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## Editorial

### Is It Possible to Be a “Radical Clinician”?

James G. Daley

**S**ocial Work is a profession that dreams of radical change. A noble, targeted effort that creates housing, expands medical coverage, changes public opinion on an issue, reaches the forgotten, embraces the unacceptable, and perhaps even recognizes our profession as the stealth catalyst with a heart. The radical dreams call to us like sirens sitting on the rocks of reality. We are drawn by our need, hungering for the grand event.

There have been concerted efforts to make the dream come true. Some authors have advocated for a specialty called radical social work, most schools of Social Work have concentrations that offer a “macro practice” choice. Authors have reminded us that all of social work is “political.” Students face a fork in their educational path where they often decide between “clinical” and “macro.” Some students assert from the beginning the path they will choose. Courses often have content that remind students of their need to advocate for change, not to “settle” for clinical adaptation for issues that reflect social injustice. The radical or macro camp share stories of program development, political change, and wrongs exposed that excite students. These endless efforts reinforce the importance of radical change as a mandate of Social Work.

Social Work is also a profession heavily invested in the effective clinical interventions that directly help our clients with psychosocial problems. Legends of Social Work students and graduates strive to learn the trade and take great pride in offering ethical, evidence-based practice with clients who are in great pain and confusion. I was a clinician for 21 years and savor the memories of families who presented initially in pain, anger, and confusion but were transformed into a nurturing, empowering support system. I recall the entrenched client who finally committed to recovery. As a teacher, I share my experiences in class. Each case, successful or heart wrenching, is part of Social Work in action. Each story shared in class further ignites the passion in students to help. The clinical camp continually strives to build better, clearer, more precise methods for helping. I feel very comfortable as brethren of the camp.

Of course, there is no pure camp of either view. We must be both advocate and inter-vener. I have experienced this tug of war (clinical change and societal change) both as student and faculty member and heard endless faculty meetings strive to balance the two issues. I have seen some very creative faculty efforts to blend the issues. I believe that we recognize this dual role. I suspect that we discretely (or boisterously) slip into the camp that best feeds our passion. Students assert, “I just want to be a clinician,” or, “I could never work with clients.” They sift through the course offerings seeking the content that fuels that passion. Macro change overwhelms some, clinical encounters scare others. And, I think this self-selection is healthy. Neither choice is the exclusive path to a productive career. Neither choice is “better” or “worse.” Each choice is a best fit for the person.

So, what does this discussion have to do with the concept of a “radical clinician?” The two terms “radical” and “clinician,” when combined, seem weird. When you are a cli-



nician, you work in an agency defined by rules, reimbursement policies, and the social construction of a person in pain called a “client.” Payne (1997) eloquently describes the social construction of the client-social worker encounter. You are part of the “system,” whether acknowledged or not. Making a diagnosis (either DSM or alternative framework) commits the person/client to be part of a client-focused system. Supervision, agency mission, and funding options are all mechanisms that reinforce clienthood and a client-focused agenda. Social issues are distilled into intervention plans. Change efforts are focused on resolving those plans. In other words, the clinician has a subtle context to navigate in an effort to effectively help the client.

Can a clinician really be radical? Macro advocates firmly assert that the clinician is tainted, even invested in the structure within which client issues are presented. Radical change is best done by outsiders who can see the “real picture,” the whole context, and are not seduced by being part of the agency. Clinicians argue that they have power within the agency, can develop programs, or change policies. Clinicians can translate client need into agency-ese, so that new programs are more likely to occur. Outside agitators have less credibility than an established clinician. Macro advocates shout that agitation is needed and the agency should listen rather than wait for translation. And the argument goes on and on.

What would a radical clinician look like? I assert that the radical clinician would be highly versed in effective intervention choices and able to provide appropriate care that empowers and builds on the strengths of the client systems. The radical clinician must first be credible as a clinician to have power and influence within the agency. Clinical competence is a major currency in agency politics, though obviously not the only skill valued. The radical clinician must be an effective program developer. You have to have the ability to transform an idea or need into a viable program to know what to do with a radical need. Finally, a radical clinician is sensitized to social justice and connected to the macro advocates who can voice the unmet needs. Frankly, all of these skills are a basic component of an MSW program.

In summary, an ongoing debate rages about radical change agents versus clinically skilled interveners, which misses an important point. Each camp is a valuable place to learn the arena for which students have a passion to learn and implement. There is no “right” way to do Social Work and each camp can be a partner in a jointly productive endeavor. Radical clinicians are possible and can effectively challenge social injustice and produce new programs to meet client and societal need. We can all dream of that magnificent social change but radical clinicians may help navigate us past the rocks of reality into the safe bay of social justice.

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## A Portal for a School of Social Work: Going for the Edge

Robert Vernon  
Cynthia Schultz

**Abstract:** *This case study documents how one school of social work addressed the growing complexity of distributing information by developing a state of the art portal and website system to serve its many audiences and campuses. Preliminary findings are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Website, design, portal, social work*

Social work education websites often reveal design and functionality problems. Many are nothing more than electronic brochures with little information on programs, faculty lists, and perhaps a smattering of select details (Carlson, 2003). These websites are typically static with very few interactive elements, if any. Some are more dynamic and offer prospective students the ability to apply online or download program information. Many are "placeholders" crafted by non-social work staff who know very little about the profession or the curriculum. Very few are designed to meet the needs of the many different audiences who want information about the profession, the school, or its features (Curl, Bowers & Bowers, 2003; Vernon & Lynch, 2003). This case study is for colleagues who want to expand their school's website toward reaching wider audiences, supporting administrative routines, and enhancing the quality of teaching through building a more sophisticated web presence.

### PROBLEMS AND NEEDS

Our school hosted a first generation website since 1995 and experienced the typical problems and limitations that developed as information needs and consumer expectations grew:

- **Lack of consistency.** Visitors were more satisfied when a website had consistent navigation and an attractive overall appearance, yet, navigation and design inconsistencies had cropped up after several updates and revisions. What resulted was a main website that actually looked like several separate websites cobbled together. A visitor could easily think that they were at a different website altogether rather than being in another part of the same one.

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Indiana University School of Social Work.

- **Outdated content.** It had been easy to amass considerable information on the website. Once posted, though, a conference announcement or other time-sensitive item tended to become immortal, available long after the event had taken place or the deadline had passed.
- **Poor quality content.** No one regularly reviewed the website for currency and accuracy. Content sometimes had grammatical and spelling errors that conveyed a lack of scholarship and professionalism.
- **Linkrot.** Hypertext links that lead nowhere are a common problem with websites. We certainly had our share.
- **Overburdened resources.** Responsibility for development and maintenance fell on administrative support personnel. Our one in-house technician was already working at capacity. In addition, most administrative support personnel lacked the advanced skills needed to develop and maintain online content.<sup>1</sup> The process of transferring information was laborious. Text content had to be changed to HTML, introducing errors, and frustrating staff. Long delays became commonplace.
- **No uniformity between websites.** The Indiana University School of Social Work is completely centralized: We offer four different degrees on five different campuses throughout the state. The Indianapolis campus is the flagship and all policies and programs are centrally managed from this campus. Yet, we had five different websites in place and none of them were similar in any respect. All had independently evolved and there had been no attempt to develop any content or design uniformity.

More subtle problems were emerging, too. As the web was maturing, the user's expectations were maturing as well (Powell & Gill, 2003). Users expected to find information on the school's website, and they assumed they would get an immediate response—24 hours a day, seven days per week (Spool, 2001). Our static website with its "one style fits all" design was failing to meet visitors' needs as reflected in numerous informal comments and e-mails. There was a general consensus that the school was rapidly outgrowing its static website and that we also needed to have a system that knit all five campuses together. This problem was taken up by the school's Technology Committee, a faculty, student, and administrative group charged with overseeing technology needs.

The Technology Committee conducted several hearings and interviews with key constituencies and determined the following: All of our university's doctoral applicants had recently been required to submit their applications online, yet, our website could not support this. Prospective BSW and MSW students wanted detailed information and the ability to apply online, as well. Alumni wanted to keep track of each other and know about upcoming events. Faculty wanted enrollment lists and access to student information. Researchers wanted to work collaboratively and share information. Staff wanted access to official calendars and detailed program information. Enrolled students wanted class schedules, syllabi, and graduation requirements. Administrators needed secure access to the financial management systems and budget information. Everyone wanted a new, more interactive, and robust web environment that would support these needs.

Disability access was paramount. The Technology Committee worried that a cutting-edge solution would limit access to users with special needs. We needed a solution that would seamlessly deliver content to all users no matter what type of computing device they used to access the website. Different connection speeds, browsers, and other universal design requirements would have to be taken into consideration as well.

Finally, we were aware that the university's many different computing networks were changing, too, and that any solution we created would have to adjust to them. The Student Information Transaction Environment or "Site"—already quite sophisticated—was being replaced by a new system that promised to integrate everything from enrollments and course scheduling to tuition and parking tickets. "Oncourse," Indiana University's course management program that is similar to Web CT and BlackBoard, was becoming universally available and students were starting to demand it. Any solution we selected would need to be compatible with these other initiatives.

### **GEARING UP**

The chair of the Technology Committee convened a project task force to inventory needs and recommend a solution. The task force consisted of representatives from major constituencies: faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community leaders. This group began to investigate how to transform our static website into a far more adaptable one that would meet current needs and likely adjust to new demands from the university. We decided we needed a central repository for all of the common documents shared by all of the programs on the five campuses within our system. For example, we needed a way to have the identical MSW Student Manual universally accessible. We wanted a way to distribute centrally managed syllabi.

We envisioned a portal—a large, integrated system with a main website for the school and satellite websites for each of the five campuses<sup>2</sup>. Each satellite would be stylistically similar yet recognizably distinct so that visitors would visually know that they were still within the same school but on a different campus. An underlying portal structure would provide this visual continuity, assure uniformity when needed, and support the individual needs and characteristics of the different campuses and their programs while making management of the entire school's system far easier. We also envisioned a "distributed system" where authorized staff could immediately post or update information without the bottleneck of converting documents to HTML and waiting for technical support to get them on the server<sup>3</sup>.

One of the first jobs the task force accomplished was to identify and specifically describe the audiences we needed to include. Unlike the current "one size fits all" version, we wanted the new portal to accommodate as many different audiences as possible (Nielsen, 1999; Vernon & Lynch, 2000). The task force identified six distinct audiences: potential students, current students, alumni, faculty and researchers, administrative and support staff, and external constituencies such as practitioners, agencies, and social service organizations. Each audience had different information needs.



We then isolated 45 discrete sub-categories within the original six target audiences. The faculty audience, for example, was divided into junior/non-tenured faculty, senior/tenured faculty, visiting faculty, adjunct faculty, teaching practitioners, associate faculty, field instructors, and potential faculty. We used this fine-grained listing based on the assumption that different groups within each target audience would have different information needs. Seasoned and tenured faculty, for example, need access to advanced course resources, while associate or adjunct faculty require far more basic help. A potential student looking for a Ph.D. program would not be interested in BSW offerings.

The task force then crafted a mission statement along with specific goals and objectives to guide us, based on this initial audience and needs inventory.

"The mission of the Indiana University School of Social Work Web task force is to create an electronic, web based support system that promotes the school in the preparation of knowledgeable professional social workers, through teaching, scholarship, and service, and to support the pursuit of social, political, and economic justice by IUSSW web community members. Through the development of a user friendly, dynamic, and ever-changing school web site, the task force seeks to streamline internal day-to-day school operations, and to build bridges among faculty, staff, students, and the broader practice community in Indiana. Such connections are also intended to support the involvement of IUSSW alumni in continuing social work education and the development of best practices. The IUSSW web site design creates a portal for continued engagement with the broader community, and a gateway into the IUSSW community. In building a web community, the task force seeks to generate electronic resources for users that support the integration of technology into teaching, scholarship, and service. To these ends, the IUSSW web task force seeks to create a web based system that is responsive to the needs of the IUSSW web community."

IUSSW Website Mission Statement

Available at: <http://socialwork.iu.edu/site/indexer/121/content.htm>

Next, the task force chair made a prototype HTML webpage and shared it and the mission statement with people from the six different audiences. Revisions were made from the resulting feedback, and the task force introduced the refined mission statement and prototype at a full faculty meeting in the spring of 2001. The faculty were thoroughly dissatisfied with the current website and clearly understood the benefits of this new approach. The faculty unanimously endorsed the portal project and this proved invaluable. It validated the recommendations of the task force and garnered broad-based support. Everyone was coming "on board." We also began to realize that a static website, perhaps a little more complex than our current one, would never support our evolving needs. It was becoming clear that we might be overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of this project. We realized that we lacked the professional expertise and resources to advance the project successfully.

Fortunately, our dean had a progressive vision for the school that embraced technology. He was very aware of what a good web presence could accomplish and how

it could advance our many activities. This, combined with complete support from the faculty and staff, set the stage for seeking out the resources we needed.

We needed to expand internal capabilities. We sought out professionals experienced in large-scale web projects. The university had a web services unit in the Office of Communication and Marketing. We scheduled a meeting with their Web Development Services (WDS) consultants and took hard copies of the prototype, our mission statement, and our list of target audiences with us.

The meeting with WDS was both productive and frustrating. Their primary work was with high-level strategic initiatives for the entire university system. They could provide basic consultative services to schools, but this was not their principle function. It became apparent that engaging them to help develop our portal would result in significant delays. We mulled over the idea of cobbling together various parts of the portal from several other university sources. This, too, seemed equally fraught with problems and potential delays. That left us with the all too common dilemma—build or buy? We needed to decide whether we would design and build the portal ourselves or seek an external partner to complete the project. We asked the WDS staff to help craft a concise Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that would focus our choices<sup>4</sup>. This became the key working document. The MOU included a vision statement, ranked target audiences, recommended solutions, identified quantitative and qualitative metrics, and provided an estimated timetable and costs.

The MOU outlined four possible solutions in increasing order of complexity and cost. We could:

1. Redesign the current static HTML site with similar functional limitations to the ones we had.
2. Build a website with some dynamic sections (news, calendar, etc.) and include databases and several administrative tool features.
3. Undertake a completely dynamic website using templates and a database repository. Robust administrative tools for content management of documents, images, audio, and video files with distributed publishing and workflow management capabilities could also be included. This would make it possible to have many different people working on the website continuously without bottlenecks and yet have the ability to oversee and control what was being posted.
4. Choose a robust solution with additional e-commerce, e-learning, and “push and pull” features. In this context, push and pull referred to complete integration with the Oncourse course management system and other information systems planned by the University.

