an adapted idea from the doctoral director, asking the students to write down four things that they had learned in the previous class. I felt that this would be useful for their retention and also for evaluating my competence. After the students left, I read their answers. I was immediately touched by some of them, and as I read more, I became increasingly proud of what they had learned because of my teaching. I went back to school for my doctorate in social work because I wanted to make a difference in the knowledge we have in the field-- both by teaching future social workers and by conducting research for them to utilize. However, I recognized that this was somewhat of an idealistic

picture of what becoming a university professor would actually be like, and I did not truly expect to have as much of an impact as I fantasized I would.

Reading the answers that my students gave regarding what they had already learned in such a short period was a remarkable experience for me. As I read their comments, I thought of the many helping professionals currently in the field that do not know some of the basic principles the students detailed. Some of their responses applied not just to social work, but also to life. I was struck by the effect I had and could have on these students and potentially the future of social work, and I felt proud.

On our first day, I told my students that it was very unlikely that they would all get A's in the course. I told them that as much as I cared about their success, my main concern was for their future clients. Not only would their future clients far outnumber the students who sat in my classroom, but they would look up to my students, expecting them to know how to help in their tremendous times of vulnerability and need. I explained that what was important to me, as their instructor, was not to give them all pleasing grades, but to make sure that they had the information, tools, and resources that they would need to be the amazing social workers that our clients deserve and require. After reading their responses and listening to their discussions that week, I began to feel that this meaningful goal might not be as fanciful as I had imagined.

Once She Has a Purpose, She'll Probably Fumble in Application

The week my teaching was observed was the first time the students and I had a visitor, and I was surprised by how nervous I became after beginning class. I found that I had difficulty remembering where I was planning to go with different subjects, forgot what one of the bullets on my PowerPoint was about, and felt utterly lost a few times throughout this portion of class.

Being a self-aware social worker, I am cognizant of the common pitfalls I tend to run into whenever I am especially nervous, such as speaking quickly and beginning sentences before knowing what I am going to say. Knowing this about myself, I have become adept at preparing myself before entering nerve-racking situations so as to avoid these obstacles, but this time I was not prepared for my anxiety. I had become rather comfortable in my role in the classroom, and although I recognized I might be more nervous than usual, I had not envisioned just how difficult I would find this situation.

About fifteen minutes into class, I realized how tense I had become. My mouth was dry, the slides I had created a few days earlier were suddenly unfamiliar, and I began talking before knowing what I would say. I urged myself to remember some of the pedagogical advice I had researched before my first few classes, such as giving the students time to reflect and respond after asking a question that no one immediately jumped for, as everything that had felt natural the weeks before now felt methodical and odd. After a couple of uncomfortable fumbles and hot flashes, it was finally time for our break. The students dispersed or pulled out electronic devices, and I took a deep breath as I began to review what I had planned for the rest of the class. The slides seemed somewhat more familiar, and I had hope that my shoulders might become less tense and lay back down.

After the break, I glanced at the students' faces to make sure they were all mentally present and strangely realized that I had not really looked at them since class began. I had been too consumed with what I now realized I had been doing: performing—and not very well. I pulled a chair in front of the class, sat down, and talked to my students. I saw them as individuals—their human expressions of affect, experience, and social conventions, and I felt silly for the time I spent presenting myself to the classroom of chairs rather than interacting with the human beings who sat in front of me. It was no wonder I had felt so stiff and disoriented. Now I placed my focus on them rather than myself, and I could not believe what we had been missing.

I did not have to wait long; the students sensed my comfort and responded with their own. They asked questions, shared personal experiences, and provided insight into the topics we were reviewing. Had I not struggled so much that day, I imagine it would have been a great deal longer before I realized the significance that the connection I make with my students has on our teaching and learning.

Once She Fumbles, She'll Want to Self-Reflect

As my students were settling in the classroom before one of our mid-semester classes had officially begun, I heard two of my students speaking about another instructor. They were complaining about their perception of her class as unchallenging. One student alleged that he received an A after not being present for many classes and putting little effort into assignments. I was not familiar with the name of the teacher they were referring to, but this did not seem like a new complaint or one unique to the university.

