

Podcasting as Social Scholarship: A Tool to Increase the Public Impact of Scholarship and Research

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ABSTRACT For decades, social work educators and scholars have pondered the question of how to best prepare students and practitioners to learn and apply evidence-based practices and policies for alleviating individual and social problems. The most common response has been to expose students to evidence-based practices and policies and to involve social work practitioners in continuing-education courses and workshops. In 2007, I used a new type of media—podcasts—to address the question of how to most effectively disseminate research and best practices to social work students and practitioners. This article provides a brief definition and history of podcasting in social work, reviews social work scholarship on podcasting, provides results from a survey of social work podcast consumers, and discusses the role of podcasting in the larger context of social scholarship. The article concludes with recommendations for social work scholars, practitioners, and leaders related to the effective use of podcasting to increase the public impact of scholarship and research.

KEYWORDS: social scholarship, social work, education, social media, podcast

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Social work scholarship has a problem. Despite increased faculty productivity and funding over the past decade, social work practitioners and the broader society experience serious limitations in the value of social work research. Social work practitioners tend not to read scholarship, nor do they incorporate research findings into their practice (Gitterman, 2014; Grady et al., 2018). At the same time, disciplines such as public health, psychology, and economics have advanced the science that social work is built upon (Brekke, 2012). Although there are examples of scientific contributions by social workers that are being widely adopted (e.g., Michael Sherraden's Individual Development Accounts; see, e.g., Sherraden, Lough, Sherraden, Williams Shanks, & Huang, 2019, in this issue), other contributions—including the empirically supported task-centered model (Videka & Blackburn, 2010)

and person-in-environment system (Karls & O’Keefe, 2008)—have been largely ignored inside and outside of social work.

Initiatives such as the Grand Challenges for Social Work have focused on improving the quality and visibility of social work scholarship (Fong, Lubben, & Barth, 2018; Gehlert, Hall, & Palinkas, 2017), but challenges to promoting the impact of scholarship through conventional print and media outlets remain. Perhaps as a result, practitioners increasingly seek out presentations such as TED Talks or popular pseudoscience workshops. Although some are grounded in research (e.g., Sliva, 2019), these types of presentations may mask complex conceptual or empirical problems faced by social workers (Thyer & Pignotti, 2015; Tur, Harstad, & Antonakis, 2018). Scholars must do better at conveying information to nonresearchers in an engaging and informative way.

Podcasts may be one way in which social work scholars can increase the depth and breadth of their influence and remove the financial (Cartney, 2013), conceptual (Knight, 2013), and attitudinal (Fronek, Boddy, Chenoweth, & Clark, 2016) barriers that prevent social work students and practitioners from consuming and implementing scholarship. Because there has been very little scholarship on the role of podcasts in social work education or practice, the purpose of this article is to provide a brief definition and history of podcasting in social work, review social work scholarship on podcasting, provide data from a large survey of social work podcast consumers, and discuss the role of podcasting in social scholarship. Social scholarship is defined as the use of social media to engage in and expand the scholarship of discovery, integration, teaching, and application (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014). In this article, people who engage with podcasts via audio, written transcripts, video, or a combination of all three are referred to as “consumers” rather than “listeners” to acknowledge the fact that not everyone consumes podcast episodes by listening (see Istovi, 2017, for a Reddit thread on Deaf accessibility of podcasts).

A Brief History of Podcasting

Podcasting is a combination of two technologies that were developed in the late 1990s: the MP3 file format, which compresses audio without significant loss in audio quality (“MP33,” 2019), and RSS (Rich Site Summary and Really Simple Syndication), a type of Web feed that the newspaper industry developed to push online content to consumers (“RSS,” 2019). Although people had been consuming audio online since the early 1990s, the first documented podcast was in 2004 when former MTV VJ Adam Curry used RSS feeds to push MP3 files to subscribers of his online show. At the time, the most popular MP3 player was Apple’s iPod. On February 12, 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley coined the term “podcasting” by pairing the words “iPod” and “broadcasting” (Hammersley, 2004). In 2005, Apple added a podcast category to iTunes, and the New Oxford American Dictionary named “podcast” the word of the year (“Oxford Dictionary names ‘podcast,’” 2005).