Given the available resources and personnel capabilities, the first two solutions could have been built in-house. The third and fourth would require external help. The fourth solution was the most complex and would involve coordination with major university-wide initiatives. We elected to pursue the third option and retain a consultant.

WPD recommended three firms that they had worked with in the past. We started by reviewing the firms' websites and tested them for disability access with the "Bobby" program (Watchfire, no date). "Bobby" allows you to analyze how well a website conforms to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, 2002) standards for disability access and the Federal Section 508 requirements. These are industry standards for website disability access (Wright, 2002). Only one of the three firms, Excel Communications, Inc., passed these crucial tests. Next, we asked for references from Excel's customers and followed up on them. The recommendations were positive: Excel Communications had successful experience working with higher education institutions and was quickly responsive to their customers. They understood some of our more Byzantine organizational characteristics. In addition, they had experience with portals and content management systems (CMS). Their past projects involved design, development, and implementation of "off the shelf" CMS products. Most importantly, they had developed their own CMS solution in response to client needs. The product was called *Plexcor* and was built using open source Microsoft protocols—a common industry standard—that we felt would have staying power. We began a relationship with Excel Communications. This produced a contractual agreement including planning and consulting services, creative services (design, development, and implementation), and the Plexcor application. This was the most critical juncture—we had made a formal commitment to the portal project and found the help we needed to pursue it.

### PLANNING PHASE

We began the session by brainstorming with the Excel team to develop a common vision of what success would look like if we looked back five years from now. We used our mission statement as the basis for this discussion. Next, we went back over the list of target audiences and reviewed the groupings. The Excel team encouraged us to rank the audiences in order of importance. We then listed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and possible threats that could result from the new web presence. Once everyone was on the same page, we developed strategies that would support our vision. We remained mindful that a portal was a means to communicate and not a strategy in and of itself. During the discussion we considered a broad range of topics. Not surprisingly, one of our main strategies involved developing our portal as our primary communications, marketing, and development tool.

At the same time, we compiled a list of possible sub-strategies and activities that we could initiate: We wanted to showcase research activities, develop collaborative teaching resources, convey what you can do with a social work degree, promote prospective students, cultivate alumni, nurture current students, and develop new relationships with organizations through hosting services.

We discussed the features and functions we wanted included in the portal from the outset. It was time to take this knowledge and make it explicit. In collaboration with the Excel consultants, we came up with the following features and functions:

- The people who would maintain the portal and websites would not need technical skills such as writing, converting files to HTML, or placing them on the server.

- Distributed publication would happen by as many people as needed rather than merely relying on one person or office.
- A workflow management process would be in place to control content by having a review—approval feature—so that problematic files could be re-edited before being made publicly available.
- Security, including the ability to control different degrees of access to editing and the uploading of documents and the ability to archive files and web pages taken out of circulation.
- Disability access at minimum compliance with W3C and Section 508 standards.
- The hosting of collateral organizations such as social work practice associations that need a web presence.
- The ability to add e-learning, especially for continuing and distance education, and e-commerce features if the school decided to pursue these in the future.

The final task of the planning phase involved the consultants developing a project review website. This website became our central hub as the project evolved. It was a convenient mechanism for storing documents, reviewing proposed designs, and archiving project information.

### **DESIGN PHASE**

Once this job was done, we disbanded the task force and moved oversight of the project to the school's standing Technology Committee. The committee's first order of business was to agree on the methodology for moving the project forward with the Excel consultants. The User Centered Design approach (Norman & Drapers, 1986), a dialog process for developing successful interaction between people and computers, was in widespread use at our university. Excel was experienced with this methodology, and the consultants had developed a project management matrix that could easily manage the project as it progressed from design to construction.

Our consultants recommended an "Integrated Marketing Communication" (IMC) approach (Schultz, Stanley, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1993) noting that the university's marketing group had been employing it with success for several years. IMC results in a seamless uniformity between media: websites echo printed materials, televised messages, and all other media used for public communication. Taking this approach required us to consider development of the overall creative concept for the portal—the "look and feel" and primary messages—as a cohesive whole (Percy, 1997). This would result in consistent designs and messages in all of the school's media including website, brochures and other promotional and scholarly materials. The concept would begin with our portal.

To develop our key message, we listed the school's attributes, which were unique and of value. In marketing terms, this is referred to as the "unique value proposition." We had strong brand recognition and an excellent reputation. As a result, we developed this key message:

*Indiana University School of Social Work...Shaping Leaders Since 1911*

### Visual Design

We initially began working with the consultants to develop the visual look for the website. This caused a fundamental change in our public relations documents. Many of the school's brochures for various programs, reports, and other public documents had evolved at different times over the years. This resulted in a confusing patchwork of many styles, colors, and layouts. The need for a uniform coherence was obvious. We needed to embrace the integrated marketing approach. As a result, apart from website development, Excel and the school developed creative concepts that included a common color palette that would be used both on the website and in paper publications. This crystallized the "look" for the portal and satellites.

The portal now had a uniform design that would be mimicked by all five campus programs. The colors would be unique for each campus but would still be from the same palette. Visitors would know that they were still within the school but on different campuses. With a little practice, a regular visitor such as a student would be able to immediately recognize where he or she was in the portal.

In the same manner, close attention was given to having some consistency with our host university's website through the use of visual cues. We portrayed the relationship subtly by re-using the same message, font, stylistic treatments, and logo as our university does in its key marketing strategy.

Excel then provided us with three different creative treatments. We tested how well the concepts resonated with users in all six target audiences during the prototype testing that took place when the information design was complete.

### **Information Design**

With the initial planning and most of the design phase now complete, we were ready to begin designing the information architecture and navigational structure details for the portal and one of the campus websites. We elected to tackle the design and implementation of the portal, now called Indiana University School of Social Work and would develop the main campus website first. Subsequent development would follow for the other four campus sites. We deliberately decided on this approach because we felt that changing the entire five-campus system all at once would overwhelm us.

The first task was to design how the specified contents for the various audiences, programs, and campuses could fit together into a reasonably navigable whole. This proved to be daunting given the number of audiences and varied content specifications. The process evolved into a dialog: our consultants would give us a version of a sitemap. We would review it, give them feedback, and ask for an updated version that reflected our changes. When we got to the fifth version, we were ready for user testing. We needed feedback from users in all six target audiences before proceeding further.

### **Prototype Usability Testing**

Usability is defined by The International Standards Organization (ISO) as the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to effectively achieve specific goals efficiently in a specified context of use (ISO, 1998). We started to gener-



ate authentic tasks using the frequently asked questions collected during the planning phase. For example, the directors from the Ph.D., MSW, and BSW programs reviewed the questions and proposed tasks for their program area.

A paper mock-up was developed from text documents that represented potential web pages (Snyder, 2001). The pages were assembled into a loose-leaf binder. Each page had a numbered tab and the numbers represented links to other pages. This made it possible to simulate movement from one page to the next without actually developing the website.

We selected 10 representative users from the six target audiences. We wanted typical users, not people who were extremely enthusiastic, knowledgeable, or hostile to using technology, and so they were screened for a moderate level of computer experience and familiarity with the School of Social Work. The test sample was weighted toward females, which represents the school's population. Testing was conducted at the school, one test subject at a time. One of us would read an introductory script, then the test subject would try to accomplish 22 tasks and was asked questions pertaining to the design. The tasks simulated actual activities such as finding specific information about fieldwork in the BSW program. In accordance with UCD methods, iterative changes in the pages were made as testing progressed.

### **Findings**

Observations and data from the paper tests were consolidated into a report. The findings and recommendations were grouped according to template styles (portal, campuses, and programs). The report listed 21 "Findings" and suggested 13 "Recommendations" for consideration. This produced a final sitemap when the recommendations from the usability testing were resolved and adopted.

Taken together, the sitemap planning process and usability testing produced a workable plan. The Excel technical staff developed an electronic prototype within three weeks. The Technology Committee reviewed it and additional modifications were made based on minor stylistic and content changes. We now had a clear plan for constructing the portal and its satellites.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION PHASES**

### **Hosting and Security**

We had to decide whether to host the portal on our own server or enter into a fee-for-service agreement with an internal university service. The school had its own server at that time, but we had encountered security problems with it and maintaining a vigilant presence was getting to be a drain on our school's one technical support person. While no system is completely immune from attacks such as people attempting to store movie files, alter files as pranks, or worse, our university could provide a far more robust environment. As a result, we decided to go with the university's hosting services. This decision gave us the advantage of not having to worry about security and also provided the opportunity to host a test-bed website for the prototype. We could populate the new portal and its associated websites while keeping the old website in service. This would allow us to fine tune navigation and content before rolling out the new portal and help with training.

## **Role Assignments**

Our consultants installed the prototype and we created a preliminary list of content managers, the people who would have responsibility for specific content areas within the portal. For example, someone from the MSW field office would need to develop and maintain content regarding practicum activities. "User groups" could be created with different levels of access to the portal and the IUPUI campus website. We initially created four groups, which included "owners," the people with complete access and decision control over all aspects of the website. A "security" group consisting of the owners and our technical support person was added to regulate access. A "managers" group was created for people with administrative responsibilities. Finally, an "editors" group was created. These would be the people who would actually enter web content and the managers would be able to approve that content. Assignments to specific groups were made by the school's "Administrative Team," the group charged with oversight of all of the school's production routines. Group assignment was based on the staff person's role and responsibilities. Pass-worded access was given to each individual depending on their assigned group.

## **Training**

Our consultants then held two field-training sessions. The preliminary documentation for managing the website was not adequate from a "read it-do it" viewpoint. This was largely due to the fact that the Plexcor program is menu based, not graphics based, making it sometimes difficult to understand where you are in the program. This made it important to have hands-on training and experience in addition to the documentation. These sessions focused on the direct skills needed to gain access to the system, how to upload different types of files, set navigation, and edit web page content. In addition, Excel provided a lengthy technical instruction session with one of us, who, as a site owner, would also have occasional instructional responsibilities.

## **Workflow**

The initial workflow procedures, such as assigning who was responsible for providing and editing content, began to evolve as more people contributed to the portal's database. We discovered that overall management and navigation decisions needed to be made by the site owners because of features in the Plexcor system. The navigation features were too challenging for some staff. This resulted in a prototype website that was both centrally managed and yet access-distributed on a controlled basis: exactly what we wanted!

## **Launch**

At this point we had to decide when to take the portal out of the test-bed and present the websites to the public. We still had incomplete data files and occasional gaps where content should have been available but was not. Yet, to delay longer would simply continue dependence on our older, inadequate website. Expectations had been raised and we needed to deliver on them, even if the product was incomplete. We decided to roll out the portal and the IUPUI website at the beginning of October, 2002, with the expectation that enough of the database

would be complete by the end of the semester that people would start becoming dependent on it for routine information.

## **EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT**

What worked and what did not? While a summative evaluation of the portal's effectiveness is premature, several issues concerning how well it has worked and nuances around the development process merit discussion. These are based on observation, experience, and discussion. One key issue is monitoring organizational change and management issues.

### **Change Management**

Innovation often takes place outside of the organization's official hierarchy. This project was no exception. Many people with varying statuses had participated throughout the formative stages of the project. This resulted in a wide degree of buy-in and certainly fostered designs that addressed many needs. Yet, once up and running, some administrative control over content became necessary. As a result, oversight and policy finality was transferred from the school's Technology Committee to the school's Administrative Team. This group consists of our dean, the three directors for the different degree programs, the director of research, and the director of development. With this policy established, the evolution of routines and who would be responsible for them began to evolve. Since "no single quality of management practice is more highly correlated with success than [participation]" (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson, 2000), it was fortunate that these individuals had been keenly involved in the portal development and were very supportive of it from the start.

### **Marketing and Promotion**

Little energy was devoted to advertising and promotional planning for the portal at rollout because the databases were incomplete. What would be accomplished by attracting visitors to an incomplete website? We began to turn our attention to promoting the portal and its content once people started to add content. While the portal project began independently, the collateral efforts to create a uniform or "branded" look and feel for all external communications collateral for the school were in development as well. As a result, we missed an initial opportunity to cross-promote between the various marketing and communication channels.

### **Assessment Metrics**

Assessment metrics are included in the Plexcor module to help determine frequencies and patterns of use. Unlike the rather useless logfiles from the older website, this feature provides quantitative measures such as the number of hits per web page per unit of time, page hit frequencies, and hierarchic relationships between web pages. The measures show more visitors are regularly hitting the IUPUI website than the portal page. This suggests that visitors look for campus-specific information more than general information about the school. The visitation patterns suggest targeted search. For example, information-laden web pages about the MSW program have a high visit frequency followed by web pages with more specific information, then by web pages on application information. This suggests a pattern of inquiry, exploration, and commitment on the part of poten-

tial students. The research section of the website enjoys high use as well. These aggregate measures have been gratifying because they indicate that, at least for the prospective student and research audiences, the portal is beginning to support them.

### **Lessons Learned**

The process we followed—initially envisioning what we needed, then consolidating it into a mission statement that was endorsed by the faculty—was probably the most critical part of the planning process. The vision whetted appetites for what could be. The mission was the foundation for our goals.

The initial efforts at defining the portal's audiences, then conducting usability testing, were most worthwhile. These efforts helped transition the mission statement from general intentions to specific and concrete operational objectives. They also clearly informed everyone about just how complex and how long the endeavor would take. This led to reasonable expectations. The fact that we put a great deal of energy and effort into this—prior to writing a single line of code—clearly paid off as very few user complaints were voiced after rollout.

Earlier attention to administrative structures and policies for the website would have been helpful. We had occasional conflicts over just what content needed to be placed within the portal and where it should be located. These conflicts tended to be mechanical rather than philosophical, though, and did not impede progress. Additional issues such as who would be responsible for them while initially mapped out evolved into different personnel needs and patterns. In a sense, the loose coupling of various constituencies during the design and implementation process may have been helpful, but rationalizing the results earlier in the process might have resulted in a more complete product at rollout.

Our decision to use professional designers and developers was invaluable. The efficiencies gained were worth the investment. Had the school tried to develop the portal with internal and intramural resources, the results would certainly have been an inadequate portal way past deadline. The visual consistency among campuses might not have emerged. The system for managing information on the website would have been far more arcane.

Adequate financing was also very pivotal in our success. Our dean was extremely supportive. Having a competitively bid price for the entire system rather than contracting with technical personnel on an hourly basis was efficient and resulted in more collaborative involvement with the consulting firm. Contracting with numerous independent consultants instead for bits and pieces of the system would have courted disaster. Coordination and compatibility would probably have been a major problem had we chosen this alternative, plus the time drain on staff would have been prohibitive. The planning of revenue streams to eventually amortize investment costs and sustain the system in the future, discussed from the outset but still on our horizon, was very helpful in generating support from key administrative personnel.