It is not uncommon to hear social workers express that some of their social work classes were “easy A’s” and otherwise unchallenging, especially during their undergraduate years. This deficiency in rigorousness, common in social work coursework, is conceptualized by some in the field as a lack of gatekeeping for the profession (Tam, 2004). My experience has been that at least part of this pattern in social work education is due to the instructors themselves being the caring, understanding social workers we all have come to appreciate for these very qualities. As social work practitioners, our role is frequently to work very diligently towards opening gates for others so as to allow them access to the opportunities they otherwise would have missed. It would follow that many social work instructors attempt to make their students' loads a little lighter, their work a little less demanding, and their degrees a little easier to attain. As social work educators, however, we are gatekeepers into the field of social work. As such, we must first consider the competency, rather than the misfortune, of our students, as it is our responsibility to make sure that only those who are absolutely prepared for the roles with which they will be entrusted pass through the gates. This dual role dilemma for social work educators is controversial in the field (Tam, 2004), and it is especially worrisome due to the great responsibilities that our students, these future social workers, will eventually carry.

Regardless, many instructors struggle with “being too easy” on students against making excessive demands, and many have trouble finding an appropriate balance of their roles as educators and representatives of the profession. In some ways this issue is not unique to social work. A common complaint from students in research-based education in general is that certain

instructors are very knowledgeable in their field but are difficult to follow as educators. This role imbalance can fundamentally decrease teaching effectiveness (Bulger, Mohr, & Walls, 2002). In the field of social work, this can take form as instructors who have remained helpers rather than become educators.

This trap may be especially difficult to avoid given the relatively high percentage of social work students who have themselves experienced many of the psychosocial difficulties that social work clients face (Rompf & Royse, 1994), further blurring the lines for unmindful instructors between students and clients and thus between educators and helpers. There are no naturally inherent differences between our clients and our students. The difference is in our relationship to them. It is our responsibility to create and maintain the distinction.

Given the potential for this trap, I was especially cautious when making decisions in the classroom regarding exceptions for students and other relatively subjective matters. One student, for example, had the lowest grade in the course, rarely participated in discussions, and often seemed withdrawn from teachings. He had experienced the deaths of two close family members within a short period of time before and during our course. Despite my efforts to reach out to him, he did not show any interest in discussing his performance in the course with me.

I recognized in becoming an educator that I would have students who would not do well in my classes, but I somehow failed to consider how much I might empathize with the reasons for their underperformances. Deprived of this student's willingness to communicate, I struggled with my role and responsibilities to the students' future clients, the other students in the class, and the young man himself. I had to remind myself that it was possible to connect to and empathize with the students without relinquishing my role as educator, and I decided that the situation presented an opportunity for both of us to learn a bit more about what it is to become a social worker.

When I began taking undergraduate courses in social work, I experienced personal crises as well. Through personal reflection I have realized these crises helped me become more in tune with the skills needed to help others. This young man was not the only student in the class who was experiencing difficulties in life. I wondered if understanding and integrating our own personal struggles into our development as social workers was much more important than I had previously considered. The next week I incorporated a discussion about self-reflection and what it means to be a social worker. The class appeared to find camaraderie and support from one another in these dialogues, and I was able to reflect on these changes with the students.

After She Self-Reflects, She's Going to Take Action

As for grading in general, I struggled with there being a wide range in quality and effort exhibited. The students whose work was most challenging for me to grade simply delivered the most basic products possible in accordance with the guidelines. These were difficult to grade because they had done what was asked with few to no errors or missing information, but they did not exemplify the same quality of thought and effort as others. I had to consider whether it was fair to base my expectations of their efforts on the quality of their peers' work in comparison and what my expectations ought to be considering their level of education.

Further, I struggled with grading students' assignments that were unrefined in terms of grammar and vocabulary. I was largely concerned about penalizing students for the disparities in education that we have in the United States and the fairness of grading students based on what often appeared to be markedly different educational experiences and current skills. Beyond directing students to the campus writing center and other resources, I was at a loss for how to accommodate for educational disparities and uphold high academic expectations.

I decided to continue to pursue my original ideal for the class. My goal was not to evaluate the students simply by their academic performance in my classroom, but by their demonstrated potential performance as social workers. I looked at the papers thinking not of the students I would see in class the following week but of the clients they would need to help. What did the students need to demonstrate to show that they were becoming effective social workers, as helpers and as advocates? Looking at their work through this lens reminded me of the larger picture and tremendously eased my worries and qualms.

Then She'll Recall Her Purpose... and Ask for Another Class Next Semester

Throughout the course, I reflected a great deal on decisions I was making in teaching, evaluating, and grading. I had days when I felt I was making better decisions than others. I made mistakes, and I improved. I agonized over each decision. But at the end of the semester, I wondered if all the time and worry I put into the past months was so necessary after all.