On January 22, 2007, I produced the first podcast series for social workers: the *Social Work Podcast* (Fronek et al., 2016; Schembri, 2008). I was a social work doctoral student at the time. Between 2007 and 2016, eight more English-language social-work-related podcast series were published in four countries. The number of social-work-related podcasts published for the first time increased from 4 in 2017 to 12 in 2018. Table 1 lists the names, start dates, and countries of origin for podcasts that have been produced and hosted by social workers since 2007.

Table 1

Names, Start Dates, and Countries of Origin for Social Work Podcast Series

Podcast Series Name	Date Started	Country of Origin
<i>Social Work Podcast</i>	January 22, 2007	USA
<i>inSocialWork</i> (originally <i>Living Proof</i>) ⁺	August 4, 2008	USA
<i>Profiles in Social Work</i> [*]	September 1, 2010	Canada
<i>Podsocs</i> [*]	June 28, 2012	Australia
<i>Leading From Behind</i> [*]	December 15, 2012	Canada
<i>Social World Podcast</i>	October 8, 2013	United Kingdom
<i>Therapy Chat Podcast</i>	April 2015	USA
<i>Black Therapist</i>	September 13, 2016	USA
<i>Helpful Social Work</i>	November 22, 2016	United Kingdom
<i>Mental Health Moment</i>	January 20, 2017	USA
<i>Transgressive: The Podcast</i> [*]	April 27, 2017	USA
<i>Social Work Discoveries</i> ⁺	August 14, 2017	Australia
<i>Guerrilla Social Work Podcast</i>	November 22, 2017	USA
<i>Black Boys & Men: Changing the Narrative</i> [*]	January 15, 2018	USA
<i>Doin' the Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change</i>	March 5, 2018	USA
<i>NASW Social Work Talks</i>	March 6, 2018	USA
<i>Hip Hop Social Worker</i>	May 24, 2018	USA
<i>A Feminist Therapist</i>	July 3, 2018	USA
<i>Social Work Conversations</i>	August 15, 2018	USA
<i>Social Work Duo</i>	August 29, 2018	USA
<i>The Roving Social Worker</i>	September 3, 2018	USA
<i>Social Matters Podcast</i>	September 15, 2018	United Kingdom
<i>Social Work Stories</i>	September 17, 2018	Australia
<i>Decolonize Social Work</i>	October 4, 2018	USA
<i>Kelly and the Encouragers</i>	October 15, 2018	USA
<i>TheMattSchwartz(Cast)</i>	October 21, 2018	USA

Note.

^{*}Podcast series that have not been updated in 12 or more months.

⁺Podcasts with an explicit focus on research.

An evergreen list of social work and related podcasts can be found on a Google Sheet started by Melanie Sage (Sage & Social Work Tech Community, n.d.).

The increase in social-work-related podcasts mirrors the current trend in the United States, which saw a nearly fourfold increase from 180,000 podcasts in 2015 to 700,000 podcasts in 2019 (Winn, 2019). The popularity of podcasts has been attributed to greater variety in content, deeper penetration of smart phones, easier streaming access due to more ubiquitous broadband data connections and Wi-Fi, and most recently the rise in smart speakers such as Google Home and Alexa that play podcasts on command (e.g., “Hey Google, play the *Social Work Podcast*”).

Although there is no empirical data to evaluate why social workers are starting podcast series more frequently, anecdotal evidence suggests that driving factors include access to inexpensive and easy-to-use podcasting technologies and recognition that podcasting is an effective way to reach other social workers. Shimon Cohen, host of the *Doin’ The Work: Frontline Stories of Social Change* podcast series, tweeted to me that he had not heard of podcasts during graduate school (2008–2011), but that after he was in the field for a while, “I had wanted to ‘do more’ but wasn’t sure how & a combo of listening to @socworkpodcast & my own interest in people’s stories & a convo with my good friend who’s a journalist @jordanthierry just brought it all together. And that it felt more fun and accessible than writing a book!” (Singer, 2019a). Cohen’s tweet highlights his perception that podcasting is fun and accessible and his desire to disseminate stories of people on the frontlines of social change. This is what Boyer called the scholarship of engagement: the integration of academic and civic spaces (Boyer, 1996).

