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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 12
Issue 2 *June*

Article 9

May 1985

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Recommended Citation

Merdinger, Joan M. (1985) "Professional Development of the BSW Student," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol12/iss2/9>

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BSW STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

In order to test the hypothesis that undergraduate social work students, over the course of two years, will move in the desired direction on scales measuring humanistic values and on scales measuring orientations to profession, client, agency or community, students in one BSW program were studied longitudinally. Forty-one students were tested in 1978 and in 1980. Students obtained significantly higher scores on a scale of humanistic values over the course of two years. Students scored higher on profession and client orientations and lower on agency orientation over the same period. Students manifested a strong career interest in social work education at the MSW level.*

As the country moves towards the right, following the movement established at the national level, researchers have found a similar trend among college students that appears to mirror the larger

scene. Levine (1981) has discussed the "death of altruism" as only one value change among the college students of the 1970s, in contrast to the students of the 1960s. Of more relevance to social work educators is a study by Koeske and Crouse (1981) which found increasing conservatism in beginning MSW students studied in 1979-1980 when compared with beginning MSW students studied in the same school in 1975.

This retreat to a more conservative stance, followed by a retreat in action towards people, mainly the poor, at the highest policy making levels may have caused Meinert (1980) to suggest that the profession of social work should "...eliminate values completely from public statements and emphasize only its knowledge and skill components...social work should be characterized as valueless" (p. 15). Although this point of view seems somewhat extreme, authors and researchers appear to be documenting a trend which must be taken seriously by any human service profession.

In order to understand conservatism, a definition of the concept itself is essential. Wilson (1973) discusses the conservative syndrome as including

...religious dogmatism, right-wing political orientation (in Western countries), militarism, ethnocentrism, intolerance of minority groups, authoritarianism, punitiveness, anti-hedonism, conformity, conventionality, superstition and opposition to scientific progress (p. 257).

Liberalism is usually viewed as the opposite of conservatism.

Depending on the era and the perspective of the writer, the profession of social work has been labeled

conservative or liberal. Cloward and Piven (1975), Galper (1975) and Pearson (1975), view the profession as conservative because it often supports the status quo. Alternatively, the value base of the profession of social work, as articulated by Boehm (1959), can be considered liberal because it upholds the belief in self-actualization, equal opportunity and social responsibility, the antithesis of conservatism. The disagreement about liberalism or conservatism of the profession does not appear at the abstract level of the definition of the values themselves, but when and how the values are put into practice.

If, however, values influence the ways in which social workers practice, it seems essential to educate beginning social workers into the humanistic values espoused by the profession. Pumphrey (1959) states:

It seems axiomatic that if social work is a heavily value-laden profession, its values also must be communicated to new recruits, and understood and accepted by them in their efforts to develop into bona fide professional representatives. If there are typical or required ways of behaving, a new social worker must be familiar with them and exemplify them. Social work educators have followed general professional precedent in declaring this to be one of the desired results of professional education (p. 12).

Despite the fact that Koeske and Crouse (1981) found entering MSW students to have become more conservative than their predecessors, a critical issue is that of outcome. Do social work students, despite the conservative beliefs they may hold when they begin a program, move in the desired direction due to the socializing process of their social work education? With the

growth in numbers of BSW programs and the limited research on such students, it is important to know if BSW programs are socializing their students into humane beliefs about clients, and the way they, as social workers, operate as professionals.

Socialization theory indicates that several issues may be important in imparting values to new recruits. According to Merton (1968), manifest, or overt values, which are stressed in a socializing experience may be more quickly and obviously accepted than latent, or covert, values. Wheeler (1966) suggests that the intensity and the group nature of the experience result in more intensive socializing experiences.

Although there is some conflict in the values literature in social work about what changes and what does not, Cryns (1977) has found differences between male and female students, and undergraduate and graduate students. Orten (1981) has found differences in attitude position and intensity. In addition to the important issue of socializing BSW students into a humanistic belief system characteristic of social work, Bloom (1969) stresses the need for students to develop a professional identity. Other authors, notably Cloward and Piven (1975) and Galper (1975) identify the conservatizing influences of professional social work education, the most important being the creation of professionalism. Most authors would probably agree, however, that a commitment to the servicing of clients needs to be held paramount.

Some important questions still need answering, however, about students at different levels, particularly at the BSW level. With over three times the number of accredited undergraduate to graduate programs, considerably more information is

needed about these first level professionals. Is their undergraduate education moving them towards a more humane belief system about clients, or is their education having no effect? Or, are they becoming more conservative in their views toward their clients, mirroring the movement of MSW students? Are these students committed to the profession or to a particular bureaucracy? What are the plans they are making for the future? Are they planning on leaving the profession or do they intend to remain committed to further professionalization through obtaining an MSW degree?