Our security and currency concerns have been marginal. While we initially set up a hierarchy where editors' work would be reviewed and approved by the manager's

group, this was not necessary. The portal system fosters mutual oversight among contributors. This has resulted in quick error correction and the elimination of obsolete information.

Finally, the relationship between our vendor, Excel, and the school was instrumental in the portal's current and growing success. Selecting a firm that could guide development and extend support beyond rollout through maintenance agreements was crucial. The spin-offs, such as gaining a uniform marketing strategy and "look" where previously there had been far too much variation, were invaluable.

### **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

Why go to the trouble of developing a complete portal system when individual static websites have worked in the past? Why create an initiative when university personnel are often willing to build "brochure" websites for programs? The portal approach holds several distinct advantages.

First, people are gravitating toward the web as their first source for information. This means that a recruitment-directed website will not serve other audiences such as research colleagues, alumni, or current students very well. A more complex environment, built from the ground up to meet the needs of multiple audiences, is far more engaging. This advances the school's mission. In addition, a dynamic portal system can be adapted to computer applications that evolve within the university. New campus-wide innovations such as additional online services and information resources can be easily incorporated into the portal. This allows the school to seamlessly integrate itself into the university's computing environment rather than just being an isolated source for information. The school, in return, is perceived as a player instead of just an observer.

Next, a distributed system encourages "buy in" because many people are participating in its ongoing maintenance and growth. A sense of collective ownership generates enthusiasm. New ideas can be quickly implemented. A static website maintained by one or two individuals cannot do this. This encourages growth and innovation for the entire school. For example, rural social workers often have problems finding supervision for licensure. We are considering a web-based service that can mediate supervision online. A static website cannot do this. Online training for licensure continuance or other continuing education activities can also be supported by a dynamic system. A static website cannot do this. Our portal's ability to develop online surveys for research or marketing opens new horizons for interacting with many audiences as well. Data solicitation and collection is easy in a dynamic system. A static website cannot do this.

Schools also have the obligation to help support the practice community. Specialized groups of practitioners often want websites. Some organizations have volunteer-maintained websites but many of these are not well designed or maintained. Other organizations simply do not have the means to sustain a website on their own. The portal approach offers the ability to create a sophisticated web presence for these organizations. For example, we now host the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Directors (BPD) web site: <http://bpdonline.org>. Select



members from BPD have password access to this website and the only skill needed is to be able to upload text files. Behind the scenes, the template and management shell for the BPD website is simply another extension of our school's portal. Support initiatives for affiliated organizations thus become possible, furthering the mission of the profession. This type of hosting service works well without draining the school's resources.

Finally, the portal system fosters quality teaching. The classic problem of quickly orienting new faculty or supporting adjunct colleagues can be eased through making teaching resources readily available in secure parts of the portal. We are currently developing password accessible resources for faculty through our "Indiana University Resource Online Collection" (IUROC) initiative. The website will contain syllabi, lists of media used in each class, testbanks, and voluntarily provided teaching materials such as PowerPoint files and lecture outlines. This will help new instructors, plus it has the added benefit of showing faculty what teaching materials other colleagues are using. This should eliminate the problem of students rolling their eyes in class because they have "seen this movie before." In terms of the Council on Social Work Education's Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), the initiative will directly support non-repetitive learning plus horizontal and vertical integration (Council on Social Work Education, 2003). Classroom management programs cannot do this well.

All of these benefits provide the flexibility to adapt to an ever-changing and growing electronic world. Through creating portals, we can define and expand our roles ourselves rather than being guided by others who understand little of the social work education mission.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>While generating a basic HTML page is relatively easy—most word processing programs can save a text document for Web display—generating one that can be accurately rendered by many different browsers that are running on many different platforms is considered more difficult. A good metaphor is photography: Anyone can take a snapshot, but crafting a professional photograph takes far more considerable skill.

<sup>2</sup>The term "Portal" is not well defined. A "shopping mall" metaphor is often invoked. Common definitions include one-point entry via a main homepage and easy use through extensive navigation aids including sophisticated search engines, "breadcrumbs" that tell the user where they are in the website and how they got there, and other features that facilitate easy access to vast amounts of information. Additional features may include chat abilities, newsletters, online shopping, and many other services. A good overview is available at About.com: <http://compnetworking.about.com/library/weekly/aa011900a.htm>.

<sup>3</sup>At present, the main portal: <http://socialwork.iu.edu> has been developed along with one campus, <http://socialwork.iupui.edu>. Two other campuses are under construction and the remaining two are scheduled for development in 2004-2005.

<sup>4</sup>The complete Memorandum of Understanding is available at: <http://socialwork.iu.edu/site/indexer/121/content.htm>

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## An Outcome Evaluation of Competency Based Training for Child Welfare

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**Abstract:** *In response to the continuing need for competent child welfare professionals, a large mid-western university's College of Social Work collaborated with a public child welfare agency to design and implement a one year, Title IV-E-funded training opportunity for second-year MSW students. Student outcomes, including knowledge acquisition, attitudes about child welfare, and field of post-graduation employment, were evaluated using a quasi-experimental pre-post comparison group design (n=28). Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the two groups concerning attitudes about child welfare practice. However, although trainees' level of child welfare knowledge increased more than that of the comparison group, the difference did not reach statistical significance. Implications for practice and social work education are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Child welfare, knowledge acquisition, evaluation, outcomes*

Recruiting and retaining social workers for child welfare careers has been a topic of significant concern both for schools of social work and child welfare institutions (Gleeson, Smith & Dubois, 1993; Hopkins, Mudrick & Rudolph, 1999; Jones, 2002; Lerner, Stevenson & Behrman, 1998; Lieberman, Hornby & Russell, 1988). Social work students are often reluctant to enter public child welfare due to concerns about job stress, negative public perceptions, and working conditions. Retaining those who do enter the field has also been an issue. Retention rates in many child welfare agencies have been abysmal, resulting in a workforce comprised mostly of young, inexperienced caseworkers handling some of the most challenging and difficult cases. In addition, the cost of replacing workers is enormous, especially in terms of orientation and training (Daly, Dudley, Finnegan & Christiansen, 2000). Nonetheless, extensive training is crucial given the increasing complexity of child welfare work (Gleeson, et al., 1993).

Attracting and retaining a cadre of professionally trained child welfare workers is complicated by a number of factors both within schools of social work and the

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child welfare work environment. Many social work students are reluctant to enter public child welfare, even if they have a strong interest in serving children and families. Public child welfare is often viewed as stressful, low status, and low paying (Jones, 2002; Pecora, Briar & Zlotnik, 1989). According to numerous sources, these perceptions are not necessarily false (Curtis & Boyd, 1996; Larner, et al., 1998; Lieberman, et al., 1988. Public scrutiny of the child welfare system by the media and the recent death of a child welfare worker during a home visit in Ohio have further contributed to social work students avoiding public child welfare service.

Criticisms of social work education as it relates to the field of child welfare have also been voiced (Gleeson, et al., 1993; Lieberman, et al., 1988; Hopkins, et al., 1999). Social work education has been criticized for its lack of relevance to the actual skills and knowledge required for work within an agency. Another criticism is that social work schools have shown a lack of commitment to recruiting and educating social workers interested in working within the public sector. Suggestions for competency-based education and greater collaboration between educators and public agencies have been made in response to these criticisms (Rycus & Hughes, 1998).

Problems within child welfare agencies also contribute to difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers. Caseloads are typically high, supervision is often weak, opportunities for promotion are limited, and policies are often changing and unclear (Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994; Harrison, 1995; Pecora, et al., 1989; Rycraft, 1994; Vinokur-Kaplan & Hartman, 1986). As a result, worker burnout is not uncommon and supervisors often recognize the problem too late to intervene (Anderson, 1994; Cicero-Reese & Black, 1998; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994). The result is that most child welfare workers do not have social work degrees and, in some states, no pre-service training is provided (Larner, et al., 1998).

Despite the obvious difficulties in attracting social workers to child welfare, the evidence is clear that those with social work degrees are better prepared to serve families and children in the child welfare system. Several benefits of social work education for child welfare workers have been reported in the literature (Lieberman, et al., 1988; Hopkins, et al., 1999; Olsen & Holmes, 1982). Those child welfare workers with formal social work training report feeling better prepared and more competent in the performance of their jobs than do non-professionally educated workers. Social work educated workers also have been reported to provide higher quality services in child welfare. In addition, the social workers report greater job satisfaction. Finally, social work education seems to increase retention of child welfare workers.

Many schools of social work, in response to the issues described above, have utilized Title IV-E money to support the training of social workers for work in child welfare (Rose, 1999). In fact, at least 24% of respondents from a recent survey of CSWE-approved (or in candidacy) social work programs indicated the use of Title IV-E money for degree-related education (Zlotnik & Cornelius, 2000). Title IV-E training money, made available through the Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) is intended to provide education at the undergraduate and/or graduate levels for students who plan to work in public child wel-

fare agencies. Universities that utilize this money are expected to collaborate closely with public child welfare agencies; and students who receive funded education are expected to work in child welfare for one year upon graduation.

At least four reports have recently addressed the use of Title-IV-E monies by schools of social work. Jones (2002) presented the results of a Title IV-E program developed by the California Social Work Education Committee. She found that those with social work training had longer periods of employment in child welfare. Zlotnik and Cornelius (2000) have described the use of IV-E funding by schools of social work utilizing survey methodology. Rose (1999) described the Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in relationship to adult-learning issues. In addition, they included qualitative data related to the students' evaluation of the program. Finally, Robin and Hollister (2001) examined and reported on the career development in, and contributions to, child welfare practice among 73 graduates of the University of Minnesota's Child Welfare Scholars Program. They concluded that Title IV-E monies were well spent, resulting in committed, social work trained child welfare professionals who were making many positive contributions to the field.

This paper briefly describes a Title-IV-E funded, MSW-level child welfare training program and reports on student outcomes related to knowledge acquisition, attitudes toward child welfare clients and practice, and satisfaction with the training program. After a description of the program, the outcome evaluation method and results are presented. Finally, implications for practice and social work education are discussed.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The goal of the child welfare training program was to prepare a group of 14 masters-level social work students for postgraduate careers in child welfare through a collaborative effort between The Ohio State University College of Social Work (CSW) and a large, public county children's services agency (CCS). Students entering the second year of the MSW program at The Ohio State University were eligible to apply for the program. Acceptance into the traineeship required that students express a desire to work in child welfare after graduation, have an acceptable grade point average, and possess a willingness to accept a field practicum at CCS.

The organizing framework and foundation knowledge for this project came from the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (1998) developed by Judy Rycus and Ron Hughes from the Institute for Human Services (IHS) in Columbus, Ohio. This is a four volume set of materials that identifies and teaches the core competencies for child welfare workers. These materials are distributed by the CWLA and are currently used as part of the Comprehensive Competency-based In-service Training (CCBIT) system that has been adopted to train all child welfare employees in 24 states and six Canadian provinces. Typically, new workers are required to complete courses on the core competencies during their first year of employment. The CCBIT system focuses on 52 competencies in four areas that are deemed crucial to current child welfare practice. For example, the core curriculum covers competencies on (1) the legal aspects of child protection, (2) family-centered



child protective services, (3) case planning/casework, and (4) the effects of abuse and neglect on child development. Specialized competencies have also been developed on several topics such as adoption/foster care, working with adolescents, sexual abuse, intake/assessment, interventions, substance abuse, and others. Despite the comprehensiveness of this system, however, it is still somewhat limited in addressing transfer of learning issues and does not include the most recent research in child welfare.

Although the CCBIT system is widely used by states to prepare child welfare workers, social work programs that train MSW students who plan to enter the child welfare field have not previously adopted these materials. The use of these materials by The Ohio State University's College of Social Work may serve as a model for other social work programs interested in using the Institute for Human Services/CWLA materials.

In addition to standard MSW requirements, a four-course series covering the core competencies (Child and Family Policy, Advanced Child Welfare Practice (I and II), and an Integrative Seminar on Child Welfare) was required of trainees. While the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (Rycus & Hughes, 1998) provided a competency-based foundation, course content was supplemented with recent empirical work in child welfare and a critical analysis of current trends in child welfare services. In addition, the curriculum was integrated with the field practicum component of the MSW program to ensure that students acquired the knowledge and skills needed to move quickly into child welfare positions upon graduation. The field practicum experience was supplemented with quarterly meetings including students, faculty members, and field instructors to discuss issues related to the integration of classroom and field learning. Through these efforts, trainees in the program were expected to increase their knowledge and skill competencies for provision of child welfare services, begin to think critically about current practices in child welfare, transfer their learning from the classroom to applied settings, and obtain employment in child welfare after completing the MSW program at OSU.

To ensure continued collaboration throughout the traineeship, an advisory board was convened on a quarterly basis. The advisory board consisted of the authors of the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (Rycus & Hughes, 1998), county child welfare administrators, staff members from private child welfare advocacy groups, and university faculty members. The Board met quarterly to review the program's activities and discuss possible modifications to the curriculum or field experience.

Other components of the program included devising and implementing an evaluation of the training and disseminating information about the program to interested parties. The trainees were evaluated in terms of knowledge acquisition, skill development, attitudes about the child welfare profession, critical thinking skills, sensitivity to cultural diversity, and post-graduation child welfare employment. Skill development was evaluated primarily through the field evaluation process and is not reported here. Likewise, critical thinking skills were evaluated primarily through graded classroom assignments. Evaluation of the trainees' sensitivity to cultural diversity is reported elsewhere (Vonk & Curtis, under review).

The remainder of this report focuses on the evaluation of knowledge acquisition, child welfare attitudes, and child welfare employment one year after graduation.

## METHODS

### Design and Selection of Students

This study utilized a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test comparison group design with a one-year follow-up. An additional follow-up interview with the trainees was conducted in 2002 (three years after the program for the 1999 cohort and two-years after the program for the 2000 cohort). The two groups used for initial pre-test-post-test comparison were second year MSW students selected for the training program ( $n=14$ ) and a group of second year MSW students not involved in the training program who volunteered to complete the outcome evaluation instruments ( $n=14$ ).

All eligible MSW students received solicitation letters describing the child welfare-training program. The solicitation included information about the components of the training program and the expectation that trainees would work in the field of child welfare for one year upon completing the MSW degree. Interested students were instructed to indicate ways in which the training program would fit with their future study and career plans. Students were then selected for the training group based on application letters reviewed by three faculty members involved with implementing the training grant. As a result, in each of the two years, seven second year MSW students were selected to receive competency based child welfare training.