At the end of our last meeting, I was fortunate enough to have multiple students thank me personally for the class, and I felt a gratification similar to that which I felt at times during my work as a social worker. I thought of my indirect impact on my students' future clients, and I thought of my impact on my students themselves. I thought of my identity as a social worker and of my responsibility as an educator. And I was glad I struggled so much.

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Sara Jo Helba is a PhD student and undergraduate instructor at the University of Kentucky's College of Social Work. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in social work from Florida State University. Sara currently teaches Human Behavior in the Social Environment. Her main research areas include sexual assault and consent, the medicalization of psychosocial health, ethics in the helping professions, and social work education.

Fathers are Caregivers Too: Shifting Focus on Research with Latino Men

Noe Mojica, LCSW

Abstract

This article presents a description of the state of knowledge about Latino fathers' coping with pediatric cancer and explains the need to shift the attention for research and practice with this group. In order to provide a fuller understanding of the fathers' experience, those conducting research need to analyze constructions of masculinity and move away from stereotypical models about men and their caregiving. The author proposes decentering research from the Anglo-American dominant focus and being more inclusive of other perspectives. Paths for inquiry to promote culturally sensitive interventions and research recommendations are provided.

Keywords: cancer, Latinos, fathering, caregiving, research

During years of practice as a social worker in the healthcare system, I have witnessed the challenges many families face when their children suffer a life-threatening illness like cancer. Statistics from the American Cancer Society (2015) indicate cancer survival rates among children have greatly improved compared to previous decades with overall survival approximating 83%. Some children with certain cancer diagnoses approach or exceed 90% long-term survival. However, an estimated 1,250 cancer deaths are expected to occur among children 0 to 14 years of age in 2015.

Parents may experience a sense of loss when they bring their children to the hospital because of the fact that illness presents the reality of their child's vulnerability and the caregivers' inability to alleviate the problem. A cancer diagnosis is one that places new burdens on the life routine of men. It may lead them to question notions they previously had about what it means to be a father and how they construe their masculinity.

I work predominantly with mothers from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. About one quarter of these women are Latinas. The mothers' presence is more evident as they are often the ones who provide care to their children when hospitalized. I have also noticed a number of Latino fathers present, sometimes by themselves while their wives are at home or taking care of other responsibilities. The capacity of these men to dedicate their time and undertake a role that is usually associated with women is appealing to me. On the other hand, there is a larger number of fathers who are not present at the hospital. Their level of involvement, time, and effort to their ill children is less obvious. They seem to be invisible because they are rarely at the bedside.

This article presents a description of the state of knowledge about fathers' coping with pediatric cancer. More specifically, it discusses the need to take a new approach for research and practice with Latino fathers in order to provide a fuller understanding of their experience. To accomplish this, it is imperative to analyze constructions of masculinity and move away from stereotypical models about men and their caregiving. It includes decentering research from an Anglo-American dominant focus and moving towards increasing the inclusion of more ethnic minority groups, specifically Latino men, and bringing them out of the apparent invisibility.

Challenges of Fathers

Researchers argue that social conditions have presented many challenges to fathers to assume an increasingly active role in raising children (White, Roosa, Weaver & Nair, 2009). The emergence of the feminist movement has questioned traditional gender roles and a redefinition of fathering (Silverstein, 1996; Dowd, 2000). This, in turn, has modified the distribution of parental responsibilities which, in the past, was based on the traditional roles of the mother caring for the children and the father functioning as provider (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Falicov, 2010). There is evidence suggesting an increased overall involvement from men. Their roles and behaviors at home seem to be changing from traditional norms to more gender egalitarianism (Coltrane, Park & Adams, 2004; Doucet, 2004; Pelchat, Lefebvre & Levert, 2007, Falicov, 2010; Galinsky, Aumann & Bond, 2011).

Saracho and Spoked (2008) compared fathers to “family ghosts” in relation to their children’s development and well-being. They explain that the father’s role is very often attributed to the financial support of his children. They seem to be “invisible” in other aspects of their children’s lives. The few studies that have examined fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives may have created the perception that fathers were the “hidden parents.” Some researchers indicate that given these family, social, and cultural variations and expectations, it is still largely true that those working in pediatrics seldom get to know the fathers as well as they do mothers (Coleman, Garfield & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2004).