THE SAMPLE

The sample for this research was made up of the class of 1980 in one accredited BSW program in an Eastern state college. Data collection took place in October 1978, at the beginning of the junior year and again in May 1980, at the conclusion of the senior year. Forty-one students, 65% of the class, participated in both data collections, from a class numbering 63. When a follow-up was conducted in 1980, 59 of 63 students participated. There were no significant differences between students tested on one or both occasions.

The class was made up of 51 women and 12 men. Thirty-two women and nine men participated in the research on both occasions. The average age of the graduating class was 25, with the youngest and oldest students being 20 and 47, respectively. Over half the class reported that their parents' income was under \$15,000 yearly. Most students had had no social work experience prior to the field placements.

Although students in this sample resemble students in other BSW programs in 1980, the findings of this study cannot be

generalized because the program studied is not representative of all other undergraduate social work programs.

MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

The first instrument used in this study, the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale, designed by Wrightsman (1964) to quantify an individual's belief in human nature and human motivation, consists of six subscales: (1) trustworthiness, (2) will, (3) altruism, (4) independence, (5) complexity, and (6) variability. Scores on the 14 item subscales range from +3 (strongly agree) to -3 (strongly disagree) with no midpoint score. The scores were changed to range from 1 to 6, producing a subscale score ranging from 14 to 84, the lower scores reflecting a negative view of human nature, the higher scores, a more positive view. Test-retest reliability coefficients for the six subscales ranged from .52 to .84 for the college sample tested by Wrightsman. The scale has construct validity and has been highly correlated with other scales measuring similar concepts related to human nature.

The second instrument, Anderson's (1965) Public Dependency Scale with 16 items scored from 0 to 5, and total scoring ranging from 0 to 80, measures attitudes towards recipients of public assistance. A split-half test of reliability produced a correlation coefficient of .94 with a college sample used by Anderson. The scale appears to have concurrent validity because of its differentiation between positive and negative views held by selected populations towards welfare recipients.

The third instrument, Billingsley's (1964) conflict scale, asks respondents to select between sets of competing norms: (1) client needs vs. agency policy, (2) client needs vs. professional standards,

(3) client needs vs. community expectations, (4) agency policy vs. professional standards, (5) agency policy vs. community expectations, and (6) professional standards vs. community expectations. No tests for reliability or validity have been conducted on this test, although it has been shown to differentiate between BSW graduates and non-BSW college graduates.

The fourth instrument, developed by Corwin (1960) and modified by Dyer (1977) for social workers, consists of three subscales, rated from 1 to 5, measuring attitudes towards professionalism, bureaucracy and service to clients. This scale and the Angrist Scale (1971-1972) were employed only during the second data collection.

The last instrument, Angrist's (1971-1972) Life Style Index, consists of selected questions related to future educational and occupational plans. The questionnaire concludes with plans for further social work education and expected positions students wished to obtain in the future, such as caseworker, supervisor or administrator.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 indicated that students scored significantly higher as seniors on three of the values on the Wrightsman Philosophies of Human Nature Scale; trust ($t = -3.06$, $p < .004$), altruism ($t = -3.78$, $p < .001$) and independence ($t = -4.23$, $p < .001$). On one other value, will, change was also in a positive direction although it did not reach significance ($t = -1.92$, $p < .06$). No significant difference was found on the Anderson Scale of Public Dependency between junior and senior years.

Table 1

Comparison of Junior (Jr.) and Senior (Sr.) scores on the Wrightsman Philosophies of Human Nature Scale and the Anderson Public Dependency Scale using t-tests (N=41)

Wrightsman Items	Pairs	Mean	S.D.	t
TRUST	Jr.	53.46	9.07	-3.06 ^b
	Sr.	57.49	9.79	
WILL	Jr.	52.93	6.77	-1.92*
	Sr.	54.90	7.65	
ALTRUISM	Jr.	51.49	8.27	-3.78 ^a
	Sr.	56.95	9.52	
INDEPENDENCE	Jr.	50.61	9.07	-4.23 ^a
	Sr.	56.27	8.56	
COMPLEXITY	Jr.	49.68	10.22	-0.66
	Sr.	50.56	9.18	
VARIABILITY	Jr.	61.97	6.87	-1.25
	Sr.	63.24	7.77	
Anderson Scale				
PUBLIC DEPENDENCY	Jr.	58.95	11.07	1.28
	Sr.	57.34	12.68	

^a significant at $p < .001$

^b significant at $p < .01$

* near significance at $p < .06$

Over the course of two years, students were most likely to move in the desired direction when asked to choose between clients, profession, agency and community, as defined by Billingsley. Students were more likely to move in the direction of profession and clients and away from agency. This indicated a growing commitment to clients and to the profession of social work and a decreased commitment to bureaucracies.