Comparison group participants also were recruited through letters circulated to all eligible MSW participants. The recruitment letters contained information about the time commitment necessary for the study and a monetary incentive upon completing the questionnaires. In each of the two years, seven second-year MSW students volunteered for the comparison group that received only the traditional second-year MSW curriculum. Thus, the 14 trainees were compared to 14 non-trainees.

### Measures

Measurement of the students' child welfare knowledge was based on the training materials developed by the Institute for Human Services (IHS) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA). Knowledge acquisition was measured using the 81-item questionnaire that was developed for training purposes by the authors of the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (Rycus & Hughes, 1998). Specifically, the comprehensive 81-item child welfare knowledge questionnaire is divided into four sections that correspond to the organization of materials in the *Field Guide*: (1) "Family-Centered Child Protective Services"; (2) "Case Planning and Family-Centered Casework in Child Protective Services"; (3) "The Effects of Abuse and Neglect on Child Development"; and (4) "Separation, Placement, and Reunification." A variety of questions were used to gauge student knowledge in each of the aforementioned areas.

Participant attitudes and beliefs about child welfare practice were assessed using a 20-item questionnaire developed by the first author. The attitude and

belief scale was designed to assess student attitudes and beliefs, both about child welfare as a career choice and about working with child welfare clients. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess student attitudes and beliefs (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Sample items related to working with child welfare clients include, "Sometimes the general interests of the family should supersede the interests of the child" and "Child abuse is basically caused by lack of parenting skills or flawed thinking in the abuser." Sample items about child welfare as a field of practice included "It is highly unlikely that I will be working in the field of child welfare 10 years from now." and "Sooner or later most child welfare workers become disillusioned with their jobs."

Information about the post-graduate field of employment was obtained with a survey mailed exclusively to trainees one year following graduation from the program. Graduates of the training program were also contacted during the spring of 2002. In addition to questions about current employment, graduates reported their perceptions of the relevance and satisfaction with the child welfare-training program using the same Likert scale described previously.

### **Procedure**

All training activities were offered during the second year of the MSW program. The tests were administered to the trainees and students in the comparison group at the beginning of training in the fall of 1998 and 1999 and at the end of training in the spring of 1999 and 2000. Follow-up surveys were mailed to graduates of the child welfare training one-year following graduation in the spring of 2000 and 2001. Also, post-graduates of the training program were contacted via the telephone in the spring of 2002.

Data were coded and entered into a database, and analyzed using SPSS 10.0.5. In order to describe the data obtained from the group of trainees and contrast it to the comparison group, univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistics were calculated. The rationale for using descriptive and inferential statistics was based on uncovering statistically significant differences between the group of trainees and the comparison group. In particular, it was hoped that those who participated in the child welfare-training program would display greater gains in knowledge of and attitudes toward child welfare practice.

### **RESULTS**

There were no significant demographic differences between the groups for age ( $X^2(2)=9.44, p=.66$ ), gender ( $X^2(1)=.297, p=.58$ ), race ( $X^2(2)=2.62, p=.26$ ), or years of experience in child welfare ( $X^2(3)=3.39, p=.33$ ). A substantial majority of students involved in the study were Caucasian women. The majority of the students were in their twenties, with an age distribution that ranged from 22 to 58 years. With respect to years of experience in the child welfare profession, 23 participants reported no experience, while five reported having one to three years of experience.

Overall, descriptive data showed an increase in child welfare knowledge from pre-test to post-test scores for the trainees and the comparison group using the child welfare knowledge questionnaire. Specifically, the mean for the child wel-

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	24	85.7
Male	4	14.3
Age (years)		
22-30	22	78.6
31-39	4	14.3
40-58	2	7.1
Race		
White	21	75.0
African-American	5	17.9
Other	2	7.1
Years Experience		
None	23	82.2
One Year	2	7.1
Two Years	2	7.1
Three Years	1	3.6

fare training group increased from 53.42 correct answers at pre-test to 60.46 at post-test. This is an overall increase from 66% to 75% on the 81-item welfare knowledge acquisition questionnaire. An increase in the number of correct answers also occurred in the comparison group from pre-test to post-test. The comparison group mean increased from 49.87 at pre-test to 55.08 at post-test, resulting in an overall increase from 62% to 68% on the 81-item questionnaire. Despite the greater increase in knowledge scores among the trainees, independent *t*-tests uncovered no statistical significance from pre-test to post-test for trainee or comparison groups on the 81-item questionnaire, *t* (26)=1.08, *p*=.28; and *t* (26)=1.06, *p*=.29; respectively. In addition, when controlling for the pre-test, the one-way Anova procedure uncovered no statistically significant difference between the two groups on child welfare knowledge at post-test, *F* (1, 26)=1.12; *p*=.30. The differences among mean scores did not produce a large enough effect to be detected within the limits of the statistical power.

Table 2: *Knowledge Acquisition Scale Scores for Second-Year MSW Students Before and After Training*

Knowledge Acquisition Scale	n	Pre-test		Post-test	
		mean	SD	mean	SD
Training Group	14	53.42	8.53	60.46	6.63
Comparison Group	14	49.87	8.82	55.08	17.74

Although there was no statistically significant difference for either group from pre-test to post-test on the knowledge component of the study, independent *t*-tests did uncover a statistically significant difference between the trainees and the comparison group concerning their attitudes towards the field of child welfare practice. Students in the training group had more positive attitudes about the profession of child welfare when compared to those students in the comparison group at post-test. On the other hand, there was no statistically significant differ-

ence between the two groups on their attitudes towards child welfare clients at post-test.

Table 3: <i>Post-test Means for the Scales Measuring Attitudes About the Child Welfare Profession and Attitudes About Child Welfare Clients by Training Group and Comparison Group (N=28)</i>		
Measure	CW Profession	CW Clients
Training Group	3.08*	3.14
Comparison Group	1.72	3.07
<i>Results of t-tests: *p&lt;.01.</i>		

As expected, it was found that students in the training group were more likely than their counterparts to actively seek positions in the field of child welfare at graduation. In fact, all but one of the students in the training group, as compared to only two of the students in the comparison group, reported the intention to seek employment in child welfare.

At the one-year post-graduation follow-up, we were able to contact 11 of the 14 trainees, all of whom completed follow-up questionnaires. All but two were employed in child welfare. At the two- or three-year follow-up, 12 of the 14 trainees were contacted by telephone. All but two of the 12 contacted reported currently being employed in child welfare. Specifically, all those in the two-year follow-up cohort were employed in child welfare; whereas, all but two in the three-year follow-up cohort were employed in child welfare. For analysis purposes, missing data were replaced by the mean of the distribution; an acceptable procedure when the replaced data do not exceed 15% for a particular case and/or variable (George & Mallery, 2001).

One-year follow-up also revealed favorable outcomes regarding the training participants' attitudes about the field of child welfare practice and child welfare clients. In fact, comparisons from post-test to one-year follow-up uncovered that training participants had sustained a positive attitude in each area over the 12-month time period. To the point, training group participants reported a minimal decrease of only 0.74 regarding their attitudes toward child welfare practice and a minimal decrease of only 0.70 regarding their attitudes toward child welfare clients. Thus, the trainees maintained moderate to strong agreement with positive attitudes toward the child welfare profession and clients.

Post-test to one-year follow-up comparisons also revealed favorable outcomes concerning trainee satisfaction and trainee perception of relevance of the training they received. Specifically, trainee satisfaction remained very high, with only a minimal decrease of 0.35. More importantly, the relevance of programmatic training to child welfare practice also remained very high, with a decrease of only 0.44. Favorable outcomes were also uncovered at the two- or three-year follow-up. In fact, *t*-test for paired samples uncovered a statistically significant improvement on mean scores from the one-year follow-up to the two- or three-year follow-up concerning the overall relevance of programmatic training *t* (13)=2.37; *p*<.05, and overall satisfaction of programmatic training *t* (13)=2.34; *p*<.05.



Table 4: *Satisfaction and Relevance of Programmatic Training (N=12)*

Measure	Post-test Score		One-year Follow-up		Two-year Follow-up	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Satisfaction with Training	2.92	2.01	2.57	1.73	3.50*	.65
Relevance of Training	2.85	1.95	2.41	1.58	3.71*	.82
<i>Note: Comparisons between one-year follow-up and two-year follow-up Results of t-tests: *p&lt;.05</i>						

At the post-test and follow-up interviews participants were also asked their opinions about the *Field Guide to Child Welfare*. The respondents consistently reported that the books were clearly written, easy to read, relevant, and useful. The limitations mentioned by the participants focused on the cost of the four-volume set (about \$120) and the difficulties they experienced transferring the information from the books to “real-life” situations.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that although child welfare trainees gained knowledge about child welfare practice, they did not do so at a rate statistically significantly greater than a group of students in the standard MSW program. The trainees did, however, show a more positive attitude toward the field of child welfare as a career than did the comparison group. Also, at one year and then again at either two or three years post-graduation, a high percentage of the former trainees were employed in child welfare with the intention of staying in the field for at least five more years. In addition, they reported the perception that most aspects of the training experience were satisfying and, more importantly, relevant to their current work.

Before interpreting the results further, important limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, the small sample size seriously limits the ability to generalize the results. In addition, bias in the non-random sample selection limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about the effects of the training intervention. Obviously, students in the training group indicated high interest in the field of child welfare prior to training. Just as importantly, students in the comparison group were exposed to information about child welfare through other classes in the MSW program, or in a few cases, by electing to participate in one of the classes required of the trainees. Finally, the instruments lack standardization. As such, the nominal increase in knowledge and the lack of statistical differences between the groups may be the result of learning stimulated by the administration of the pre-test, the overlap of knowledge acquired from other MSW courses taken by the comparison group, or insufficient statistical power to detect differences. In spite of these limitations, the results suggest additional support for training social workers to work in the field of child welfare.

Related to concerns about the professional and educational preparation of social workers for child welfare careers (Gleeson, et al., 1993; Lieberman, et al., 1988; Hopkins, et al., 1999), these results appear to have provided both a reason for hope and continued concern. First, related to the perceived need for more professionally trained social workers in child welfare, these results suggest that the Title IV-E funding did support the professional education of 14 social workers, the majority of whom were employed in the field of child welfare two to three years after graduation. Similar to the findings of Robin and Hollister (2001), these results were promising also in terms of the retention of child welfare workers whose education was funded by Title IV-E money. All of those employed in child welfare one year post-graduation reported the intention of staying there. The interpretation of the results in light of the criticism that social work education has not been relevant to the work of child welfare may also be seen in a positive light. Most of those trained perceived the "training overall" to be moderately to very relevant to their work even after two or three years had elapsed.

In spite of these positive findings, the students' modest gain in knowledge about child welfare remains a concern, both in terms of curriculum planning and research methodology. Although this study did not address curriculum, *per se*, we have given thought to this concern and speculate that curriculum might be strengthened in several ways. First, trainees might benefit from a curriculum that could be tailored to the individual's needs based on pre-training testing of knowledge and skills. Many of the trainees began the program with work experience in child welfare. As such, they entered the program with varying levels of knowledge about child welfare. Learning might be maximized by tailoring learning objectives and related activities for each of the overall program goals according to the needs of each student. For example, a student with a high baseline of knowledge and skills in the area of adoptive placement may benefit from a greater focus on other areas of child welfare such as child protective investigation.

Other curriculum changes might include those that focus on transfer of learning. For example, use of classroom time could place a greater emphasis on experiential learning activities that require analysis and synthesis of information. In addition, classroom instructors and field supervisors might collaborate to create direct ties between field and classroom learning through the use of case-studies and assignments that require integration of classroom knowledge and field experience.

Regarding future research on child welfare training effectiveness, while there is accumulating evidence to support the effectiveness of training social workers for the demands of child welfare work (Hopkins, et al., 1999; Robin & Hollister, 2001; Rose, 1999), the studies, including this one, have all been exploratory in nature. Furthermore, methodologically rigorous research is important in order to help guide Title-IV-E appropriations and determine whether participants are adequately trained to meet the needs of clients. Samples should be sufficiently large that small effect sizes might be detected. Multi-site training projects such as one currently in planning stages in the state of Ohio potentially would provide a large group of trainees. A multi-site program would also provide the possibility of interesting comparisons of the effects of various learning activities related to consis-

tent goals among the sites. This would, of course, require careful operationalization of the training interventions. Finally, future research must also include the use of meaningful comparison groups. At the very least, the students in the comparison groups should not be exposed to coursework designed specifically for trainees.

While this study found that a small cohort of Title-IV-E funded child welfare trainees made modest gains in knowledge, maintained favorable attitudes about the child welfare profession, and for the most part, remained employed in child welfare for up to three years following training, it is clear that further evaluation is needed. As others have observed (Gleeson, et al., 1993), the complexity of problems encountered by child welfare workers requires increasing levels of knowledge and skills. Future child welfare professionals must be armed with the knowledge and skills needed to meet the demands of their jobs. Competency-based child welfare training curriculums and educational collaborations must be strengthened and rigorously tested to determine whether those who participate in training are better able to deliver child welfare services.

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**Booked for the Week:  
A Survey of the Use of Bibliotherapy by  
Licensed Clinical Social Workers**

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**Abstract:** *Despite its general acceptance, there has been no research exploring the actual use of bibliotherapy by Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs). This study sought to determine the extent to which LCSWs, represented by a random sample from one state, used bibliotherapy for specific problems, identified relevant variables that influence bibliotherapy use, and compiled a list of books currently used by respondents. Results suggest that bibliotherapy is used for numerous specific problems and LCSW endorsement of bibliotherapy by LCSWs is similar to that of respondents in other disciplines. Unlike studies involving other disciplines, LCSW usage patterns were not related to gender and less related to employment settings.*

**Keywords:** *Bibliotherapy, self-help, clinical social work, behavior change*

The prevalence of books on the topic of self-improvement is apparent to those who spend time in the burgeoning "self-help" sections of popular bookstores. Likewise, an examination of recent lists of non-fiction best sellers attests to strong consumer interest in self-help through reading. Individuals in the helping professions have noted the value of therapeutic reading, otherwise known as bibliotherapy (Riordan & Wilson, 1989). In fact, there appears to be an increase in clinicians' use of bibliotherapy (Riordan & Wilson, 1989; Starker, 1988) both in a wide range of clinical settings and with a wide array of problems (Pardeck, 1998).