Podcasting as a Tool for Social Scholarship

Podcasts can be used for social scholarship as a broadcast medium, an interactive medium, or as an entrée to engage with the public using other forms of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

Nearly all podcasts are consumed as producer-to-consumer content. The individual or team that produces the podcast episode pushes the content to the consumer, who then consumes the content by listening, reading a transcript, looking at related content online (e.g., video), or some combination of the three. This approach to podcasting is essentially a 21st century form of radio broadcast. Some scholars have advocated for podcasts to be interactive. Lynn Harter, a communications professor, stated that her purpose in creating a podcast was to engage with her audience:

I have no desire to produce podcasts for passive listeners. Instead, I envision podcasts as social activities that involve dialogue between hosts and guests and include the presence of spectators who enter the conversation to learn, feel good, be moved, entertained, or motivated. To podcast is to take part in

the experience in whatever capacity, whether as host, guest, or spectating body. Solitary individuals can engage podcasts in isolation yet still develop kinship with narrators. Listeners can talk back, add commentary, make expressive noises and gestures at will, and contemplate ideas long after an episode ends. (Harter, 2019, p. 127)

Harter's desire for interaction with her podcast audience is more possible today than it was when the first podcasts were produced in 2004. Anchor.fm and Soundcloud are two platforms that facilitate interaction with audio files. Soundcloud is an app and website that allows visitors to leave comments on any audio file uploaded to Soundcloud. Podcast hosts can read consumer reactions or responses to specific moments in the podcast, and a community of consumers can participate in a larger conversation.

A more sophisticated approach to interaction can be found on Anchor.fm, a mobile app that can be used by podcast producers and consumers. Using a smartphone, producers can record solo or phone-to-phone interviews and edit and upload podcast episodes. Consumers can interact with episodes by clicking the clap or applause icon, engaging in text-based discussions, leaving voice messages for the host about an episode, and integrating the audio into their own podcast episode. The latter functionality enables producers to comment on a specific segment of the podcast episode in the same way that an author can quote a piece of text in a written article. These technologies transform podcasting from a broadcast format to an interactive format.

Many of us have had an intimate experience with podcasts. When we listen to the podcasts using headphones, the host's voice is literally inside our heads. Our brains automatically cocreate an experience with the host by providing images for the words we hear. As a result, we feel like we know the hosts. We develop an affection for them. Consumers can develop "kinship with narrators" (Harter, 2019, p. 127). As a result, interacting with consumers through the podcast opens the possibility for debate, collaboration, and cocreation of content. Because podcasts are public, it is possible to engage with academic and nonacademic consumers. This expands reach to academics outside of a scholar's silo to people who might be living with the issues that are the focus of research (Boyer, 1996). If a scholar shares an idea and consumers push back, question, or modify that idea through mixing and mash-ups, the scholar might have to explain, defend, answer, and critically engage the ideas they promulgated with a lay audience. Ideally these exchanges would not just refine and improve the scholars' academic contributions but would result in products that could be consumed by the general public. This is the essence of social scholarship.

The final way that podcasts can be used for social scholarship is as entrée to scholarly engagement on social media platforms. Bonnie Stewart, a digital network

scholar, noted that academia and social media are both reputational economies (Stewart, 2015). Although my academic reputation is primarily associated with my work on youth suicide (Singer, Erbacher, & Rosen, 2019), and secondarily on technology (Berzin, Singer, & Chan, 2015), I was invited to submit this article on podcasting and social scholarship in part because my presence on social media during the past 10+ years has helped me establish a reputation as an expert on social media.

In sum, the rise of podcasting as broadcast medium, the increased participation of social workers in podcasting, and the possibilities it holds for engaging a broader audience makes podcasting a valuable tool for social scholarship. The remainder of this article reviews what is known about social work and podcasting, presents the findings from a survey of *Social Work Podcast* consumers, and concludes with implications for podcasting and social work scholarship.

Scholarship Addressing Social Work and Podcasting

A literature search on ERIC, psycINFO, Social Service Abstracts, and Social Science Index using the term podcast\$ AND “social work” returned six published peer-reviewed journal articles: three empirical pieces (Cartney, 2013; Fronek et al., 2016; Salloum & Smyth, 2013), one editorial (Robbins & Singer, 2014), and two articles that used the word “podcast” in a list of technologies. A manual search of the literature identified two more journal articles that mentioned “podcast” and “social work” (Schembri, 2008; Wretman & Macy, 2016), but both described podcasting rather than presenting research on its use in social work education or practice.