Constructions of Masculinity

Earlier literature pictured Latino families with a certain pathology and social deficit view in which men are stereotypically autocratic. Accordingly, Latino men were seen as machos, regardless of country of origin, education, class, age or gender role beliefs (Mirandé, 1997). It is very important to be aware that Latino masculinities and gender identities should not be conceptualized as subordinate/marginalized but as complex and diverse as those of Euro-American men (Mirandé, 1997) and shaped according to social context (Levant et al., 2003). However, these shifts do not occur in a homogeneous, formulaic way. The changes happen unevenly and result in contradictory combinations in everyday life where some historical aspects of machismo coexist with increased egalitarianism (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2005; Maciel, Van Putten, & Knudson-Martin, 2009; Falicov, 2010).

New interpretations of how machismo is expressed are emerging (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Glass & Owen, 2010). In relation to Latino men they do perform roles that include loving husband, consumed father, family man, and provider for the family. Coltrane, Parke, and Adams (2004) in a sample of participants of low-income Mexican-American families suggest a complex portrait of father involvement. Fathers in the study were more involved in both masculine-typed and feminine-typed interactions with their children than their White counterparts. The authors suggest that this finding provides support for Mirandé’s (1997) suggestion that Mexican men are labeled by the majority culture as macho and uninvolved in family life, “when in fact they often exhibit high levels of commitment to family and spend considerable time interacting with their children in nurturing and emotional ways”

(Coltrane, Parke & Adams , 2004, p. 185). The same study also found that men with more egalitarian ideals tended to be more involved in performing family duties.

Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, and Tracey (2008) have made a distinction between traditional machismo and *caballerismo*. They conceptualized traditional machismo as focusing on individual power, hypermasculinity, aggressive behavior, sexism, and chauvinism, whereas caballerismo places emphasis on social responsibility and emotional connectedness (nurturing, family centeredness, and chivalry). The researchers found that traditional machismo was related to aggression and antisocial behavior, greater levels of what is called alexithymia (the degree to which one is not aware of affect). Thus, men who scored higher on traditional machismo had more difficulty being aware of and understanding their own and the emotions of others. This study's examinations are significant to help situate these scales into a larger and multifaceted model of masculinity.

Research emerging from Latin America has surpassed the notion of masculinity as monolithic. Various scholars propose a conceptualization of men constructing masculinities. They highlight the diversity of men's experiences and identities in opposition to an essentialist perspective which enfolds all men under a single identity (Ramírez, 1993; Shepard, 2001; Montesinos, 2005). Ethnographic work has explored how masculine identities manifest regionally according to geographic areas. Men act differently according to their setting. Those coming from rural areas conceive being men as closer to machismo, while men living in large developed urban settings reshape their masculine identities and advocate for more egalitarian gender relations (Viveros, 2001; Fuller, 2001; Valdéz & Olavarria, 1998; Olavarria, 2001). However, the same researchers have indicated that class differences of those living in urban areas also shape men's conceptions of their masculinity. Thus these researchers move beyond a reductionist conception of masculinity that is circumscribed to underdeveloped/rural macho mentality versus developed/urban flexible mentality (Hernández, 2007).

In light of this knowledge about masculinities, how do men cope when faced with pediatric cancer? One avenue to learn more, is taking a look to the area where most of the research has been done. These areas are coping differences and psychosocial functioning between men and women and their roles as caregivers.

Psychosocial Functioning and Coping Differences of Mothers and Fathers

Mothers tend to participate in more social-support seeking activities (Hoekstra-Weebers, Jaspers, Kamps and Klip (1999) while social support has a greater impact on means of coping for fathers when compared with mothers (Goldbeck, 2001). It is possible that fathers are more aware of or more concerned about the typical ups and downs of interacting with their children. They may be more vulnerable than mothers to perceived problems of interaction (Macias, Saylor, Haire, & Bell, 2007).

It has been reported that fathers primarily use solution-focused strategies of coping, whereas mothers tend to focus on emotions. This may mean that fathers do not have healthy outlets for expressing their emotions (Jones & Neil-Urban, 2003). They may be unprepared for the experience of grieving in addition to feelings of shame and embarrassment in relation to their

own needs for connection (Addis, 2011). A significantly greater proportion of fathers than mothers reported higher rates of depressive symptoms due to the child's health problems in research done by Bonner, Hardy, Willard, and Hutchinson (2007). In one qualitative study conducted by Wolff, Pak, Meeske, Worden, and Katz (2011), the most often cited challenges fathers reported included depressive symptoms, feeling alone and payment of expenses during the child's hospitalization.