Bibliotherapy has been defined as "using books in clinical intervention" (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984, p. ix), although the literal meaning of the term is "to treat through books" (p. 241). Bibliotherapy can be described as the prescription and/or recommendation of particular books to clients, followed by subsequent reading, for the purpose of ameliorating the effects of particular problems. The technique can be used "to provide information, to provide insight, to stimulate discussion about

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problems, to communicate new values and attitudes, to create awareness that others may have similar problems, to provide solutions to problems and to provide realistic solutions to problems" (Pardeck, 1998, p. 5). Although bibliotherapy is sometimes used as a stand-alone treatment approach, it is used most often as an adjunct to other forms of direct treatment.

Despite the popularity of bibliotherapy, there are few studies of its use by practitioners and no studies that can be found in the area of clinical social work practice. With this in mind, the authors have engaged in research to examine the prevalence and usage patterns of bibliotherapy by licensed clinical social workers in a southern state. There will be a brief review of the empirical literature on this topic, and the results and implications of the current study will be presented. Appended to the article is a list of books most commonly used by clinical social workers. This list is divided according to specific problem area.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy**

The efficacy of bibliotherapy as an adjunct for helping individuals change their behavior in a number of different areas has been amply demonstrated over the last 20 years (Pardeck, 1998). Bibliotherapy has been found to be effective in the treatment of panic disorder (Lesser, 1991; Lidren, et al., 1994), relapse prevention in panic disorder (Wright, Clum, Roodman & Febraro, 2000), depression, (Cuijpers, 1997), depression in the elderly (Guirguis, 2001), children's behavior (Klingman, 1985), health-related problems (Starker, 1992), cancer (Pardeck, 1992), insomnia (Mimeault & Morin, 1999), childhood aggression (Shechtman, 1999), self-harm in children (Evans, et al., 1999), the effects of separation and divorce on children (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1983), agoraphobia (Gould, Clum & Shapiro, 1995), personality changes (Ellis, 1993), and attention deficit disorder (Long, Rickert & Ashcraft, 1993). Halliday (1991) reported that 43% ( $n=43$ ) of adult clients entering psychotherapy for the first time had read at least one self-help book prior to their first appointment. Of this number, 86% ( $n=37$ ) reported that they had benefited from the readings.

After reviewing numerous studies of bibliotherapy, Riordan and Wilson (1989) discovered mixed results regarding its use as a primary clinical approach to working with clients. However, those same authors state that "bibliotherapy is a tool—among many—to be used when it can contribute to overall satisfactory outcome" (p. 507).

More recently, a meta-analysis of 70 samples used in studies of bibliotherapy revealed that bibliotherapy is as effective as therapist-administered treatment with a mean effect size of +0.565 (Marrs, 1995). Such effect sizes fall within the range of medium effect sizes as defined by Cohen (1988), suggesting that bibliotherapy is a significant factor in treatment when used.

### **Use of Bibliotherapy by Professionals**

Despite the attention given to the effectiveness of bibliotherapy, patterns of use by practitioners have received less attention. Starker (1988) administered a questionnaire to psychologists in San Diego and Boston ( $n=268$ ) surveying "attitudes, experiences and prescriptive practices in the matter of self-help books" (p. 143). There



was a 44% return rate resulting in a total of 119 usable questionnaires. Using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from harmful to often helpful), on a global rating of general helpfulness, 60.5% ( $n=72$ ) reported that self-help books were somewhat helpful as an adjunct to therapy and 5.9% ( $n=7$ ) found them to be often helpful. Sixty percent ( $n=73$ ) prescribed self-help books to clients. Among the latter group, 53% did so occasionally, 7% regularly, and 9% often. Parenting was the area most frequently reported for book prescription (54.8%), followed by personal growth (39.7%), and relationships (38.4%).

Quackenbush (1991) examined books that were most commonly prescribed for particular problems and created a subject index in order to survey 100 university-affiliated counseling psychologists across the United States. Approximately 47 usable questionnaires were returned, enabling compilation of an extensive bibliography of books organized by problem area. No further univariate or bivariate analyses were reported.

Marks, Gyorky, Royalty and Stern (1992) investigated the use of bibliotherapy among practicing psychologists ( $n=209$ ). They found that the vast majority of psychologists (88%) reported using bibliotherapy with at least 1% of their clients. Of the group who reported using bibliotherapy, 55.5% ( $n=100$ ) used bibliotherapy only rarely (defined as ranging from 1% to 25% of clients), 19% ( $n=34$ ) used it sometimes (defined as ranging from 26% to 50% of clients), 10% used it often (with 51% to 75% of clients), and 3.4% ( $n=6$ ) always used it. Additionally, the researchers found that female practitioners were more likely to use bibliotherapy than males and that psychologists in private practice were more likely to use bibliotherapy compared to psychologists in other employment settings.

Santrock, Minnett and Campbell (1994) attempted to determine those books that were most often used by practitioners and found to be most helpful. To do so, they compiled an extensive list of specific book titles in a questionnaire format. Approximately 4,000 members of the American Psychological Association (APA) were asked to rate books that they used in practice. Only 600 (15%) fully usable questionnaires were returned. The authors compiled the results of their survey in a text that provided a comprehensive list of books according to subject area and frequency of use.

Recently, Adams and Pitre (2000) assessed the use of bibliotherapy by mental health practitioners. They surveyed all mental health practitioners within a rural community ( $n=112$ ) in order to determine reasons for the use of bibliotherapy and also the types of books recommended. Among the 62 questionnaires returned, 68% of the practitioners reported using bibliotherapy. The authors anticipated that counselors with larger caseloads would use bibliotherapy more frequently compared to those with smaller caseloads. They also anticipated more use of books by paraprofessionals than professionals. Neither hypothesis was supported. However, counselors with more years of practice experience tended to be significantly more likely ( $p<0.05$ ) to utilize bibliotherapy with clients compared to those with less practice experience. Counselors indicated that the major reasons for using the technique were to encourage self-help, enhance therapy, and respond to client requests for reading material.

In an attempt to update a survey conducted by Santrock, Minnett and Campbell (1994), Norcross, et al. (2000) developed a revision of the original questionnaire that included an updated list of self-help books with the addition of three new subject areas, Schizophrenia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Dementia/Alzheimer's Disease. As with the original study, an attempt was made to randomly sample psychologists who were current members of the APA. Two discrete surveys, each with a different set of 15 problem areas, were mailed to groups of 1,500 randomly selected psychologists comprising a total of 3,000 respondents. Respondents were asked to evaluate specific books in each area using a five point Likert-type scale ranging from extremely good to extremely bad. Researchers reported a response rate of 22% and 25% for the two samples in which a total of 57% were male and 43% were female. Twenty eight percent ( $n=192$ ) identified their theoretical orientation as cognitive, 28% ( $n=188$ ) were eclectic, 16% were psychodynamic ( $n=107$ ), and 10% ( $n=67$ ) identified themselves as behavioral. Approximately 42% ( $n=284$ ) were engaged in private practice and 25% ( $n=166$ ) were affiliated with universities. Among respondents to both surveys, global ratings of helpfulness indicated that 19% rated bibliotherapy as very helpful, whereas, 74% found it somewhat helpful. No bivariate comparisons involving respondents were noted. The complete ratings of individual books by subject area likewise were included.

As suggested by the review of the studies cited above, most of the bibliotherapy research has focused on compiling and evaluating lists of books for use in specific problem areas. Some attention has been given to exploring practitioners' usage patterns, including reasons for use, extent of use, and relations between demographic variables and use. Few of the studies reported bivariate data and none reported practitioners' reasons for excluding bibliotherapy. More importantly, the research review indicates that the above studies have tended to sample clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, or generic mental health practitioners.

### **Use of Bibliotherapy by Social Workers**

Pardeck (Pardeck, 1991; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984) has been a consistent advocate for the use of bibliotherapy within the profession and has pointed to the need for continued research into the use of bibliotherapy (Pardeck, 1998). However, despite the recognized prevalence of bibliotherapy, the authors were able to find only 14 citations for bibliotherapy in social work abstracts. Of these, eight were by the same authors (Pardeck, 1991; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984) and none presented evidence of use by social workers obtained through inquiry.

Addressing the need for research on the deployment of bibliotherapy by social workers, the authors undertook the present investigation. This inquiry: 1) determined the extent to which clinical social workers in one state used bibliotherapy; 2) appraised their perceptions of its effectiveness and value; 3) explored their patterns of usage; 4) explored the effects of age, gender, practice experience, and practice setting on usage; and 5) compiled and classified volumes used by the practitioners. In an attempt to add to the existing literature on usage and deployment, the authors incorporated methodological strategies, variables, and research questions from previous research in this area.

## METHOD

In addition to demographic data, the survey included a combination of questions requiring Likert-type responses, categorical responses, and written responses in which subjects were asked to supply specific information regarding their use of particular books or readings. Questions requiring Likert-type responses asked respondents to evaluate the frequency of their use of bibliotherapy, the perceived value of bibliotherapy, and their perception of its effectiveness. Answers requiring categorical responses highlighted demographic data including area of practice specialization, employment setting, and problem focus. Similar to previous surveys, the major body of the questionnaire presented respondents with 30 possible problem areas such as depression, relationship problems, parenting, schizophrenia, developmental issues, career issues, personal growth, and physical illness. Because the survey was designed to identify books that practitioners use rather than evaluate particular books, researchers decided to omit a list of specific book titles. Rather, each topical area was presented with sufficient space for respondents to write in the names of books and authors that they used in the particular area. Problem areas were determined using templates from previous studies and a review of the literature. Completion of the questionnaire took from 25 to 70 minutes, depending on the number of books and categories that respondents reported.

Subjects were selected by using a randomly generated list of Licensed Clinical Social Workers purchased from a statewide NASW database of licensed clinical social workers. One thousand questionnaires were mailed to names on the list and no follow-up mailings were used. One thousand surveys were mailed out, and of these, 417 were returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining 583, 122 questionnaires were returned and 107 were usable. The low rate of response (21%) was of some concern to the researchers. However, as is apparent in the aforementioned studies, low response rates tend to be common in this area, and other studies on bibliotherapy likewise have relied on samples within a similar range.

Of the 107 usable questionnaires, females completed 81, 23 were completed by males, and three were of unspecified gender. In terms of race and ethnicity, 95 respondents were Caucasian (89%), 11 African-American (10%), and 1 Hispanic. The age of respondents ranged from 30 to 67, with a mean age of 49 years and median of 50. The average age for the males was 53.7 and 47.4 for the females. The mean number of practice years was 19.1, with a median of 18 and average years of clinical licensure was 10.8. For males, the average number of practice years was 24.8 compared to 17.7 for females. The most common area of practice was private practice (40.2%,  $n=43$ ), followed by mental health (23.4%,  $n=25$ ), and medical social work (9.3%,  $n=10$ ). The values for age, gender, and race/ethnicity in this sample are quite similar to those in the most recent samples of NASW members (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997; NASW, 2003). However, the median years of respondents' practice experience was slightly higher than the 16 years reported for NASW members (NASW, 2003). Likewise, practitioners in private practice were over-represented in comparison with NASW reports of 25%, and mental health practitioners were under-represented in contrast to the 39% reported by NASW (NASW, 2000).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Because the purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which social workers in one state used bibliotherapy, areas in which bibliotherapy was used, and identification of the most frequently used readings, data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative analysis consisted mainly of univariate data. Based on the literature review, the authors formulated only three *a priori* hypotheses requiring bivariate analyses: 1) Female Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) would value and use bibliotherapy more than males; 2) LCSWs with more practice experience would use bibliotherapy more frequently than less experienced workers; and 3) LCSWs in private practice would use bibliotherapy more often than those engaged in other employment settings.

### Usage, Value, and Effectiveness

Among all respondents, 86% ( $n=93$ ) reported using bibliotherapy at least once. Seven and one-half percent ( $n=8$ ) rated using the technique almost always, 30.8% ( $n=33$ ) frequently, 33.6% ( $n=36$ ) occasionally, 13.9% ( $n=16$ ) infrequently, and 12% ( $n=13$ ) never used bibliography. Among those clinical social workers using bibliography infrequently or almost never, reasons for the low rate of use were examined. The major reason for the low use given by 38.4% of respondents ( $n=10$ ) was that their clients could not read the resources. A second reason given by 34.6% ( $n=9$ ) indicated that the social workers did not believe that their clients would read the material.

Fifteen percent ( $n=16$ ) of respondents reported bibliotherapy to be greatly effective, 51% ( $n=55$ ) moderately effective, 21% ( $n=23$ ) mildly effective, and 11% ( $n=12$ ) ineffective. Bibliography was found to be of unlimited value to 4.5% ( $n=5$ ), 42% ( $n=45$ ) reported it to be very valuable, 45% ( $n=48$ ) found it to be of limited value, and 6.5% ( $n=7$ ) found it to be of little or no value.

### Patterns of Use

Thirty-one percent of respondents ( $n=32$ ) used a single book in more than one area. In other words, they used one book for at least two different types of problems. However, only 13 books were used more than once, indicating that more than half of those using one book in more than one area were relying on the same titles. In comparison, 18.5% of the respondents ( $n=20$ ) used multiple books (ranging from 2 to 7) in a single area. More than 30% of respondents used texts in each of the following seven areas: 1) co-dependency and ACOA, 2) anxiety/anxiety disorders, 3) non-specific relationship problems, 4) anger management, 5) intimacy issues, 6) grief and loss, and 7) depression. Table 1 provides frequencies of respondents using a book in each problem area.