Subscale scores indicated student commitment in the following order: (1) profession, (2) client, (3) community, and (4) agency. Over the course of two years students scored higher on profession and client commitment, showed no change on community commitment, and moved to a lower commitment to agency (see Table 2).

Table 2

Scores in 1978 and 1980 on Billingsley Subscales (N=41)

	1978		1980	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Profession	2.29	.87	2.92	1.27
Client	1.51	1.34	1.87	1.17
Community	1.36	1.37	1.31	1.31
Agency	1.29	.93	.83	.95

Findings on the Corwin Scale, which also measured commitment to profession, bureaucracy, and client-service, indicated the strength of commitment to clients and profession with a lower commitment to bureaucracy. (see Table 3)

Table 3

Scores Received by Seniors on the Corwin Scale, 1980
(N=59)

	Mean	S.D.
Agency	2.47	.52
Profession	3.43	.38
Client-Service	3.68	.52

A strong interest in careers was demonstrated by nearly all graduates on the modified Angrist scale. With a school age child, and a working spouse, 90% of students expected to work. When presented with a hypothetical situation of being able to work for interest rather than necessity, over 90% preferred to work. Although more wanted to work part-time (50.9%) than full-time (40.7%), this indicated the importance of careers to these students. In fifteen years, 75.4% of the group expected to be married with a career and children.

Ninety percent reported an interest in a social work career, 90% planned to obtain an MSW degree with 52% expecting to attend an MSW program within two years after graduation (see Table 4).

Table 4
Responses to Social Work Career and MSW Degree

	SOCIAL WORK CAREER		MSW DEGREE	
	N	%	N	%
DEFINITELY	37	62.7%	27	45.8%
PROBABLY	17	28.8%	15	25.4%
UNCERTAIN	3	5.1%	0	
PROBABLY WILL NOT	1	1.7%	10	16.9%
DEFINITELY WILL NOT	1	1.7%	2	3.4%
NO RESPONSE	0		5	8.5%
	59	100.0%	59	100.0%

Seventy-one percent reported an interest in a casework position, 50% reported an interest in supervision, and only 45.8% indicated an interest in administration (see Table 5).

Table 5

	Career Interests					
	CASEWORK		SUPERVISION		ADMINISTRATION	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
VERY STRONGLY	19	32.2%	11	19.0%	8	13.6%
STRONGLY	23	39.0%	18	31.0%	19	32.2%
PROBABLY NOT	15	25.4%	27	46.6%	30	50.8%
DEFINITELY NOT	2	3.4%	2	3.4%	2	3.4%
	59	100.0%	58	100.0%	59	100.0%

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Significant differences appeared when the 1978 and 1980 scores on the Wrightsman Philosophies of Human Nature Scale were compared. Seniors scored significantly higher than they had as juniors on (1) trust, "...the extent to which people are seen as moral, honest and reliable," (2) altruism, "...the extent of unselfishness, sincere sympathy and concern for others present in people," and (3) independence, "...the extent to which a person can maintain his convictions in the face of society's pressures toward conformity." Students also scored more favorably on (4) will, "...the extent to which people understand the motives behind their behavior and the extent to which they have control over their own outcomes," (p. 744) although this was not significant.

Despite the fact that these values did not appear to be particularly manifest in the undergraduate social work curriculum to which these students were exposed, it appeared that the combination of class work and field experience influenced and reinforced these beliefs about human nature, in this particular cohort of students, in the desired direction. Thus, the seniors viewed human nature more positively than they had as juniors. This

finding appeared to underscore Wheeler's (1966) comments on socialization in organizational settings:

Collective patterns may make a more positive contribution under certain circumstances. If initial commitment to the organization and its recruits is high, the peer group may be harnessed as an aid in socialization, thus intensifying the effects of the formal socialization program (p. 64).

Consequently, when students are committed to getting a degree in social work, as this cohort was, the students themselves can reinforce both manifest and latent values of the profession, although the more latent values may take longer to be demonstrated.

A study by Hepworth and Shumway (1976) which found changes in open-mindedness of MSW students during the second year of study further reinforces this theory. They report:

The manifest growth in open-mindedness during the second year may be attributed in part to changes in the climate of learning, reflected by a more flexible second year curriculum, an increasing practice focus, and greater student receptivity to learning. With respect to the latter, it is common knowledge that first year students in all professions manifest a higher level of anxiety and insecurity than do students in later phases of training (p.60).