Streisand, Kazak and Tercyak (2003) studied parenting stress related to caring for a child with cancer and family functioning outcomes (n=116). Results indicated that increased parenting stress was associated with poorer family functioning outcomes. The study also indicated that these families may need greater assistance in handling stress and in openly sharing responses with other family members.

Chesler and Parry (2001) in a sample of 167 men studied how fathers' experiences and stresses are influenced by gendered identities, gendered roles, and gendered organization of support systems. Fathers found it difficult to learn new skills and take on new chores. They experienced conflicting role obligations for work and family. Some fathers were not prepared for additional child care and housework. Although a number of men were willing to let their wives continue to perform those responsibilities, some fathers also felt they had to "fight" the mother to assume these tasks. Work was used to escape emotionally or practical demands. On an emotional level, men felt their role was to remain strong and not express emotions. They felt helpless and guilty for lack of control of the situation. They felt left out of the loop for medical information because the staff focused on the mother. Finally, the authors indicate that fathers had limited support from male friends. In light of these stressors, consideration needs to be provided to how fathers can cope effectively when facing pediatric cancer.

Protective factors, that is, the conditions or attributes in individuals and families that help them cope more effectively with stressful situations, are important to reduce risk. Brody and Simmons (2007) used the resiliency model of family stress, adjustment, and adaptation as a framework for exploring the resources assisting fathers adapt to life after their child was diagnosed. By using social supports in combination with constructive communication patterns, fathers were more likely to display resilient characteristics that enabled them to adjust to the changes in their family life. Fathers were very involved in the caretaking of the child. They reported that their relationships with family members were strengthened through the difficult times. They also valued healthcare professionals who were straightforward and honest with information sharing. The study indicates that fathers needed 3 important resources to emerge successfully from the pediatric cancer experience: good social support, strong communication skills, and an ability to adjust to the changes required of the illness. This is supported by other studies which indicate that the amount of support families receive (e.g., financial, emotional, and supportive) directly influences the caregiving response to a chronically ill child (Perrin, Lewkowicz, & Young, 2000; Hovey, 2006; Ygge & Arnetz, 2004). One study by Gannotti, Kaplan, Handwerker, and Groce (2004) compared service use, perceived unmet needs, and expectations of providers of Latino and Euro-American families. It found that Latino families were more likely to cite unmet needs in areas such as an unresolved health problem and need for more information or a support group.

In one literature review of articles published from 1992- 2002, Kerr, Harrison, Medves, and Tranmer (2004) looked into studies that addressed one or more of six supportive care needs (i.e., informational, emotional, psychosocial, practical, physical, and spiritual) in relation to parents of children with cancer. The main psychosocial need cited was for social support while spiritual and physical needs were cited in the fewer amounts of studies reviewed.

Integration of Latino Fathers in Research

Cabrera and Garcia-Coll (2004) have expressed that little is known about what Latino fathers do as fathers. These authors have shown that Latino fathers continue to be studied from Anglo-American perspectives which omit language, beliefs, expectations, roles, culture, and aspirations. Fathering in the growing population of immigrants remains relatively unexplored (Capps, Bronte-Tinkew, & Horowitz, 2010). Immigrant fathers may face stressors such as unemployment, underemployment, language barriers, shifts in identity roles, and hurdles to services, all of which can have an impact on their parenting abilities. In addition, sociocultural beliefs about the roles and expectations of fathers may vary according to the norms in fathers' native country, leading to differences in parenting (Capps, Bronte-Tinkew, & Horowitz, 2010).

Most of the understanding about Latino fathers and their roles has been constructed by the writings of researchers who approached research on families from outside the families' cultural reality, using their own theoretical frameworks (Taylor & Behnke, 2005). As the United States becomes a more diverse society scholars have been stressing the importance of using various culturally appropriate methodological and theoretical paradigms to study ethnic minorities. This is a departure from Eurocentric perspectives and employing "cultural variance" or "ethnotheories" to study diverse families (Sherif-Trask & Marotz-Baden, 2007).

Coltrane, Parke, and Adams (2004) report that research on fathers' care of their children has focused on White, highly-educated, middle-class, intact families. Results from one meta-analysis on 29 studies examining psychological distress, marital, and family functioning among parents of children with cancer indicate the inclusion of Latino participants in this kind of research has ranged from minimal to completely absent (Pai et al., 2007). A total of 17 studies reported the ethnic distribution of the study sample. Participants were predominantly Caucasian (mean percentage of 83.92%). Hispanics in the sample ranged from 0% to only 8%. This is concerning in view of the increasing population growth and demographic projections of Hispanics in the United States in sharp contrast to the low level of inclusion in pediatric oncology research.