Peer-reviewed research on social work and podcasting has addressed three topics: (a) the potential for podcasting to reduce costs in educating social work students (Cartney, 2013); (b) the use of podcasting to improve social work students’ and practitioners’ knowledge of and adherence to delivering a manualized treatment (Salloum & Smyth, 2013); and the usefulness, benefits, and barriers of an open-access Australian social work podcast series, *Podsocs*, in education and professional development (Fronek et al., 2016). Each of these studies found support for podcasting to reduce costs, improve adherence to a treatment manual, and serve as an adjunct to traditional social work education. Research has also found that social work students report high levels of satisfaction with podcasting as a complement to traditional textbooks and lectures (Fronek et al., 2016; Singer, 2011). Students valued learning on the go while traveling to and from class and field placements, taking a break from reading, and listening to experts enliven concepts that were uninteresting on paper (Singer, 2011). Although one of the four aims of *Podsocs* was to “make connections between theory, research, and practice (by interviewing theorists, practitioners, and researchers about their work),” a survey of *Podsocs* consumers—6 social work instructors and 22 students—did not specifically ask about the aim of disseminating research (Fronek et al., 2016, p. 107).

Podcasting Versus Traditional Academic Learning

Learning outcomes appear to be equal, and in some cases better, among students who use podcasts compared to students who use traditional learning methods. Research with students in nursing, medicine, and business has found no differences in learning outcomes among students who used podcasts and those who attended traditional lectures and read articles or books (De Los Reyes et al., 2017; Gipson & Richards, 2011; Kazlauskas & Robinson, 2012). Research on more discrete outcomes, however, has found that podcasts improved outcomes when students were required to learn complex information (Gachago, Livingston, & Ivala, 2016) or were expected to engage in reflective thinking activities (Yilmaz & Keser, 2016). Educators-in-training who consumed a series of 5–15 minute multimedia podcast episodes scored significantly higher on knowledge and application measures than educators-in-training who consumed the same information in a text-only condition (Kennedy et al., 2016). Podcast episodes that were specifically designed to reinforce adherence and delivery of a manualized treatment were effective with both social work students and professionals (Sallum & Smyth, 2013).

In sum, there is little scholarship on podcasting and social work education or practice. Research from allied fields suggests that podcasting holds promise in education and training, especially with the type of complex information that social workers are required to process. Existing studies with social workers have small sample sizes, have been conducted primarily outside of the United States, and have not explicitly addressed the role of podcasting and research among social work students and professionals. Finally, there have been no studies that examine the use of podcasting as a form social scholarship. In the following section, I present findings from a study of podcast consumers that aims to fill these gaps.

Survey of Social Work Podcast Consumers

I conducted a study to identify and describe patterns of podcast use among a sample of podcast consumers. The goals of the investigation were to better understand the demographics, subscriber behaviors, and preferences of consumers who had engaged with the *Social Work Podcast*. To that end, I collaborated with Podtrac.com, a podcast marketing company that provides a consumer survey and free podcast metrics to any podcast with fewer than 2 million downloads per month. Podtrac's approach to assessing the nature and impact of podcasts is the industry standard and is used by podcasts and media outlets such as *This American Life*, *The New York Times*, PRX, and National Public Radio. Survey findings provide information about unique downloads by location, time, device, and audience size.

Sample

Although data collection is ongoing, data presented here were collected from July 2016 to July 2019. According to Podtrac, 789 people took the survey during that

time, with item responses ranging from $n = 499$ ("Combined household income") to $n = 673$ ("How many episodes have you listened to?"); this suggests that 116 people clicked on the survey link but didn't answer a single question.

Instrument

Data were collected using Podtrac's Audience Survey for Podcasts (Podtrac.com, n.d.). The online survey (available at <http://survey.podtrac.com/start-survey.aspx?pubidpIqglf8oKcaQi&verpstandard>) includes 40 questions and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey collects quantitative data about consumer demographics and subscription behavior, professional status, and satisfaction with the podcast; it also gathers open-ended responses to the questions "What do you like about the podcast?" and "What do you dislike about the podcast?"

Procedure

I recruited consumers of the *Social Work Podcast* to complete the survey through Twitter (Singer, 2019b), the *Social Work Podcast* website (socialworkpodcast.com), and invitations at the beginning of podcast episodes since 2017.

