



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 31

Issue 1 March - Special Issue on Restorative
Justice and Responsive Regulation

Article 18

March 2004

Review of *Addiction Treatment: A Strengths Perspective*.

**Katherine van Wormer & Diane Rae Davis. Reviewed by Mike
Gorman.**

Mike Gorman

San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Clinical and Medical Social Work Commons, Social Work Commons, and the Substance Abuse and Addiction Commons

Recommended Citation

Gorman, Mike (2004) "Review of *Addiction Treatment: A Strengths Perspective*. Katherine van Wormer & Diane Rae Davis. Reviewed by Mike Gorman.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol31/iss1/18>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

secondary one, or to provide background for preparing classes, as a university professor, I find this a valuable book and suggest that others teaching health courses will find it so.

Deborah Schild Wilkinson
University of Michigan

Van Wormer, Katherine and Davis, Diane Rae, *Addiction Treatment A Strength's Perspective*, Pacific Grove, CA: Thomson Brooks Cole, 2003. \$ 51.92 papercover.

In this recently published work, Katherine van Wormer, Professor of Social Work, University of Northern Iowa and Diane Rae Davis, Associate Professor of Social Work, Eastern Washington University offer their readers an exhaustive and comprehensive Cook's tour of the why's, wherefores and whereby's of addiction treatment from a strengths (including but not limited to social work) perspective. The book is a must read for social workers and other allied health and substance abuse treatment professionals and provides refreshing and insightful vignettes and anecdotes from both authors' professional and personal lives. It is full of history and facts, and the authors take the bio-psycho-social ecological framework very seriously in their effort to situate current addiction treatment in its appropriate context.

The book is divided into four parts: Part I offers an Introduction which encompasses chapters on the nature of addiction, historical perspectives and strength's based helping strategies while Part II, on the biology of addiction, consists of two chapters; these deal respectively with substance misuse, dependence and the body and interventions related to the biological nature of substance abuse among Native Americans. Part III addresses the psychology of addiction with chapters on addiction across the lifespan, eating disorders, gambling, shopping and other behavioral addictions and substance use with a coexisting disorder or disability. Part IV provides an overview of the social aspects of addiction, including chapters on family risks and resiliencies, racial, ethnic and cultural issues, gender and sexual orientation differences, mutual help groups, and public policy.

In short, the book is remarkably wide ranging and comprehensive and if there are any downsides it may be that, for some

readers, the book offers too much detail on too wide a spectrum of issues. This reader, however, came away with a sense that the book makes a major contribution to substance abuse treatment generally and in particular to the (much needed) field of social work practice in the field of addictions. This is an area of social work practice, research and policy that many believe has been woefully ignored by mainstream social work. Indeed, given that *NO* area of contemporary social work practice can ignore substance abuse in its many permutations, it is surprising that such a book has not appeared sooner. But, the fact of the matter is that it has not, and Professors van Wormer and Davis are to be congratulated on their effort which represents a milestone in this reader's opinion.

The authors set the tone for the book in their very first sentence by informing their readers:

"On the surface, our application of the strengths perspective to the field of addiction treatment marks a dramatic departure from the past. Our notion of reinforcing strengths in a self-directed program of harm reduction is seemingly a more extreme departure still. And yet the tone of the writing is intended to be conciliatory rather than adversarial; the focus is "building upon" rather than "tearing down". (p. 1)

To their credit, van Wormer and Davis take the proverbial bull by the horns and come out of the closet at the onset with their explicit support of a harm reduction perspective. This is refreshing and yet their arguments are so well defended and referenced one could not help but be persuaded by their many examples and insightful vignettes. It is interesting to note that both women likewise have had extensive personal and clinical experiences with "substance abuse" and the book provides sensitive and appropriate insights in terms of their own process and their commitment to understanding this critically important area of practice.

What else can one say? With respect to strengths, the book is well researched, and comprehensive, although more attention, not surprisingly, is given to some areas than others. This reader especially appreciated the authors' historical perspective, their clear and sympathetic articulation of harm reduction, their inclusion

of a section on biology (the oft forgotten part of the bio-psycho-social equation) and their inclusion of lifespan considerations, an area seldom adequately addressed in the literature. The inclusion of the “new” addictions, such as eating disorders, gambling, shopping and sex are also appreciated as are their discussions of gender, racial, ethnic and sexual orientation perspectives. With regard to limitations, such as they are, at times the book felt a bit too chocked full with almost too many examples and there were chapters when it seemed as though the authors weren’t sure who the audience is—practitioners? students? policy wonks? Some chapters had exercises for readers, while others did not so that on occasion the reader experienced a certain (minor) confusion as to what the intent was. But, at the end of the day, the richness of the book must be recognized for its important contributions. Thank you Katherine and Diane for a significant effort.

Mike Gorman

San Jose State University