The literature review only resulted in few studies that focused on Latino males and their fathering. It was apparent that Latino fathers were included in some of the samples. However, their sampling totals were very small to make generalizations to the larger population. Approximately 58% of the study samples included in the study of Pai et al (2007) had fewer than 50 participants in each of the study groups. Small sample sizes may limit the power of the studies to find significant differences between groups. This could result in underestimating the influence of pediatric cancer on parents. Many of the studies relied on qualitative data gathering. There were only a few studies that included large samples of Latino fathers.

In summary, findings from the current literature review demonstrated that family functioning may be reduced at some point during the cancer course after children are diagnosed. The results of this review indicate that there is a growing number of studies addressing the impact of the diagnosis and treatment of childhood cancer on fathers which includes considerations to protective factors that help fathers and their families cope better. However, the amount of research on fathers' involvement constitutes a small fraction when compared with the amount of studies on mothers as caregivers. The number of studies is even smaller when considering research involving Latino fathers.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Research

Social workers are an important component in service provision in medical and other health care affiliated institutions where families and their children go to receive treatment or support services. Social workers are at the forefront of knowledge building and advocacy regarding marginalized populations such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, and the disabled. Social justice and inclusion are values rooted in the profession (Towle, 1965; Addams, 1990; National Association of Social Workers, 2008). These values shape practice and help to enhance the capacity of individuals, families, and communities so they can thrive and access better resources, improve quality of life, and transform their reality. The profession's principles of promoting change and social transformation are also relevant to the focus of this research as they relate to the pursuit of policy making relevant to the most important issues of society including healthcare.

The United States' healthcare system is undergoing a drastic transformation and the emerging challenges create policies and requirements that determine new priorities. There is the risk of shifting the attention to procedures, budgets and maximizing of profits leaving out the compassionate and dedicated care that centers on the vulnerable patient and family (Lown, Rosen & Marttila, 2011). Racial and ethnic minorities and persons living in increasingly economically disparate settings continue to suffer a disproportionate share of the cancer burden in the United States (Efird, 2013). In that regard, those professionals whose practice setting is the medical field need to assess their knowledge base and competence to engage in such a complex health care environment which promises to become more demanding and diversified as the shift in policies and regulations keep expanding (Efird, 2013).

The intersection of caregiving, masculinity and coping is a complex one that calls for further exploration in research in the context of healthcare. When the component of pediatric cancer is added to the equation, it becomes clear that in-depth inquiry is needed to have a wide perspective of the participants' worldviews, values and experiences. In light of that, mixed methods approach is a viable methodology when studying the topic (Greene, 2007). Mixed methods is a valuable methodology because it allows for collecting, analyzing and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). More research is required to identify fathers' unique emotional, social, financial and health care roles and needs in family care giving. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in capturing the experience of male caregiving over a specific timespan.

In addition, differences between particular subsets of the population such as patients with brain tumors vs. those with acute lymphoblastic leukemia needs further study. Differences in prognosis, as well as the types of treatment regimens, could have substantial implications for parents. Examination of the influence of child age on parent outcomes requires research as there is only a small number of studies (Pai et al., 2007).

It is also worth considering as well that despite their common-sense appeal, the familiar group labels habitually used in United States' health research are in fact based on a confusing mixture of characteristics, ranging from skin color to geographic origin to language preference. Differences are commonly ignored in health research, presuming homogeneity among people of diverse Hispanic origin. Researchers often use terms such a "Hispanic" to bundle all persons that includes over 400 million people from many different ethnic groups and subgroups, in more than 20 different countries (Hunt, Schneider & Comer, 2004).

Another aspect to highlight is that most of the research on fathers has been done from the optic of heterosexuality as the norm. Although it may be a challenging task to recruit gay participants, especially in the Latino community, it is obvious that there are same-sex couples (and gay fathers) caregiving for children with life-threatening illness. Gay fathers' perspectives would be valuable, "as they may also face additional stigmas in the health care systems that are not known to heterosexual fathers" (Wolff, Pak, Worden, Meeske, & Katz, 2010, p.215).