### Types of Books

The respondents listed a total of 229 different book titles. In surveys of this type, there is typically no distinction among types of self-help titles. For example, some titles may be more informative than prescriptive, whereas, others may be more inspirational. The authors wished to attempt such a classification. To do so, two of the authors independently examined all of the titles and their synopses using existing comprehensive reviews of self-help books (Pardeck, 1998; Norcross, et al.,

Table 1: *Percentage of Respondents Using Books in Each Problem Area and Percentage of Respondents Using More Than One Book in a Particular Area*

<b>Type of Problem Addressed</b>	<b>Total % of Sample Used Book (Used at least one book in area)</b>	<b>Percentage of Sample Used More Than One Books Area</b>
ACoA/codependency Issues	34 (n=35)	13.6 (n=14)
Anxiety	34 (n=35)	4.9 (n=5)
Relationship problems	34 (n=35)	11.7 (n=12)
Anger management	33 (n=34)	7.8 (n=8)
Intimacy issues	31.1 (n=32)	6.8 (n=7)
Grief and loss	30.4 (n=31)	8.8 (n=9)
Depression	30.4 (n=31)	4.8 (n=5)
Parenting	29.1 (n=30)	12.7 (n=13)
Incest/shame/recovery	28.2 (n=29)	5.9 (n=6)
Child abuse	26.2 (n=27)	3.8 (n=4)
Self-esteem and/or self-worth issues	25.3 (n=26)	7.8 (n=8)
Alcohol and/or drug abuse	23.4 (n=24)	1.9 (n=2)
Personal growth	21.4 (n=22)	4.9 (n=5)
Divorce and/or separation	18.5 (n=19)	7.8 (n=8)
Assertiveness training	18.5 (n=19)	.9 (n=1)
Bipolar illness	17.5 (n=18)	1.8 (n=2)
Rape/sexual assault	16.5 (n=17)	.9 (n=1)
Career issues	15.5 (n=16)	3.9 (n=4)
Developmental issues	15.5 (n=16)	2.9 (n=3)
Family problems	14.6 (n=15)	4.9 (n=5)
Perfectionism and/or obsessive compulsive behavior	13.6 (n=14)	3.9 (n=4)
Suicide	13.6 (n=14)	.9 (n=1)
Values/goals	13.6 (n=14)	4.9 (n=5)
Women's issues	13.6 (n=14)	1.9 (n=2)
Men's issues	12.6 (n=13)	3.9 (n=4)
Domestic violence	12.6 (n=13)	2.9 (n=3)
Care-giving	11.7 (n=12)	2.9 (n=3)
Sexual Dysfunction	11.7 (n=12)	2.9 (n=3)
PTSD	11.7 (n=12)	.9 (n=1)
Aging	9.7 (n=10)	2.9 (n=3)
Academic issues	8.8 (n=9)	3.9 (n=4)
Weight concerns	7.7 (n=8)	.9 (n=1)
Minority issues	5.8 (n=6)	1.9 (n=2)
Sexual abuse	5.8	2.9 (n=3)
Mental illness (including Schizophrenia)	4.9 (n=5)	1.9 (n=2)

Table 1: *Percentage of Respondents Using Books in Each Problem Area and Percentage of Respondents Using More Than One Book in a Particular Area (cont.)*

Social skills training	3.8 (n=4)	0
Medical issues	2.9 (n=3)	1.9 (n=2)
Sexual identity issues	2.9 (n=3)	1.9 (n=2)
Adoption	1.9 (n=2)	0
Boundary issues	1 (n=1)	1 (n=1)
Empathy	1 (n=1)	1 (n=1)
Isolation/loneliness	1 (n=1)	1 (n=1)

2000). Those titles not contained in existing compendiums were further examined through the use of a bookseller's publication index on the World Wide Web ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). The authors then compared classifications using a three-group classification system, self-help, educational, and inspirational. Disparities were resolved with consensus. One hundred and sixty-one of the books examined appear to be practical, manualized, behavioral-oriented books, supplying prescriptions and "how-to" information. Although providing material that was educational and informative, these books appeared to focus primarily on facilitating actual change, with titles containing descriptors such as "how to," "step-by-step," "guide," "workbook," "behavior," and "practical strategies." Fifty-three of the titles were more generally "educational," containing information and data on a specific topic such as co-dependency or bipolar illness. Fifteen titles were determined by the authors to be inspirational. These titles contained material that was typically comforting, spiritually uplifting, or focused on overcoming adversity. Several of these titles were autobiographical. Only nine of the 229 titles were fictional. Seven were written for children on particular topics such as anger and were classified as educational. Not surprisingly, the list contained numerous titles that were popular bestsellers.

### **Hypotheses Testing**

Males and females were compared on a number of demographic variables including race and ethnicity, area of practice, problem focus, age, years of practice, and years of licensure. They differed significantly only on the dimensions of age  $F(47.4)=3.43$   $p=.001$ , and practice experience  $F(101)=3.75$   $p=.000$ , with males being older and having more practice experience. For this reason, any gender group comparisons on bibliotherapy were made controlling for both age and years of practice experience. Results indicated that there were no differences between male and female social workers' use of bibliotherapy, their perceived value of bibliotherapy, or the perceived effectiveness of bibliotherapy when age and years of experience were held constant.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted comparing LCSWs in a variety of employment settings including private practice. Comparisons were made among LCSWs in the following employment settings: private practice ( $n=43$ ), medical/hospital social work ( $n=10$ ), family and children services ( $n=12$ ), mental health services ( $n=25$ ), and "other," which includes corrections, school social work,



EAP, and university settings ( $n=10$ ). A significant difference was found among the groups,  $F(4, 95)=3.00$ ,  $p=.022$ . Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Bonferroni test that controls for overall experimental error by dividing the experiment-wise error rate by the total number of tests for each comparison. Despite homogeneity of variance, the differences in sample size required employing the harmonic mean of the two groups in each comparison as the sample size estimate. Results indicated that the only difference was between those in private practice and those employed in medical/hospital social work.

It was also hypothesized that social workers with more years of practice experience would find bibliotherapy to be more effective, more valuable, and would use the technique more frequently than those with fewer years of practice experience. Because age was found to have a significant interaction in the preceding tests of difference, age was included as a second variable in the analyses. Not surprisingly, age and years of practice were found to be significantly correlated,  $r=.623$ ,  $p=.000$ . For this reason, the researchers wished to determine which of the two predictors had the greater predictive power on each of the three criterion variables. Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to predict the perceived effectiveness, perceived value, and the degree of bibliotherapy use from the amount of prior practice experience of the respondents. In these equations, years of practice experience was the predictor variable. The degree to which respondents found bibliotherapy to be effective, valuable, and the degree to which respondents reported using bibliotherapy served respectively as the criterion variables on the three analyses. The results of the analyses indicated that previous years of practice experience was not a significant predictor of perceived effectiveness of bibliotherapy, perceived value of bibliotherapy, or the degree to which respondents used bibliotherapy.

A second series of analyses were conducted to evaluate whether respondents' age predicted perceived effectiveness, value, and use of bibliotherapy over and above years of practice experience. Age accounted for a small but significant proportion of the variance in the respondents' perception of bibliotherapy's effectiveness,  $R=.077$ ,  $R_{\text{change}}=.053$ ,  $F(2, 100)=5.1$ ,  $p=.018$ , and the degree to which respondents valued bibliotherapy,  $R=.078$ ,  $R_{\text{change}}=.06$ ,  $F(2, 100)=6.5$ ,  $p=.012$ . Age accounted for only 3% of the variance in the degree to which respondents used bibliotherapy,  $R=.03$ ,  $t(2, 100)=-1.7$ ,  $p=.07$ . Perhaps more significant than the predictive power of age is the direction of the relationship. Reverse slopes for effectiveness,  $b=-.29$ , value,  $b=-.31$ , and use,  $b=-.22$  indicate that younger workers perceive bibliotherapy to be more effective, value it more, and use it more than older workers.

## DISCUSSION

Results suggest that bibliotherapy use, as endorsed by the LCSWs in this sample, is perceived by respondents to be an effective and valued adjunctive tool in clinical encounters. Reports of usage (86%) exceeded most other studies and were comparable to rates (88%) reported by Marks, et al. (1992). Notably, the reasons most cited for not using bibliotherapy suggest that practitioners avoid using bibliotherapy because of their doubts that the material will be read rather than doubts about its usefulness.

Frequencies of use according to problem area suggest that clinical social workers use bibliotherapy for numerous problems. Not surprisingly, bibliotherapy use for both anxiety and depression appears high, perhaps reflecting the pervasiveness of both problems and general awareness of the problems as well as the popularity of cognitive treatment approaches for both. Perusal of Table 1 also suggests that bibliotherapy may often be used for problems that appear to be more interpersonal in nature (such as co-dependency, relationship and intimacy issues, parenting, and grieving). The list suggests usage in areas similar to the findings of others. It also appears to reflect usage in areas wherein consumer familiarity with issues may be more common.

Findings also suggest that a moderate number of clinicians may judge a single book to have utility and value in more than one problem area. In the future, bibliography surveys might consider rating books on the construct of "impact." Importantly, nearly 20% of the respondents ( $n=20$ ) reported that they used from two to seven books for a particular problem. This finding suggests that some practitioners have considerable familiarity with numerous books in specific problem areas. Likewise, a future construct for consideration in such a survey might be bibliotherapy "saturation" in a particular area. Overall, it appears that clinical social workers endorse a preference for practical, action-oriented titles that promote some form of behavior change. This type of use is similar to usage schemes that are considered by others to be effective methods of bibliotherapy practice (Pardeck, 1998).

Unlike others' findings regarding gender differences (Marks, et al., 1992), male and female social workers appear to approach bibliotherapy similarly. Also, the difference in use of bibliotherapy between social workers in private practice and those not in private practice is accounted for solely by the difference between private practitioners and those employed in medical/hospital settings. The finding suggests that social workers employed in areas such as family and children services and mental health services may not differ from private practitioners in their use of bibliotherapy. One suspects that the significant difference found between private practice and medical/hospital settings may reflect a more narrow health-related focus in the medical setting, wherein, many of the specified problems may be encountered or identified less often. The lack of a relationship between practice experience and bibliotherapy use in addition to an unanticipated inverse relationship with age suggest that bibliotherapy use may be a more recent phenomenon in clinical social work practice than in psychology. The paucity of studies on the use of bibliotherapy by social workers, when compared to deployment studies by psychologists, tend to support this conjecture.

### **LIMITATIONS**

There are notable limitations to this inquiry. Although a random sample was employed, it was drawn from a list of LCSWs in one southeastern state. Furthermore, the response rate (21%) was quite low. It is possible that the length of the questionnaire and the inability to use any follow-up mailings to stimulate response may have attenuated the response rate. However, the high number of respondents who reported using bibliotherapy (86%) in conjunction with the low

rate of response suggests a response bias favoring those who employ bibliotherapy in their work. The percentage of respondents who found bibliotherapy to be of great value (46.5%) would indicate that those who responded were fervent in their opinions regarding its use. Also, the over-representation of private practitioners and the under-representation of mental health workers, in comparison with NASW membership, restrict generalizations and could indicate an inflated number of returns by those favoring bibliotherapy. Consequently, a major question that remains unanswered is the degree to which the results of this survey reflect the use of bibliotherapy within the general population of licensed clinical social workers. Thus, generalizations are discouraged. Nonetheless, it is noted that other surveys of this kind have used samples of this size and have also reported similar response rates.

In addition, measurement of effectiveness is limited to the global perceptions of respondents. This is problematic for several reasons: 1) Exclusion of treatment recipients' appraisals restricts any assessment of treatment effectiveness; 2) Similarly, self-reports often tend to be biased favorably and perceptions are subject to distortion (Miller & Ross, 1975). In cases where practitioners favor a particular intervention, it is possible that the perceptions of the intervention's success are a function of a self-serving bias (Fiske & Taylor, 1991); 3) Empirical verification or corroboration of effectiveness warrants the scientific rigor found in experimental designs, wherein, participants are randomly selected and bibliotherapy is randomly assigned as an addition to a standardized treatment. As a result, the nature of this study must be considered exploratory and the results considered prudently. More importantly, the lack of research on usage patterns of bibliotherapy in social work underscores the need for additional studies of this kind and outcome research.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to explore the use of bibliotherapy by clinical social workers and compile the resources used in their efforts. Results suggest that the LCSWs in this survey strongly endorsed the use of bibliotherapy, its value, and its effectiveness. It would appear that the general endorsement of bibliotherapy by LCSW respondents in the study is similar to that of respondents from other disciplines represented in previous studies of this type. However, specific hypotheses regarding usage patterns related to gender, practice experience, and employment settings that are supported in other studies were not corroborated in this study. With the notable exception of younger social workers using bibliotherapy more than older social workers, the findings suggest that patterns of usage among LCSWs are more evenly distributed between males and females. Bibliotherapy has been proven to be a viable and effective adjunct in clinical settings. As with other practice interventions, it is important that there is more empirical data to support its use and it is essential to learn more about its use within the profession. If more social workers are to use bibliotherapy, they will require access to the practical knowledge and resources of experienced colleagues.

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## APPENDIX

### BIBLIOTHERAPY RESOURCES ACCORDING TO AREA

#### Academic Problems/Concerns/Study Skills/Time Management

- Allen, D. (2001). *Getting things done: The art of stress-free productivity*. New York: Viking Press.
- Bradshaw, J. (1992). *Homecoming: Reclaiming and championing your inner child*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Buzan, T. (1991). *Use both sides of your brain* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Covey, S.R. (1990). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Flick, G.L. (1997). *ADD/ADHD behavior change resource kit: Ready to use strategies and activities for helping children with attention deficit disorder*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hallowell, E.M., & Ratey, J.J. (1995). *Driven to distraction: Recognizing and coping with attention deficit disorder from childhood through adulthood*. New York: Touchstone Books.
- Mooney, J., & Cole, D. (2000). *Learning outside the lines: Two Ivy League students with learning disabilities and ADHD give you the tools for academic success and educational revolution*. New York: Fireside Press.
- Radencich, M. C., Schumm, J. S., & Espeland, P. (Eds.). (1997). *How to help your child with homework: Every caring parent's guide to encouraging good study habits and ending the homework war*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Rechtschaffen, S. (1997). *Time shifting: Creating more time to enjoy your life*. New York: Doubleday.

#### ACoA/Codependence/Family Dysfunction

- Al Anon Family Group. (1988). *One day at a time in Al-Anon*. Houston, TX: Al Anon.
- Beattie, M. (1996). *Beyond codependency: And getting better all the time*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Information Education.
- Beattie, M. (1996). *Codependent no more: How to stop controlling others and start caring for yourself*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Information Education.
- Black, C.A. (1982). "My dad loves me, my dad has a disease:" A workbook for children of alcoholics (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Denver, CO: Medical Administration Company.
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- Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (1992). *Boundaries* (Rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Ellis, A., & Velten, E. (1998). *Optimal aging*. Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company.

- Friedan, B. (1994). *The fountain of age*. New York: Touchstone Books.
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- Friends in Recovery. (1996). *12 steps for adult children*. San Diego: Recovery Publications.
- Grollman, E.A., & Kosik, K.S. (1997). *When someone you love has Alzheimer's: The caregiver's journey*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
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- Leite, E., & Espeland, P. (1989). *Different like me: A book for teens who worry about their parent's use of alcohol/drugs*. Minneapolis, MN: Johnson Institute.
- Mace, N., & Rabins, P.V. (2001). *The 36 hour day* (Rev. ed.). New York: Warner Books.
- Manning, D. (1983). *When love gets tough: Making the nursing home decision*. Oklahoma City, OK: In Sight Books.
- Pipher, M. (2000). *Another country: Navigating the emotional terrain of our elders*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Silverstone, B. (1990). *You and your aging parent* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Vanvonderen, J. (1992). *Families where grace is in place*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Woititz, J.G. (1986). *Struggle for intimacy*. Pompano Beach, FL: Health Communications.
- Woititz, J.G. (1990). *Adult children of alcoholics*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.