Analysis

Podtrac provides the free podcast metrics and survey results in a report form. Because I did not have access to the raw survey data, I could not conduct individual-level statistical analysis (e.g., calculate standard deviations or run correlations between responses in one category and demographic variables), hypothesis testing (e.g., people who listen to half of the episode are more likely to rate the quality lower than people who listen to the full episode), or pair quantitative and qualitative responses. Thus, only descriptive findings from the Podtrac survey are reported here.

Of the 789 total respondents, 429 answered the two qualitative survey questions. A preliminary review of the 812 qualitative responses suggested that they could be used to answer two questions relevant to the issue of podcasting and social scholarship: "Do consumers of the *Social Work Podcast* see it as a valuable tool for accessing research?" and "What do consumers like or dislike that might inform decisions about podcasting and research?" I copied and pasted the 429 "like" and 383 "dislike" responses from the Podtrac survey into their own spreadsheets. To identify comments that addressed research, I searched the 812 comments for the truncated term "resea," resulting in 12 comments that addressed research—all from the "like" spreadsheet.

Quantitative Findings

Podcast metrics. The 22 episodes of the *Social Work Podcast* released July 2016–July 2019 have been downloaded more than 2.1 million times: 920,970 downloads

from iTunes and 1,207,332 from Web browsers and podcast apps (e.g., Stitcher) on Android and Windows mobile devices. The podcast was downloaded in 189 countries, with 94% of downloads from four English-speaking countries: 1,698,112 (79%) from the United States, 113,750 (5.3%) from Canada, 98,619 (4.6%) from Australia, and 97,018 (4.5%) from the United Kingdom.

Respondent demographics. The largest group of *Social Work Podcast* respondents were English-speaking, MSW-level women in their mid-20s to mid-40s who were employed full time, married, and without children living in their household; 76% ($n = 389$) of respondents were female. More than half of respondents (57%, $n = 261$) worked in health care or education settings with more than 100 employees. See Table 2 for additional respondent demographic characteristics.

Respondent listening habits. As shown in Table 3, approximately three out of every five respondents reported subscribing to the *Social Work Podcast*, listening to six or more episodes, and listening to the entirety of the episode. Three-quarters of respondents reported listening to each episode once while they were connected to the Internet (i.e., they streamed the episode). More than half of respondents listened to the podcast using an Apple product (iTunes or iPhone). Most Apple users listened on their phone, but Android users listened on their PC, possibly because Apple integrated podcasts into their mobile apps years ago, whereas Google launched a native podcast app in June 2018.

Respondent satisfaction. Consumers' perceived importance and satisfaction with the *Social Work Podcast* series were assessed using a 10-point scale. As shown in Table 4, respondents reported high overall satisfaction ($M = 8.92$) with the series and perceived it as being important ($M = 7.75$). A gap score was calculated to examine the difference between ratings of importance and satisfaction ($M = -1.17$). A large positive gap implies the podcast has failed to meet expectations; a large negative gap suggests that the podcast has exceeded expectations. As shown in Table 4, the highest rated category, *overall quality*, had the same score for importance and satisfaction (9.30). The largest positive gap (i.e., the worst performing category) was *content*, with an overall satisfaction score of 9.19 but a gap of 0.46. The largest negative gap (i.e., the best performing category) was *placement of ads or sponsorships* (-2.27). The lowest rated category was *frequency of new episodes* (7.59).

Qualitative Findings

Podcast as a tool for accessing research. Comments suggested that respondents enjoyed learning about current research and having links to additional resources. As one respondent said, "I feel like I learn something new every time. It is helpful to learn about new techniques and to get a starting point for doing more research." Respondents said they appreciated listening to experts talk about the relationship between research and practice. Respondents described the *Social Work Podcast* as a reputable information source before, during, and after their degree programs.