Finally, in developing interventions for this population, current recommendations suggest creating broad-based psychoeducational interventions that can be tailored to families' specific cancer experience (Torres, 1998) as well as narrative approaches to therapy in which men have the opportunity to have their voices and cultural stories heard (Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). More spaces are also needed for self-help and support groups (Chesler & Parry, 2001). However, the idea of a "support group" may be intimidating or unattractive to some men. Thus, interventions for fathers should be advertised as "information sessions," "workshops," or "seminars" that are more educational and explanatory initially (Wolff, Pak, Meeske, Worden & Katz, 2010). To summarize, a myriad of approaches has to be available.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to present a description of the state of knowledge about fathers' coping with pediatric cancer. Moreover, the goal was to present ideas about new approaches to research and practice with Latino fathers. Namely, an analysis of the constructions of masculinity and a challenge to move away from stereotypes was presented. Additionally, the literature review revealed that evidence indicates that gender identity has an important role in determining fathers' experiences and their ability to cope with their children's illness.

Researchers need to gain insight into the norms, expectations, and beliefs that determine Latino fathers' involvement and what constitute culturally appropriate father-child activities (Saracho & Spodek, 2008). The design of many studies created methodological challenges for researchers who attempted to learn about the nature and meaning of fathering in these groups. This was specifically noted when research is done with Mexican American families which constitute the majority of the Latino population (Cabrera et al., 2004; Coltrane, Parke, & Adams,

2004). Researching the lives of these men as caregivers becomes crucial in our efforts to gain a wider understanding of the challenges families face. This understanding is also linked to enhancing social work practice.

In closing, it is important to indicate that fatherhood in the growing Hispanic population remains relatively unexplored as a focus of research. Further, there are some studies, but limited to a small number that address the impact of the diagnosis and treatment of childhood cancer on fathers. These include considerations of protective factors that help fathers and their families cope better. Regarding parental involvement as caregivers, fathers only represent a small fraction of the focus of the literature, while mothers are heavily studied. This reality is indicative of stereotypical notions of men being relegated as secondary figures, and women considered the primary caregivers. This absence has further perpetuated the notion that fathers are invisible when it comes to the caregiving of children with life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer. Decentering research on fathering from the perspective of White, highly-educated, middle-class, intact families, will help social work engage in a more inclusive research endeavor to consider groups that have been historically excluded from the spotlight, thereby increasing the visibility of Latino fathers.

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Noe Mojica is a doctoral candidate in Social Work at Loyola University, Chicago. He is a licensed clinical social worker in the state of Illinois. He currently works at the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Besides his social work practice, he is also the Beads of Courage Program Coordinator, an arts-in-medicine project to support children coping with life-threatening illness. Currently, his research interests are focused on men's studies, coping, chronic illness, and pediatric healthcare.

The CV Builder

University of Houston, Graduate College of Social Work
Perspectives on Social Work congratulates the following doctoral students on their accomplishments during fall 2014 through spring 2015.

Congratulations May 2015 GCSW Graduates!

Dr. Ginger Gummelt

Dr. Alicia LaChapelle

Dr. Melissa Torres

Dr. Mark Trahan

Melissa Torres

Presentations:

Torres, M.I.M. (2015). Militarization and Human Trafficking: The Case of the US-Mexico Border. Delegate & Presenter at the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Centennial Conference: Women Stop War, April 28. The Hague, The Netherlands.

Torres, M.I.M. (2015). Recommendations to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Universal Periodic Review of the U.S.: A Report of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section. Presenter at the Universal Periodic Review Pre-Session for the U.S. Centre International de Conférences Genève, April 8. Geneva, Switzerland.

Richard Wagner

Scholarships:

Arthur and June Smith Presidential Endowment 2014-2015 Academic Year

Presentations:

Wagner, R. W. (2015, March). Black women and breast cancer. Lack of information, lying with statistics or health disparities? Poster presented at The 7th Annual Health Disparities Conference at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Wagner, R.W. (2014, October). Significant gap in survivorship care policy. Poster presented at the Graduate Research & Scholarship Conference, University of Houston, Houston, TX.

