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## Introduction to the Special Issue: Mind-Body Interventions in Social Work Practice

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# Introduction to the Special Issue: Mind-Body Interventions in Social Work Practice

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This special issue resulted from a series of conversations between the two guest editors related to social work practice and the growing field of mind-body interventions in society. Over the course of two years, we met to share information on new materials we had been exploring or new fields in which we were being trained. Dr. Unrau became certified in Integrative Restorative (iRest)® Yoga Nidra. She offered social work continuing education trainings by blending the iRest philosophy and techniques that Dr. McCormick attended and found compelling. Dr. Unrau also offered individual iRest sessions to Dr. McCormick, which Dr. McCormick found to be incredibly helpful and sometimes akin to spiritual experiences.

One of the biggest questions that came out of our discussions and explorations over the two years of discussion concerned the limits of talk therapy or cognitively-oriented problem-solving approaches with people who have trauma histories. We began to wonder what other approaches offer a different type of healing to people living with trauma, since trauma is frequently stored in the body. These explorations, experiences, and conversations resulted in this special issue of the *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*. Our call for papers for

this special issue brought us many submissions on the topic area, and we have selected those we found most appropriate for this issue.

The special issue begins with an article that we have been crafting for some time, which is the culmination of our engagement with our questions and recent scholarship in the field. Our paper offers a new framework from the meditation field for social workers to bring to their practices—a method of engagement with clients through the bodies in which we all live. One clear message that comes out of our work is that social workers need to acknowledge and listen to their own bodies in order to be fully engaged and optimal practitioners. Another message we take away from our work is that we also need to pay attention to the other body experiences in the room—those of our clients.

We have outlined an approach called the "environment within person," which we offer as a tool for assessment and intervention with clients who live with trauma residue or symptoms. The application of this approach allows practitioners to integrate the client's felt-sense experience in the present moment and then tailor responses to meet the client in that moment. By responding in this manner, we have a greater chance of meeting clients where they are at and address feelings or thoughts in a way that helps them choose well given their current life situations.

Following our article, Heather Pizzanello explores the curative potential of yoga for women who struggle with anorexia. Pizzanello's qualitative research has found that women have experienced a different sense of embodiment through their practice of yoga, as well as experiencing empowerment, awe at the power of their bodies, and an authentic sense of self. Given the lethality of anorexia nervosa, these findings are compelling, and they may serve to highlight new treatments for people who suffer from the condition.

Following this article, Amy Smoyer unpacks her research on offering trauma-informed yoga to women with substance use disorders. Smoyer presents and evaluates a process of introducing yoga to low-income women through the auspices of a community human services agency. One of the goals of this

project was to ascertain whether yoga offered by a person who was not a certified yoga instructor, but who had limited yoga training, was feasible and/or helpful for both agencies and the low-income women who interact with them. This is an interesting exploration of an attempt to offer the benefits of yoga practice to women who would not usually be able to access the practice. It also offers some insights for agencies that may wish to attempt to replicate Smoyer's work, since the women who participated ultimately found the yoga interventions helpful in terms of relaxation, mindfulness, and body movement.

From these qualitative papers, we move to a systematic review of yoga in incarcerated settings by Alexandra Wimberly and Jia Xue. The authors did extensive research on yoga interventions in order to determine if yoga was effective with this population. Although they found that the interventions showed some promise, there were several methodological issues within the research that make generalizations inadvisable. They do conclude, however, that yoga interventions in incarcerated settings demonstrate many positive outcomes, and they offer suggestions for future research.

Finally, we have included a research note on mindfulness-based interventions on college and university campuses by several graduate social work students, Kaley J. Cieslak, Lehanna E. Hardy, Natalie S. Kyles, Erika L. Miller, Becky L. Mullins, Katelyn M. Root, and Christina M. Smith. They collected data on student mental health interventions offered by colleges and universities, and they note the increasing use of mindfulness-based interventions to address student mental health. They present information on universities and colleges and the mental health interventions they offer to help people deal with life stress as a way of providing readers with a succinct resource guide of mental health interventions at North American colleges and universities.

We would like to thank all of those who submitted their work for this special issue and allowed us to read about the work being done in this area. Our hope is that this collection is able to spark more conversation and thought about bringing body awareness, as well as body-oriented knowledge and skill, more fully into social work practice as a way to support clients to experience healing and post-traumatic growth.