The concept of a two year process, focused on the individual learner, as outlined by Bloom (1969), appears to explain changes not only in MSW students, but BSW students as well, as seen in these findings.

Not to be overlooked is the contribution that the undergraduate derives from being a college student. Morrill (1980) points out that

There is, then, a core of values that higher education in a pluralistic society must recognize and foster... Therefore, in addition to truth, strengthened commitments to tolerance, equality, respect for self and others, integrity, freedom, justice and compassion assuredly are worthy goals of any education. These are among the primary conditions for cooperative life among persons in a democracy. They are the demands of civilized life in our time and place, and their development and practice are of enduring importance (p. 130).

Additionally, Perry (1970) notes the movement of students, during their college years to a position of "commitment" where identity is affirmed. Thus it appears that a BSW experience, combining a professional education with a college education, moved this selected group of students in the direction of a more positive view of human nature.

Merdinger (1982) has indicated that initial courses in a BSW major may have the greatest impact on values stressed in the curriculum, while later courses seem to reinforce choice of a major and the earlier value changes. In light of this, it was not surprising that significant differences failed to appear on the Anderson Scale of Public Dependency. Students, as juniors in 1978, received high scores on this scale and as seniors in 1980, their scores were nearly identical. Although Sharwell (1974) found differences between a group of beginning and graduating MSW students followed longitudinally, BSW programs socialize students over the course of three

or four years. Additionally, the scores reported by Sharwell for the graduating MSWs in his study were similar to the scores reported in this research for students in both junior and senior years. It appeared from the data reported that attitudes towards people who are poor were influenced prior to the junior year in the BSW program and remained quite positive. This explains the lack of change in this particular value dimension. What is important, however, is the continued commitment to a positive attitude towards the poor over a two year period.

Students in this study appeared to be moving to a stronger commitment to the profession of social work and to clients, as evidenced by the higher scores they received, on these items, as seniors. At the same time, their commitment to a bureaucratic stance was diminishing. Given the concern in the social work literature about the bureaucratic or professional orientation of BSWs, particularly as noted by Dyer (1977), these reported findings indicate that a selected group of BSW students had been socialized into a growing belief in the importance of both client and profession. In addition, these students indicated a very strong interest in making social work a career and going on for further professional education at the MSW level, another indicator of increasing identification with the profession.

Although commitment to the profession can be seen as positive, it could also be argued that the professionalism of students has negative consequences for their clients. Thus, as Galper (1975) argues, professionalism increases the power and prestige of the social worker, to the disadvantage of the client. Although Levin (1982) argues against this, by way of a historical critique, it is important to note that there are both advantages and

disadvantages to professionalism. Epstein (1970) points out that a professional orientation coupled with an agency orientation is conservatizing, but when coupled with a client orientation it is radicalizing. Epstein (1970) concludes, "Thus the critical question for social work is not whether to become more professional or not, but rather in whose interest we are going to use our professional commitment and expertise" (p.92). Because the students in this sample moved towards both a professional and a client orientation, at the same time, it is possible to conclude that the socializing process was moving the students in the desired direction.

Results of the life style index indicated that these graduating seniors were strongly committed to careers, indicating that they expected to marry, work and have children. Even when presented with a hypothetical situation of an income in the home sufficient to preclude working, almost all of the respondents planned to work. Apparently, the majority of these students, most of them women, expect that they will spend much of their adult lives working, an increasingly common phenomenon, according to Bird (1979). And, their expectations is that they will remain in social work and pursue another degree. Over 90% of the respondents planned not only a career in social work, but in continued education as well. This percentage is somewhat higher than Dyer's (1977) findings in his study of agency employees with BSW degrees. It is possible that student status reinforces the idea of continued education more than a work environment. Further research following graduation needs to be done to determine if the students do, indeed, remain in social work and obtain MSW degrees.

In conclusion, although generalizations should not be made from these findings about all undergraduates in BSW programs, for the class of 1980, in the one accredited BSW program studied, students moved in the desired direction on humanistic values, commitment to the profession and commitment to clients. Only further study with this class will indicate if the current pattern, attributable to professional socialization and the general college experience will continue after graduation. This research also suggests that BSWs are not moving towards conservative positions but that they are maintaining a commitment to articulated value positions of the profession and are becoming stronger in those value commitments and to the profession itself.

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*The author wishes to thank the Rhode Island College Faculty Research Committee for Faculty Research funds used to employ Carol Martin as a research assistant for preparation and coding of the data.

This is a revision of a paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, New York, New York, March 9, 1982.

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