Micki Washburn

Publications:

Bordnick, P. S. & **Washburn, M.** (In press) Virtual reality applications for drug and alcohol assessment and treatment. In P. Sharkey (Ed.). *VR Technology for Health and Clinical Applications (Series Two)*. New York, NY: Springer

Invited Interview:

Craft, J. (Host) (2015, March 23). *Mental Health for the Transgender Community: Interview with Micki Washburn, MA, LPC-S and Kenneth McLeod, LCSW*. Interview can be retrieved from: <http://archive.kpft.org/>

Presentations:

Washburn, M. *DSM-V: Changes and Challenges for Clinicians*. Continuing education seminar for Bay Area Mental Health Providers NETwork. Houston, TX, February 10th, 2015. (Invited)

Rubin, A., Parrish, D. E, and **Washburn, M.** *Benchmarks for one-group outcome evaluations of research supported treatments*. Paper submitted for the Society for Social Work and Research 19th Annual Conference: The Social and Behavioral Importance of Increased Longevity. New Orleans, LA, January 14-18th, 2015. (Refereed)

Narendorf, S. A, Munson, M. & **Washburn, M.** *Psychiatric emergency service use among young adults: Precipitators and patterns*. Paper submitted for the Society for Social Work and Research 19th Annual Conference: The Social and Behavioral Importance of Increased Longevity. New Orleans, LA, January 14-18th, 2015. (Refereed)

Washburn, M. *Virtual patient OSCEs: Innovation in Clinical Social Work Education and Assessment*. Paper submitted for the Council on Social Work Education 60th Annual Program Meeting. Advancing Social Work Education, Tampa, FL, October 23-26th, 2014 (Refereed)

Shu Zhou

Publications:

Zhou, S. (2015, April). Under the Dome and policy advocacy. *China Social Work (中国社会工作)*, 226, 6-7.

Zhou, S. (2015, April). Alcoholics Anonymous: U.S. mutual helping group. *China Social Work (中国社会工作)*, 226, 60-61.

Presentations:

Zhou, S. (2014, December). *A systematic review of sex education programs in four countries.*

Poster session presented at the "college to community" research conference, University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, Houston, TX.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

Perspectives on Social Work is a publication of the doctoral students of the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston. The journal was founded in 2003 to provide opportunity for the college's social work doctoral students to showcase their work. Since that time, the journal has expanded and now accepts submissions from social work doctoral students nationwide and internationally. The primary mission of *Perspectives on Social Work* is to provide opportunity to students to enhance scholarly skills in writing, editing, and exposure to the publication process. The scope of the journal includes empirical, theoretical, and conceptual articles as well as book reviews. We accept rolling submissions!

In order to be considered for publication in *Perspectives on Social Work*, authors must consider and adhere to the following criteria:

- The first author must be a currently enrolled doctoral student.
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- Only original work will be considered.
- Only electronic PDF submissions are accepted.
- Submissions for book reviews may be 3-5 pages.
- Submissions for the featured articles should be 6 – 10 pages in length. The recommended page limits excludes references.
- Submissions must be: 1) a blind copy (no identifying information within the running head or manuscript); 2) double-spaced; 3) continuously numbered lines; 4) not less than one inch margins, and 5) 12-point Times New Roman font.
- A coversheet with the title, author(s), and school affiliation should accompany the blind copy of the manuscript.
- The following statement should be included within the email or cover letter which accompanies the submission: *“This manuscript has not been previously published, nor is it being simultaneously considered elsewhere.”*
- If you submit an empirical study with human subjects, ensure there has been IRB approval. Notate the approval in your paper.
- Submissions must meet APA guidelines (6th Edition) for text, tables, and references and be grammatically correct.
- Submissions may be denied if there are excessive grammatical errors even if the content and themes are significant.

Submission Review Process

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- Editorial decisions (i.e. accept, revise and resubmit, and reject) will be communicated to author(s) in a timely manner. Time frame for receiving a decision often depends on the availability of reviewers and the number of submissions under review. Please be advised that the review process may be slower at different times of the year (e.g. holidays, closing of the university, finals).
- Authors are encouraged to ask about their manuscript's status.
- Submissions are reviewed by a minimum of 2 peer reviewers.
- Manuscript acceptance is dependent on available space in the journal and number of submissions.
- All final decisions are made by editors.

- Upon acceptance, the editorial board may make changes (e.g. grammar, references, formatting), subject to the author's approval.

Feedback Guidelines

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Rev 1-05-16

The logo features a large, stylized letter 'U' in a dark red color. The 'U' is composed of four rounded rectangular segments that meet at a central white circle. Inside this white circle, the text 'UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON' is displayed. 'UNIVERSITY of' is in a smaller, grey, sans-serif font, while 'HOUSTON' is in a larger, bold, red, sans-serif font. A thin horizontal line is positioned below 'HOUSTON'.

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