### **ADD/ADHD**

- Gehret, J., & Covert, S. (1996). *Eagle eyes: A child's guide to paying attention*. New York: Verbal Images Press.
- Gordon, M. (1991). *Jumpin' Johnny get back to work! A child's guide to ADHD/hyperactivity*. New York: GSI Publications.

### **Adoption**

- Rosove, L. (2001). *Rosie's family: An adoption story*. Ontario: Asia Press.
- Schooler, J.E. (1993). *The whole life adoption book: Realistic advice for building a healthy adoptive family*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group.

### **Alcohol/Drug Problems**

- Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. (1991). *Alcoholics anonymous big book*. AA World Services.
- Carnes, P. (1989). *Gentle path through 12 steps*. Minneapolis, MN: Compcare Pub Audio.
- Ferguson, T. (1998). *The no-nag, no-guilt, do-it-your-own way guide to quitting smoking*. New York: Ballantine Books.
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- Toby D. (1989). *Getting them sober: You can help!* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Diego, CA: Recovery Communications.

### **Anger Management**

- Bosch, C.W., & Strecker, R. (1988). *Bully on the bus*. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.
- Boulden, J., & Boulden, J. (1994). *Push and shove: Bully and victim activity book*. Weaverville, CA: Boulden Publishing.
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### **Anxiety/Stress Management**

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- Wilson, P. (1999). *Instant calm: Over 100 easy-to-use techniques for relaxing mind and body*. New York: Plume.

### **Assertiveness/Social Skills**

- Davis, M., Eshelman, E., & McKay, M., (2000). *The relaxation & stress reduction workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Gabor, D. (1994). *Speaking your mind in 101 difficult situations*. New York: Fireside Press.
- Goldstein, A.P., & McGinnis, E. (2000). *Skillstreaming the elementary school child: New strategies and perspectives for teaching prosocial skills* (Rev. ed.). Champaign, IL: Research Press.
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- Smith, M.J. (1975). *When I say no, I feel guilty*. New York: Bantam Books.

### **Bipolar Disorder**

- Duke, P, Pinckert, M.L., & Hochman, G. (1993). *A brilliant madness: Living with manic-depressive illness*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Papolos, D., & Papolos J., (2002). *The bipolar child: The definitive and reassuring guide to childhood's most misunderstood disorder*. New York: Broadway Books.

### **Career Development/Job Search**

- Allon, J. (1999). *The business of bliss: How to profit from doing what you love*. New York: Hearst Books.
- Andrews, C. (1998). *The circle of simplicity: Return to the good life*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher.
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- Sinetar, M. (1989). *Do what you love and the money will follow: Discovering your right livelihood*. New York: Dell Publishing.

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- Capossela, C., Warnock, S., & Miller, S. (1995). *Share the care: How to organize a group to care for someone who is seriously ill*. New York: Fireside Press.
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- Mace, N.L., & Rabins, P.V. (2001). *The 36-hour day: A family guide to caring for persons with Alzheimer's disease, related dementing illnesses, and memory loss in later life* (Rev. ed.). New York: Warner Books.

### **Child Abuse/Healing**

- Bass, E., & Davis, L. (1994). *The courage to heal*. New York: Harper Perennial

### **Child Development**

- Ames, L.B., Ilg, F.L., Baker, S.M., & Haber, C.C. (1989). *Your ten to fourteen year old*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- Barkley, R.A. (2000). *Taking charge of ADHD* (Rev. ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Barkley, R.A., & Benton, C.M. (1998). *Your defiant child*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Dreikurs, R. (1991). *Children: The challenge*. New York: Plume.

### **Communication/Intimacy**

- Ailes, R. (1995). *You are the message*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S.L. (2001). *Fighting for your marriage: Positive steps for preventing divorce and preserving a lasting love, new and revised*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
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## **Social Work Practice Innovations: Helping Clients Understand, Explore, and Develop Their Friendships**

**Rich Furman  
Kathryn Collins  
Janet Swanson**

**Abstract:** *This article demonstrates the importance of helping clients understand, explore, and develop friendships in social work practice. The nature of friendships is explored. A cross-disciplinary analysis of the literature concerning friendships and their relationship to human health and functioning is discussed. Case examples illustrating the importance of friendships and examples of the conscious use of friendships as a target of intervention are provided.*

**Keywords:** *Friendship, social support, social work practice*

The importance of relationships as a crucial factor to human well being, growth, and change has been a central theme of social work practice and research (Krill, 1969; Saleebey, 2001; Shulman, 1984). Families are recognized as central to emotional health (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Janzen & Harris, 1997; Werner, 1987), while supportive communities have been shown to be of nearly equal importance (Homan, 1999; Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 1998; Weil & Gamble, 1995). While social work has done an admirable job of highlighting the necessity of family, community, and other social support relationships, the importance of friendships has been largely ignored in social work practice literature. This is lamentable since supportive friendships have been shown to be essential for psychosocial development (Clark & Ayers, 1991; Hartup, 1979, 1983 & 1989; Hutter, 2001; Linden, 2003; Roff, 1963), school and social functioning (Flannagan & Bradley, 1999), emotional health (Asher & Paquette, 2003), and lead to resiliency in many client populations (Berndt, 1989; Fraser, 1997; Miller & Fritz, 1998). As managed care and privatization have led to sharp decreases in the number and scope of services for many clients (Dorwart & Epstein, 1993; Dumont, 1996), social workers must rely on different types of natural social supports in helping restore clients to equilibrium and optimal functioning.

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Indiana University School of Social Work.

This paper demonstrates the importance of helping clients understand, explore, and develop friendships as social work practice intervention. This will be accomplished in three ways. First, the nature of the client's friendships will be explored. Second, a cross-disciplinary analysis of the literature concerning friendship and its relationship to human health and functioning will be discussed. Third, case examples illustrating the importance of friendships and examples of the conscious use of friendships as a target of intervention will be provided.

### **WHY IS FRIENDSHIP IMPORTANT IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE?**

In keeping with the profession of social work's unique and historic dual focus on person-in-environment, this paper advocates practices congruent with the ecological perspective. This perspective enables one to simultaneously focus on person and environment and their reciprocal relationship. According to Germain and Gitterman (1996), social work interventions that adhere to the ecological perspective recognize that causality in social work practice is reciprocal rather than linear in nature.

Beginning with the initial contact with a client, social work practitioners have the distinctive ability to help clients understand, explore, and develop friendships with individuals within their social environment in order to promote health and well being and to prevent and/or resolve psychosocial problems. For example, throughout the engagement and assessment process of working with individuals, families, groups, and communities, the concepts of friendships, interpersonal relationships, informal/formal networks, and social support should be explored with the client. This process helps the client begin to understand that facilitating friendships draws upon the strengths that exist within themselves and in their homes, schools, neighborhoods, work environments, and larger communities. Social workers already trained in tapping into the resources of family and community would be well served to increase their ability to help clients' understand and utilize friendships as a means of helping people meet their needs. Friendships help people learn about and validate themselves and provide the courage to face life's challenges.

### **THE NATURE OF FRIENDSHIPS**

In the United States today, nuclear family relationships are prized above all other social connections. The expression "blood is thicker than water" demonstrates the place of importance that such relationships hold. In spite of the centrality of the family, close friendships may often be as or more important to people's emotional well being than are families.

Merely defining the concept of friendship is a difficult task. White and White (1982) surveyed 300 adults age 18 to 82 years regarding friendships. They concluded that there is little clear agreement about the definition of friendship; so much depended on the experiences of participants *regarding* friendship itself. Based on their interviews, White and White developed a model of the attributes that form the building blocks of friendship. These include love, deep sharing, self-sacrifice, encouragement, stimulation, loyalty, and fun. Fox, Gibbs and

Auerbach's (1985) conceptualization of friendship was comprised of slightly different variables, including altruism (mutually helping each other), companionship (enjoying shared activity), and empathy (emotional closeness and sharing of feelings). In spite of the difficulties, definitions have been developed. Burk (1996) defines friendship as "a dynamic reciprocal relationships between two individuals" (p. 283). Wiseman (1996) defines friendships as voluntary relationships that exist primarily for personal satisfaction and enjoyment rather than the fulfillment of a particular task or goal.

In spite of the importance of friendships, they are very often undervalued in modern American society. The idiom, "we are just friends," aptly expresses a prevailing social sentiment regarding the importance of friendships (Rubin, 1985). Friendship is seen not only as qualitatively different from other types of relationships, but of less value. Research often disproves these social stereotypes. Blyth and Foster-Clark (1987) found that adolescent girls reported a same-sex friend as the most intimate relationship in their lives. Boys ranked friends third for intimacy after their parents. Relationships with siblings and other family members were consistently rated as less intimate than relationships with friends.

The nature of friendships change throughout the lifespan (Hymel, Wagner & Butler, 1990). For example, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) observed fourth graders reported that their parents were the most frequent providers of support, but seventh graders listed parents and friends as being equally supportive. By the tenth grade, friends were listed above parents for providing support. College students still listed friends as important providers of support, but they trailed just behind mothers and romantic partners. In an earlier study, Furman and Buhrmester (1985) found that fifth and sixth graders identified friends as the greatest source of companionship and ranked them equally with parents for intimacy.

Friendships are significant to many people, though they are viewed differently from familial relationships. Davidson and Duberman (1982) provide an explanation for the difference in perception between family and friends. They found that both men and women said they did not feel dependent on their friends, yet were often conflicted over dependency issues with families. Many participants recognized the impermanence of friendship relationships compared to family ties. They reported that as long as friends could be replaced, they would be satisfied.

Berndt, Hawkins and Hoyle (1986) found that intimacy—defined as a sharing of personal information—was identified by eighth grade girls as being important in their friendships. For both boys and girls, friendships characterized by high intimacy were the most stable. For adults, intimacy was found to predict the success of newly formed friendships. Those with intimate interactions after six weeks of meeting were more likely to develop close friendships. As the relationship continued, the closeness of the friendships depended on how intimate the interactions were and not on how much time the friends spent together (Hays, 1985).

Similarity and proximity also seem to be important aspects of forming and maintaining friendships. Hays (1985) discovered that the distance between where people resided was negatively correlated to the successful development of new

friendships. That is, the farther apart people lived, the less likely they were to effectively form a friendship. Nahemow and Lawton (1975) conducted a study in New York City public housing with a diverse mix of residents of various ages and races. The closer people lived to each other, the more likely they were to be friends. In fact, when asked to identify who their friends were, more than 80% of the respondents first named someone who lived in their building—often on the very same floor. Also, similar age and race were strongly associated with friendship development. Although some friends were of different ages and races, they always lived in the same building, so their proximity to each other seemed to mitigate those differences. Some did become friends with residents of other buildings, but only if they were the same race and were close in age. The authors subsequently theorized that people are likely to make friends with those who live close to them and reach out of their immediate space to make friends with others who are similar.

Verbrugge (1977) also discovered a relationship between similarities and the likelihood of developing friendships. He found that friends tended to be similar on such factors as age, occupation, education, and political and religious preferences. Indeed, both women and men reported sharing similar values with their friends and felt that having congruent values was important to their friendship relationships (Davidson & Duberman, 1982). Even children tend to be friends with those who are similar to them in terms of sex, race, and academic achievement (Tuma & Hallinan, 1979).

Researchers have sought to understand relationship dynamics that have an impact on children's friendships. It is important to note that these factors change depending upon children's age, pointing to the necessity of understanding friendship from a developmental perspective. For example, Berndt, Hawkins and Hoyle (1986) saw that competitive fourth grade friends were more stable and maintained their friendships longer than non-competitive friends, but the opposite was true for eighth graders. Seventh graders placed more importance on empathic understanding and less on mutual activities than third graders and felt that they received more empathy from their friends. As children mature, they move from competitive and activity-driven friendships to ones characterized by more emotional connectedness and intimacy. Differences were also apparent between the friendships of boys and girls. Boys were found to have larger social networks, whereas, girls were more likely to limit the size of their friendship group (Benenson, 1990; Berndt & Hoyle, 1985; Eder & Hallinan, 1978). Boys were more concerned with status among friends and described their peers in relation to their authority and achievements, while girls were concerned with affiliation and described their peers in terms of how nice and reciprocal they were (Benenson, 1990). Girls also expected more conventional morality (not lying or cheating), loyalty, and empathic understanding and perceived that they received more of those things in their friendships than boys. Despite those differences, both boys and girls had the same expectations and perceptions of mutual activities (Clark & Bittle, 1992).

The nature and structure of friendship relationships also differ by gender. The commonplace view of male friendships paints a picture of relationships that

often do not meet men's psychosocial needs. Buckner (2001) maintains that friendships between men are less intimate than are men's friendships with women or friendships between women. Elkins and Peterson (1993) discovered that men reported more satisfaction with their friendships with women than with men and had lower ideal standards for male-male friendships. It is argued that patriarchy contributes to male competitiveness, whereby, men become less likely to risk "the loss of power that closeness with another might create" (Rosen, 1999, p. 129). McAdams, Healy and Krause (1984) support this claim with their finding that men who were "power-motivated"—that is, seeking friendships in order to have influence over others—were much less likely to have dyadic (one-on-one) friendships. They tended to have more group interactions where the potential for power was greater. Men see each other more as playmates than sources of emotional support (Fox, et al., 1985). When asked to describe what is important in their friendships, men frequently emphasize shared activities (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Parker & de Vries, 1993; Sapadin, 1988). Male friendships tend to show less reciprocity (giving and receiving) than do women's (Parker & de Vries, 1993). Davidson and Duberman (1982) found that men related to each other primarily on a topical level, meaning that they discussed impersonal issues rather than talking about their relationship or other personal subjects.

Women's friendships, in contrast, are frequently characterized as expressive and intimate (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Fox, et al., 1985). Women place great significance on self-disclosure, empathic understanding, and connectedness in their friendships (Parker & deVries, 1993). Davidson and Packard (1981) asked women to discuss what aspects of their friendships were therapeutic for them by contributing to personal growth, support, or change. Factors such as reciprocal expression of feelings, altruism, and communion were rated as highly therapeutic. Sapadin (1988) found that women rated their same-sex friendships higher for overall quality, intimacy, enjoyment, and nurturance than did men and emphasized the interactions between friends rather than the activities. Although this may seem to imply that women's friendships are superior to men's, Davidson and Duberman (1982) discovered that men actually reported more trust in their friendships than women, possibly because conversations between male friends tended to be less personal and therefore less "risky." In a more recent study of adolescents with a relatively small sample, Benenson and Christakos (2003) found that female friendships may be of shorter duration. Clearly, more research is needed to clarify these discrepancies.