Table 2*Demographic Characteristics of Social Work Podcast Consumers*

Demographic Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)
Age (years)	513 (100%)
16–17	2 (0%)
18–24	63 (12%)
25–34	189 (37%)
35–44	134 (26%)
45–54	89 (17%)
55–64	30 (6%)
65+	6 (1%)
Gender	510 (100%)
Male	112 (22%)
Female	389 (76%)
Prefer not to say	5 (1%)
Other	4 (1%)
Education	516 (100%)
Less than high school graduate	3 (1%)
Graduated high school or received equivalent degree (e.g., GED)	7 (1%)
Attended college but did not graduate	13 (3%)
Graduated from 2-year college	17 (4%)
Graduated from 4-year college	133 (26%)
Master's degree	308 (60%)
Doctoral degree	31 (6%)
Other professional degree (MD, LLB, etc.)	4 (1%)
Combined household income	499 (100%)
Under \$5,000	22 (4%)
\$5,000–\$19,999	37 (7%)
\$20,000–\$39,999	79 (16%)
\$40,000–\$59,999	94 (17%)
\$60,000–\$74,999	56 (11%)
\$75,000–\$99,999	74 (15%)
\$100,000–\$149,999	77 (15%)
\$150,000 or over	60 (12%)
Employment status	515 (100%)
Full time (35 hours or more)	302 (59%)
Part time (less than 35 hours)	63 (12%)
Student	120 (23%)
Retired	3 (1%)
Temporarily unemployed	11 (2%)
Homemaker	6 (1%)
Other	10 (2%)
Relationship status	505 (100%)
Married	262 (52%)
Single, never married	209 (41%)
Divorced or separated	33 (7%)
Widowed	1 (0%)

Table 2 (Continued)

Demographic Characteristics	n (%)
Children living in household	506 (100%)
None	343 (68%)
One	81 (16%)
Two	56 (11%)
Three	18 (3%)
Four or more	8 (1%)
Languages spoken in household	503 (100%)
English	485 (96%)
Spanish	5 (1%)
Other	12 (3%)

A respondent noted,

I love how well researched it seems to be. I am currently in social work school so being able to listen to this even before I went back to school and now keeps me current on topics that seem reputable.

Another said,

I like the way it allows me to stay updated and engaged in Social Work news and research and theories. I enjoy learning and growing and staying engaged, and since I am no longer in school, this podcast allows me to do that easily during my drive to work. The topics and people are interesting and easy to listen to.

Respondent preferences. Respondents noted that they appreciated transcripts; good audio quality; guests who presented up-to-date research and information; and being exposed to theories, practices, or ideas that they otherwise would not have known about.

Respondents also commented that the podcast was too long, most frequently citing the mismatch between their commute time and the length of the episode. An equal number of respondents said that the episodes were either too basic or too advanced. Several respondents wanted a more critical analysis of the profession and more critical thinking on the topics presented. As one respondent reported,

The topics seem very mainstream social work and isn't challenging us to think broader or more critically at ourselves as a profession or as professionals. For example, why isn't the social work profession a major thought leader in current times?

Four respondents disliked that the content was specific to the United States, 14 respondents stated that there needed to be more macro-focused content, and

Table 3
Respondent Behavior

Survey Question	n (%)
Do you subscribe to this podcast?	645 (100%)
Yes	400 (62%)
No	192 (30%)
I don't know	53 (8%)
How many episodes have you listened to?	673 (100%)
None (I just saw this link to the survey on the site)	18 (3%)
1	49 (7%)
2–3	113 (17%)
4–5	102 (15%)
6 or more	391 (58%)
How often do you listen to this podcast?	671 (100%)
Always	120 (18%)
Almost always	72 (11%)
Occasionally	420 (63%)
Rarely	59 (9%)
How much of the podcast do you listen to?	668 (100%)
I always listen to the entire episode.	396 (59%)
I turn it off when the end credits start.	132 (20%)
Usually at least 75%	113 (17%)
Usually about 50%	15 (2%)
Usually about 25%	4 (1%)
Usually just the first few minutes	8 (1%)
On average, how many times do you listen to each episode?	669 (100%)
One time	501 (74%)
Two times	142 (21%)
Three times	15 (2%)
More than three times	11 (2%)
When you listen to this podcast, is the device you use most often connected to the Internet?	648 (100%)
Connected	483 (75%)
Not connected	134 (21%)
Unsure	31 (5%)
How do you most often access this podcast?	640 (100%)
Apple Podcasts app	212 (33%)
The show's website	186 (29%)
iTunes	109 (17%)
Another Podcast app	53 (8%)
Other	37 (6%)
Stitcher	30 (5%)
The show's official app	13 (2%)

Table 3 (Continued)

Survey Question	n (%)
On which device do you most often listen to this podcast?	645 (100%)
iPhone	353 (55%)
Android phone	113 (18%)
Windows PC/laptop	102 (16%)
Apple Mac/laptop	34 (5%)
In-car entertainment system	14 (2%)
Tablet	11 (2%)
Other	11 (2%)
iPod	7 (1%)

9 respondents said there needed to be more clinical-focused content. Nine respondents said they wanted greater diversity of opinions as well as more content on culture, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This comment summarizes several criticisms of the podcast:

[This podcast] does not address practicable and applicable social work skills. -does not discuss systematic oppression, discrimination, or lack of resources for actual clients. -with the exception of the wonderful dr. wyatt (in 2013), all experts are white. -this podcast has no subjects on cultural competency, multiculturalism, racism, ableism, s.e.s., or social justice for vulnerable populations. -advocacy / community development only discussed in theoretical contexts.

