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Book Review: A Review of the Collaborative and Sharing Aspects of Google Docs

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Research on Social Work Practice 2011 21: 489

DOI: 10.1177/1049731510391676

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book of value. *Evidence-based practice* is rarely mentioned in the text and does not warrant an entry in the index; accordingly, social work educators and students who are committed to an evidence-based practice process may give this book a less generous reception.

Despite the lack of emphasis on the evidence-based practice process, Furman has made a significant contribution to the social work profession by raising the issue of cultural competence in the delivery of direct practice services to male clients. Although current books have addressed social work with gay, bisexual, transgendered, and African American

men, this reviewer could find only one other book addressing social work with men in general that has been published in the last decade (*Men and Social Work: Theories and Practices* edited by Alistair Christie and Jo Campling; Palgrave MacMillan, 2001). Surely almost half the adult population is worthy of more formal consideration than is represented by two books. As Furman so compellingly explains, many men are at risk. Academics, practitioners, and students willing to respond to male needs in a culturally sensitive manner may find themselves grateful for having spent time understanding men as Furman does.

A Review of the Collaborative and Sharing Aspects of Google Docs

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Since writing for publication or preparing a presentation is a common group effort, it is helpful to have some type of mechanism in place to facilitate the collaboration. Almost every major software program allows files to be shared, but the actual process of sharing can be difficult. This is especially true when multiple versions of a single manuscript or presentation are created. Members of the collaborative group can easily lose track of who has the most current version and how to effectively merge changes. The problems are further exacerbated by the need to have shareable files (e.g., *.doc versus *.docx). These are just a few of the problems that interfere with the efficiency of any research process. However, innovations in web 2.0 technologies are successfully addressing such problems—with Google Docs being one of the most common solutions. This is a system that allows users to share, edit, and update manuscripts, presentations, data files, and drawings with relative ease. It shares the reputation of all Google's products for seamless integration, security, reliability, and low cost.

What is it?

Google Docs is an application on the Google server that allows you to easily create, share, and edit files. It allows users to create a variety of office-related documents, in addition to storing any other type of file (e.g., Portable Document Format). You can also view and edit files with any smart phone, and Google provides some basic editing features to PDF files that are usually unsearchable.

How Does it Work?

Users of Google docs need to obtain a free Google account to access Google Docs. The most common and easiest way is to

establish a Gmail account (www.gmail.com), which then automatically gives you access to Google Docs. Users can access the Google Docs at www.docs.google.com or through a link in the toolbar of the Gmail account. In the Google Docs screen, the user can select "Create new" to make a sharable document (i.e., manuscript, spreadsheet, presentation, or drawing) or press "Upload" to store a file that you may want to share with others. The user can select the "Share" button to share the files in a variety of different ways. All the files that are saved in Google Docs reside on Google's server, where they can be available for any team member, and they can have various privacy settings. The system provides basic editing tools for all documents that are created within the Google Docs system. Many existing documents, such as those created using Microsoft Office, can be uploaded, edited, and shared via Google Docs. All documents in this system can also be downloaded and saved in a variety of file formats.

Who is Using it?

This application is potentially useful to anyone who needs to share or collaborate with another writer, team member, teacher, or researcher. The user or blog editor can conveniently view and edit files at any time.

What Skills and Knowledge are Needed to Use This Technology?

Nothing beyond ordinary computer and Internet navigation skills is required, as the system was intentionally designed to let the greatest number of people share files as effortlessly as possible. The user interface is intuitive, and the new user can begin using it almost immediately. Technical support and forums are available to provide additional help.

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Why is it Significant?

Google Docs helps you move beyond the old paradigm where a single author creates a document and distributes it via e-mail. This new system facilitates collaboration—and hence, efficiency—by creating a mechanism for all team members of a single project to work within a single user space. Google Docs also automatically saves the entire revision history of documents. Thus, if a mistake were to be made, it is possible to easily revert to a previous version of the document, which is time and date stamped. Multiple users can easily work on a single document at the same time, as the system shows exactly where and what other users are typing. A chat box is also available on the document to provide additional ways to communicate and collaborate in real time. Since the document is kept in the *Google cloud*—that is, on the Google server—any number of collaborators can access a document. The contributions from different people appear in different colors (the legend of what color belongs to what contributor is automatically posted). This feature is also useful in disaster recovery, since the file is not actually kept on your computer.

What are the Downsides?

You have to have an Internet connection to share, edit, download, or upload documents with Google Docs. Thus, a user cannot effectively work *offline*. The editing tools of the documents are basic, which allows a lot of the work to be

completed within the system. However, the system does not yet have editing features such as the “track changes” feature that is part of Microsoft Office (although Google Docs does have a user-friendly commenting feature). Constructing tables and managing many necessary details is problematic in Google Docs. Google Docs does not integrate with bibliography management systems such as EndNote and Refworks. But many of these problems are easily overcome by doing the majority of the collaborative work online and then downloading the file and completing the work on a local computer.

What are the Implications for Social Work Research?

Like other web 2.0 technologies, Google Docs provides an environment for researchers, educators, and students to collaborate efficiently. This system is also a critical step in overcoming the ubiquitous problems of file sharing and revision control. While Microsoft Office has held a monopoly in the respective computing environment for many years, Google Docs has many sharing and collaborative features that are not yet available to it. Thus, it has significant potential to promote collaboration and efficiency.

Pricing Information

At the time of writing this review, Google Docs is free to all users and provides 1 GB of storage space, with additional space available at a charge (refer to www.docs.google.com) for most current pricing plans.