Despite these differences, both men and women identify some of the same factors as being important in their friendships. Parker and de Vries (1993) explored people's perceptions of friendships and what they valued most in those relationships. Both men and women rated trust and authenticity as the most important features in friendships. Sapadin (1988) also found similarities between men's and women's beliefs regarding friendship. Both sexes reported that sharing and enjoying each other's company are basic to friendships. When studying friendship development, Hays (1985) found that men and women were equally as likely to develop close friends after starting college. Although women may experience more intimacy with their friends, men are just as capable of forming new friendships. Men and women also report similar numbers of friends, similar amounts

of time spent with them, and place similar value on intimate friendships (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982).

### **THE IMPACT OF FRIENDSHIPS**

Research on resiliency has sought to identify factors that help an individual withstand stressful events. Resiliency factors prevent the psychosocial problems that social workers normally contend with in a remedial fashion. In her review of resiliency literature, Norman (2000) noted that having a positive relationship with at least one other person is the most important factor promoting resiliency throughout the life-span. Indeed, various studies have demonstrated the positive impact of social relationships on preventing psychosocial problems (Higgins, 1994; Rutter, 1979, 1987; Werner, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992; Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

While often conceptualized as internal attributes, resilience may actually stem from children's environments (Fraser, 1997). Specifically, research has demonstrated the importance of the ability to establish and maintain friendships in the lives of children (Higgins, 1994). Children who master the ability to make and maintain friendships have enormous advantages over peers without this ability. These environmental resources serve as a protective factor against various psychosocial risks. Being part of a social network was strongly related to overall peer acceptance, especially for boys (Benenson, 1990). According to Clark and Ayers (1988), middle school students with reciprocated friendships (meaning peers they identified as friends also identified them) were viewed as more successful and attractive by their peers. Caude (1986) looked at African-American seventh graders who came from families of low socioeconomic status. Those students who had an extensive social network displayed more social competence. Furthermore, in a study based on who children rely on when building a safety plan to avoid violence in their schools and neighborhoods, Collins (2001) found that children ages nine to 12 years stated that their friends often "stand up for them" or "protect them" from bullies.

Research has shown that supportive friendships serve as a protective factor during times of stress (Berndt, 1989). In fact, friendships might be more important to decreasing one's stress than familial relationships. Some people are more likely to discuss stressful events with friends than families, as family members often have more expectations and judgments than friends. For example, a person who is experiencing stress over no longer being happy with his or her current work situation is more likely to receive uncritical support from a friend who has less personally at stake than from a family member who is dependent upon that person for fiscal support. In addition, families are often the very issue about which one is experiencing stress, thus, necessitating alternative social supports. Dunn, Davies, O'Connor and Sturgess (2001) found that children who had experienced a parental separation reported more positive feelings about moving between two households if they had close friendships. Those who lived with a stepmother or who were involved in conflicts between their biological parents confided in friends more often than other children.

Friendships are valuable in meeting needs that have traditionally been met within the family. As family structures have changed in American society over



time, people often rely upon friendships to meet various psychosocial needs (Bell, 1981). Wright (1978) identified various social rewards that friendships can offer. First, a friend can be willing to help one meet needs and goals. Friends can affirm positive ideas about oneself while providing ego support—helping a friend see him or herself as a competent, worthwhile person. Friends can also introduce new ideas and experiences while expanding knowledge and perspectives.

Researchers have explored how friendships affect students' adjustment at school. Studies have shown that children and adolescents often exhibit behaviors that are similar to their friends—both positive and negative. Berndt and Keefe (1995) observed that as the school year progressed, students became more like their friends regarding disruption in class and grades. If a student had friends who were not disruptive and received good grades (or vice versa), he or she would tend to behave in a similar manner. Students themselves perceived that their level of disruption in school was similar to that of their friends. Friends who exhibit antisocial or deviant behavior are risk factors, while friends who are well socialized and "normatively conventional" are positive factors in development (Hartup & Stevens, 1997).

The quality of friendships may also affect students' adjustment. Seventh and eighth graders with "positive" friendships, characterized by self-disclosure, mutual helping, and faithfulness, tended to not only have more stable, long lasting friendships, but also showed desirable social behavior and good adjustment to school. They reported more acceptance by peers and higher self-esteem (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). In this study, students who viewed their friendships positively were rated by teachers and themselves as more involved in school. Even kindergartners tended to like school more when they perceived higher levels of aid from their friends. When boys perceived conflicts in their friendships, they showed more loneliness and avoidance and liked school less (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996). Seventh and eighth grade students who had conflict and rivalry in their friendships showed poorer adjustment to school and rated themselves as more disruptive and less involved (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). High school students with friendships high in hostility and low in reciprocity showed more delinquent behavior, alcohol use, and depression (Windle, 1994). Even for adults, those *with-out* close friendships may be vulnerable to feelings of dysphoria and loneliness (Elkins & Peterson, 1993; Williams & Solano, 1983).

### **THE PRACTICE OF HELPING CLIENTS UNDERSTAND, EXPLORE, AND DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS**

Norman (2000) asserts that helping clients develop resiliency factors allows social workers to implement the strengths perspective. The strengths based approach to social work practice has been growing in influence over the last several decades. Based upon the literature of resiliency, the strengths perspective challenges social workers to help people utilize their skills and competencies in overcoming life's problems. The strengths perspective does not deny the existence of problems, but asserts that maximizing the strengths and resources of individuals and groups is the best means of helping them overcome life's challenges. Saleebey (2001) describes the strengths perspective in the following way:

Practicing from a strengths orientation means that everything you do as a social worker (or therapist) will be predicated, in some way, on helping to discover and embellish, explore, and exploit clients' strengths and resources in the service of assisting them to achieve their goals, realize their dreams, and shed the irons of their own inhibitions and misgivings (p. 3).

Proponents of the strengths perspective recognize the importance of social supports found in communities. Cowger (1997) recognizes the importance of friendships in his strengths based assessment of clients. Workers are encouraged to explore the nature of clients' friendships, their ability to be understanding of and make sacrifices for friends, and their ability to make friends. By exploring clients' skills and resources pertaining to friendships, workers are able to help clients maximize their support and their ability to withstand life's pressures and problems.

In this section, case examples are presented in which friendships and friendship systems were a primary target of change. This does not imply that friendships were necessarily the *problem* but were utilized as solutions to various psychosocial stressors. Social workers can help clients meet various needs by helping them strengthen their friendship relationships.

#### Dan: Case Example One

Dan is a 37-year-old single male. He has worked as a computer repairperson for the last several years. Dan sought treatment for feeling isolated and depressed. He has been lonely much of the time and does not feel a sense of connectedness to others. During a previous course of treatment, Dan was placed on medication that decreased, but did not eliminate, his depression. He also was able to improve his relationships with his family of origin and joined a book club that increased his sense of connectedness to people. He also started to date a woman whom he saw about once a week. In spite of these changes, Dan still felt somewhat depressed. While his new social contacts were important, Dan longed for more meaningful and intimate friendships.

As a child, Dan was often lonely and sad. He had few friendships and was the youngest child in a distant, detached family. The friendships that he developed as a young man in college and in the Navy provided his first reprieve from the loneliness that he felt in his life until that time. During therapy he began to realize that the close friendship bonds that he experienced during these earlier years were the missing piece that he needed in order to feel a sense of wholeness. In spite of this realization, Dan was not certain how to go about making friends at this stage in his life or whether he wanted to do the work necessary to start a relationship. Dan was also deeply afraid of being hurt and rejected by others. Several years earlier, Dan attempted to start a friendship with a coworker at a previous place of employment. He and this other man began watching football together on Sundays and started to talk about their lives, pains, and dreams. Just as he and his new found friend were beginning to become close, his friend informed Dan that he was "strange" and did not want to be his friend anymore.

Developing meaningful and supportive friendships became a primary goal in therapy. One of the first early steps to help Dan work towards this goal was to

point out his strengths regarding forming relationships. Collaboratively, we developed an inventory of his strengths that included being able to talk to people easily, having interesting things to say, being able to talk about his feelings, having a history of making friends, being a loyal and kind person, and having a good sense of humor. Helping Dan recognize his strengths was instrumental in helping him become more invested in the process. By focusing on his strengths and not only his deficits, Dan began to perceive himself as more socially competent and less fearful of increasing his social contacts. Soon, Dan was able to ask a fellow member of his book club out for coffee. After meeting several times for coffee, Dan stated that he believed this man would become a friend. He reported feeling less isolated and more hopeful.

During his final three months of therapy, Dan was able to explore difficulties he experienced with reconnecting to friends. For example, Dan and the above mentioned new friend had an argument over which restaurant they would have dinner at. Dan gave in to his new friend's demands but felt mistreated and resentful. He believed that the friendship would soon be over and that he would go back to being alone. Collaboratively, we explored alternative meanings for the conflict. Dan decided that the struggle with his friend really was more about the both of them being afraid of intimacy even though it manifested as being about control. Addressing the issue with his new friend allowed both of them to develop a greater sense of trust in their relationships. Dan and his new friend learned that their friendship could survive conflict and that they could be closer for it.

#### Juanita: Case Example Two

Juanita, diagnosed with an explosive disorder and mild mental retardation, presented changes requiring a more direct, behaviorally oriented intervention. Juanita, a 17 year-old young woman, lived in a residential treatment center for troubled teens. She had been in placements of one kind or another for nearly six years. Diagnosed with intermittent explosive disorder and mild mental retardation, she became aggressive in school and ultimately at home. Her mother, who was addicted to cocaine, was not able to handle her. Juanita never knew her father. By the time she began treatment, her social network consisted solely of the staff in her group home. She was not able to make friends at her school and was thought to have very poor social skills.

Juanita possessed very negative views of friendships. She recalled a long history of experiences in group homes where other children would take advantage of her. She reported the story of a girl she knew in a prior group home who befriended her as a means of taking advantage of her. This girl "borrowed" money that she never repaid, took her belongings, and manipulated her into doing things that got her into trouble. In her mind, peers and friends led to trouble.

In spite of Juanita's negative feelings about friendship, she also desperately craved companionship from her peers. In therapy, we explored what healthy friendships were like. I utilized self-disclosure to help her believe in the possibility of healthy, supportive friendships. I also asked the counselors in the group home to talk about their friendship. Over the next two or three weeks, Juanita developed a sense of openness to the possibility of a friendship.

Asked if there were any people currently in her life that she would like to befriend, Juanita mentioned one girl in her class at school. She reported that while she enjoyed this girl's company at times, they would often quarrel and could not figure out how to get along. Juanita also mentioned that it was hard to really get to know the other girl in the confines of a highly structured school setting. With encouragement, Juanita decided that she would invite this girl (Amy) over for dinner during the weekend, when many of the other teens who lived at the group home were visiting with family.

I contacted the school social worker and found out that Amy lived in another group home a few miles away. Juanita called Amy and asked her if she would like to have dinner the following weekend. Amy said she would love to and that she and Juanita would discuss plans the following day. Juanita put me on the telephone, and I asked Amy if I could discuss arrangements and details with the social worker in the group home. I informed Amy that I wanted to learn enough about her and what she liked to help her and Juanita have a good experience. She agreed.

The following day I spoke with Amy's social worker, whom she saw for individual and group therapy. We discussed both girls' likes and dislikes, their strengths, and issues that might lead to conflict. We subsequently made specific travel arrangements. Later that night, Juanita informed me that she and Amy decided that they would like to have spaghetti and watch a movie about animals. Juanita and I also processed the conflicts that she and Amy had in advance and worked out ways of resolving potential disagreements. Before their evening together, I met with Juanita to discuss potential problems that could occur. She was most worried about not being able to share and compromise with Amy. We subsequently role played several scenarios, allowing Juanita to practice sharing and compromise. She was able to do this easily. I validated her good communication skills and helped her see that she indeed was able to do things she worried about not being able to do.

On the evening that Amy was to come over, I made plans to be in the group home but agreed to stay in the therapy room unless I was needed. The evening that Amy spent with Juanita went smoothly. They had one disagreement during which Juanita suggested they both come and speak to me. I was able to help them compromise in regard to what games they would play and when and helped them work on their negotiating skills. Amy and Juanita started to spend more time together at school, and subsequently spent one or two days a week together. Over time, Juanita began to learn that while friendships were often difficult and demanded hard work, they did not have to end in her being manipulated. Over time, her relationships with other children in the group home improved and she felt less isolated and depressed.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

We have highlighted some of the unique aspects of the importance of helping clients understand and develop friendships in their social network. Increasing research evidence suggests that individuals who have a sense of belonging within their social environment through the use of friendships have greater self-

esteem, stability, and well being. Consequently, social work practitioners should routinely inquire about a client's history of interpersonal relationships, their motivation to continue or develop ties with others as friends and supporters, and gain an understanding of how these relationships can benefit the client within current and future life situations.

Often times, the intervention of helping clients understand, explore, and develop friendships begins at the first meeting with the social worker. It is interesting that in just about every "pop culture" magazine the topic of "how to be or make a friend" is covered, yet social workers often forget the importance of exploring skills within the interventions we provide in our service to clients. Social workers teach clients how to network within their community to obtain appropriate services and resources, but often do not help clients find and develop intimate and supportive friendships outside of the social service or health systems. Social workers can provide role modeling through using the unique skills of engagement strategies such as empathic listening, attending, and being genuine with clients. The "therapy office" is the microcosm of the broader society. However, one must not confuse professional boundaries of the social support of the helping professional as friendship. Social workers realize that, as a helping professional, it is of no use to our client to also be their friend if we are to maintain a supportive, therapeutic alliance. Instead, we help to instill the skills of friendship through problem solving on how/where to find friendships, role play on how clients may engage potential friends or develop more meaningful relationships with friends, and develop skills on improving communication patterns.

Social workers can teach families how they can help children and young adults develop friendships. For example, parents/guardians may want to create a home environment that is attractive to their family member's social network by inviting classmates, church group members, or club members to the home for an informal or formal function. Families can identify local community places where children and young adults typically "hang out" and/or encourage youth to become involved in community groups and activities with their peers. This will provide repeated opportunities for children and young adults to become active and meet new peers. Just as social workers can review the process of developing friendships with adult clients, they can also use role-playing and problem solving for younger clients.

Social service agencies may consider creating connections among clients and between clients and community by implementing "club forums." Club forums are a way for community members to unite around particular issues or situations within the community. This helps to de-stigmatize and de-mystify the mission of social service agencies within the community while providing an opportunity for interpersonal relationships and friendships to develop through a process of mutual interest.

It is the hope of these authors that social worker practitioners and social work educators have been challenged and inspired by this article to further explore the ways in which friendships can help enrich the lives of our clients.

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