Summary of Study Findings

There are several limitations to this study. Because data are aggregated, it is impossible to identify and match individual-level responses. In addition, the survey was not developed by social workers and thus did not include profession-specific information. Finally, the *Social Work Podcast* is broadcast only in English, but 4% of respondents reported speaking a language other than English in the home.

Despite these limitations, the study findings offer useful insights into podcasting as a form of social scholarship. Results from the quantitative survey data indicate that respondents subscribe and listen to an entire podcast episode multiple times, suggesting that consumers find the content valuable. It may also reinforce the use of podcasts to convey more sophisticated research and scholarly content (Gachago et al., 2016). The finding that the largest group of respondents are employed in health care or education settings suggests that episodes focusing on research related to these settings might be particularly relevant.

Findings from the qualitative data also provide insights into the ability of podcasts to impact scholarship. Twelve respondents noted the importance of research,

Table 4
Respondent Satisfaction

Subject	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap
Audio quality	8.77	9.24	-0.47
Overall quality	9.30	9.30	0.00
Content	9.65	9.19	+0.46
Host(s)	8.73	9.25	-0.52
Reliability (new episodes available when promised)	7.66	8.57	-0.91
Length of episodes	7.50	8.89	-1.39
Frequency of new episodes	7.53	7.59	-0.06
Placement of ads or sponsorships in podcast	6.13	8.40	-2.27
Website design	5.74	7.92	-2.18
Website content	6.53	8.22	-1.69
Overall	7.75	8.92	-1.17

Note. Scores for *importance* and *satisfaction* are average values across all survey respondents on a 1–10 scale. A low importance score means that the attribute was not very important to respondents, and a low satisfaction score means that respondents were not very satisfied with this aspect of the show. Conversely, a high importance score means that the attribute was very important to respondents, and a high satisfaction score means that respondents were very satisfied with this aspect of the show. The gap is the difference between the importance and the satisfaction. A large positive gap means there is a problem: The podcast has not met expectations. A large negative gap means that the podcast has exceeded expectations. Because raw survey data were not available, standard deviations have not been calculated.

suggesting that podcasts may be an effective tool for conveying information that aims to increase the public impact of scholarship. Qualitative findings also highlight areas that future podcasts should consider. For example, respondents noted that they are interested in content about the social work profession in addition to information that is more specific to policy and practice. Finally, an unexpected finding was that the *Social Work Podcast* series influenced people's decision to enter the social work profession. Although the podcast is produced for students and professionals, consumers who were not yet in the social work profession engaged with the podcast and made decisions about entering programs in part due to podcast content. Conceptualizing podcasts as a medium that can help people to learn about social work and influence their decision to enter the profession could address one of the biggest marketing challenges faced by social work today (Fong et al., 2018).

Discussion

Podcasts and Barriers to Social Work Research

The results of my survey of *Social Work Podcast* consumers suggest that podcasts are a promising approach to reducing the financial, conceptual, and attitudinal barriers

commonly associated with advancing the impact of social work research. In the following sections, I discuss the potential role that podcasts can play in removing these barriers.

Financial barriers. Podcasts are free, available at the consumer's convenience, and sometimes include written transcripts (Cartney, 2013). Social work journals—especially those behind a paywall—could provide an invaluable service to the profession by creating a free podcast series with students and practitioners as the target audience. Episodes could summarize an issues' articles, emphasizing implications for policy and practice. Authors could be invited to discuss their research question and any aspect of the study that students and practitioners might find interesting. Although journals have been producing podcasts for several years, their primary audience seems to be other researchers, rather than nonresearchers.

Conceptual barriers. Despite the perception that social work students and practitioners are not interested in social work research, respondents to my Podtrac survey said they appreciated learning about research via the podcast, and prior research has found that consumers are more likely to understand complex information when it is presented through a podcast (Gachago et al., 2016). Thus, podcasts hold potential to be a highly effective medium for disseminating research findings to practitioners and engaging social workers in critical thinking. When it comes to critical thinking, the absence of peer-review for podcasts could be one of the strengths of the medium: Perspectives traditionally excluded from academia (e.g., critiques of academia, social work organizations, or the profession's code of ethics) cannot be silenced by peer-review gatekeepers who have a vested interest in maintaining the institutional status quo.

Attitudinal barriers. Podcasts live in the space between entertainment and education (Fronek et al., 2016). Anecdotal and empirical research suggests that podcasts bring research findings to life in a way that peer-reviewed journal articles cannot. If done well, the journal podcast series proposed earlier would be engaging and informative—an exemplar of the scholarship of dissemination.

Recommendations for Podcasts and Social Scholarship

There is little scholarship on the role of podcasting in social work, and no scholarship about the use of podcasting in the context of social scholarship. Recent systematic reviews of the use of podcasting and digital technologies with social work students, medical students, and health professionals have reported high levels of satisfaction and comparable outcomes with traditional instructional methods but have not collected data on the impact of podcasts on client outcomes (Cho, Cosimini, & Espinoza, 2017; Curran et al., 2017; De Los Reyes et al., 2017; Wretman & Macy, 2016). Future social work research should evaluate the role of podcasts in client outcomes, as well as the efficacy of podcasts as a pedagogical method.

One way that social work scholars, educators, and practitioners could promote social work's social justice mission would be to partner with technologists to develop instant transcription software that could increase accessibility and usability of audio podcasts. By design, all podcasts are audio by default. Automated transcription is an emerging function of podcast apps, but it is not likely to be developed or made widely available because professional transcription is a big business, and accurate automated transcription is competition. Social workers could harness podcast technology for social good by developing a way to automate audio transcriptions and make the technology available to podcast apps and websites that host audio podcasts.

Social work scholars must also define and evaluate the place of social media in the context of academic promotion and tenure. If podcasts and the associated social media are to be considered social scholarship, then there must be standards for evaluating these works for tenure and promotion. If social workers developed a peer-review process for academic podcasts, faculty podcasters could have production guidelines, and faculty and student consumers could have a layer of academic integrity that comes with a peer-review process. Combining metrics from Twitter, podcast downloads, and Facebook impressions, for example, may provide a picture of the impact that was formerly impossible for all but a few academic superstars.

Finally, it is important to note that there are several limitations to podcasts as a form of social scholarship. Paterson, Thoma, Milne, Lin, and Chan (2015) argued that the basic lack of standards in podcasting is problematic for the listener and producer. Faculty and students have no objective way to evaluate the quality of a podcast, producers have no standards to guide their work, and universities have no standards by which to evaluate podcast content for tenure and promotion (Paterson et al., 2015). If podcasting is held up as a model of social scholarship, we need to make sure its popularity is not because it is a shiny new disruptive technology.

The social work profession has traditionally been slow to adopt new technologies. Far from mandating that social workers engage with technology, the leading social work organizations have cautioned social workers about the risks associated with participating in social media, rather than highlighting the benefits (National Association of Social Workers, 2017; Reamer et al., 2017). The Council on Social Work Education 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards mention that social work education programs may use technology in their explicit curriculum and in field education but stop short of providing guidance on how to teach social work with digital technology (Hitchcock, Sage, & Smyth, 2019). As a result, social workers enter the profession without a formal understanding of how to use technology (Mishna, Bogo, Root, Sawyer, & Khoury-Kassabri, 2012). A promising development in recent years, however, has been the selection of Harness Technology for Social Good as a Grand Challenge for Social Work that aims to increase the profession's understanding of and relationship to technology (Berzin & Coulton, 2018).

Conclusion

Since the first social work podcast was published in 2007, podcasting has been used to disseminate scholarship to social work students and professionals, as a medium for scholars to engage with new audiences, and to augment traditional approaches to teaching. Newer social work podcast series have focused on issues of race, equity, and critiques of the social work profession. Despite the popularity of podcasting, few of these advances have been empirically evaluated. If podcasting is to realize its potential as a tool for social scholarship, social work scholars need to understand how and why podcasting works—for whom and under what circumstances—and then create podcast episodes to disseminate those findings to students and practitioners.

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