REFERENCES

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WHO WANTS TO WORK WITH THE POOR AND HOMELESS?

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This study examines factors associated with MSW students' (N=5,793) desires to work with the poor and homeless over the course of their education. Independent variable classes include (1) sociodemographic characteristics; (2) ideological beliefs as they relate to politics; (3) past social work–related experiences; (4) motivations for pursuing a graduate degree in social work; and, (5) field work experience and school attended. Findings show that sociodemographic variables are the least stable predictors of students' interest in working with the poor and homeless, whereas ideological beliefs and personal motivations appear as the most noteworthy influences upon students' desires to work with this population.

THERE IS A RICH HISTORY of debate regarding the defining features of the social work profession. Within the last 20 years this debate is exemplified within three general areas of examination or concern within the literature. These areas include (1) the examination or questioning of a believed migration of graduate-educated social workers away from the public sector in search of prestige in private practice (Reisch & Wenocur, 1986; Rubin & Johnson, 1984); (2) debate regarding the extent and nature to which social work is truly altruistic (Getzel, 1983; Kurland, 1982); and (3) accusations that practice and educational trends are representative of social work abandoning its "traditional" practice base or "mission" of service to the poor (Specht & Courtney, 1994; Reeser & Epstein, 1987) because of workers' desires to practice with economically affluent and highly motivated clients (Falck, 1984; O'Connor, Dalgleish, &

Khan, 1984; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Katz, 1982). The steady increase of National Association of Social Workers (NASW) members engaged in private practice over the last 20 years (Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, 1997; Kelley & Alexander, 1985; NASW, 1983; Wallace, 1982) coupled with the prominence of psychotherapy/clinical methods as preferred modes of intervention taught in many graduate schools throughout the United States have provided plenty of fuel for the above debates. Although there are no national data on the background or class status of all clients served by social workers, some suggest the lack of professionally educated social workers in public welfare offices suggests a lack of desire to work with the poor and homeless (Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Wyers, 1981). Other writers argue that these trends were a natural outgrowth of neo-conservative welfare policies (in the 1970s and 1980s) and federal

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legislation—most notably the enactment of Title XX of the Social Security Act in 1974. This legislation mandated the separation and division of income maintenance and poverty relief efforts from other service-based functions and encouraged the de-professionalization of poverty relief services (Beck, 1971; Dobelstein, 1985; Dressel, Waters, Sweat, Clayton, & Chandler-Clayton, 1988; Fabricant, 1985; Getzel, 1983; Groulx, 1983).

However the debate is conceptualized, there have been conflicting opinions and research findings regarding these issues. Regardless, the above-noted debates beg the following questions. First, what influences (market and otherwise) have shaped the career choices of professional social workers? Second, to what extent does professional training shape and direct the career choices of professional social workers, especially an interest in working with the poor? These issues need to be examined from a variety of points or perspectives that attempt to incorporate a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the various influences that affect career choice.

If schools of social work are guided by mission statements shaped, in whole or part, by an interest in serving the poor, a profile of the factors associated with students' interest in working with these populations may help guide recruitment and curriculum development activities for these schools. Paralleling the abatement of discussion in the literature over the last several years regarding the mission of the profession, few efforts have attempted to further knowledge about the career interests of social work students and the in-

fluences shaping these interests. What is lacking in the literature are longitudinal panel studies of graduate student (or employed worker, for that matter) attitudes and practices which use reliable scales developed from a multidimensional understanding of professional identity constructs in terms of one's desire to engage in specific practices with specific populations in specific venues. This paper presents findings from a longitudinal study that examines the influences upon MSW students' interest in working with the poor and homeless.

Method

Study Design and Sampling Procedure

Data were collected through a survey instrument distributed to five parallel samples. The cohorts consisted of all entering full- and part-time graduate students in California between 1992 and 1996 who responded to a Time 1 survey and all California graduate students exiting a program between 1994 and 1998. This latter cohort responded to the Time 2 survey. These groups of students are aggregated together for analysis. This study represents a longitudinal pre–posttest panel design. Given that no identifying information, such as name or address of the respondent, was ascertained, cases are matched using a unique code developed by each respondent, in conjunction with information regarding the school they attended and other demographic information (e.g., sex of student) solicited in the questionnaire at both application periods. The parallel samples permit an examination of the stability of predictive factors likely associated with MSW

students' interest toward working with poor and homeless populations.

Given the extensive time frame between applications of the survey instrument (2 years for full-time students and 3 or 4 years for part-time students), attrition exists in the number of students volunteering to complete the post-program questionnaire in comparison to those completing the pre-program questionnaire. Attrition is a limitation for this study. An attempt to control this limitation is made with the creation of four variables generated from a latent index of a probit model measuring the probability that a case responded versus did not respond to the Time 1 or Time 2 survey. Two variables known to impact upon response rates were used to generate probability estimates: respondent status as either a full- or part-time student and the school each respondent attended.

Given that students who received the Time 2 survey in any particular year may have entered and completed the Time 1 survey in different years (this information is ascertained in the Time 2 survey), a definitive response rate and panel attrition rate can be determined when cases are sorted and matched. Table 1 details the distribution of survey responses according to year of entry into graduate school. Table 1 further denotes whether respondents completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys (and subsequently can be included in panel analyses), only the Time 1 survey, or only the Time 2 survey.

The response rate to the study was high across individual cohort years, which is to say if respondents returned at least one survey while a graduate student. A total of 1,631 MSW students or 28.16% of the total number of independent cases ($n=5,793$) included in this study completed both the Time 1 and Time 2 survey instruments. A total of 3,048 (52.61%) cases completed the Time 1 survey but not the Time 2 survey. Further, an addi-

TABLE 1. Distribution of Survey Responses According to Year of Entry Into Graduate School by Cohort Year

Year of Entry	Cases Incl. in Panel Analyses	Cases With Time 1 Data Only	Cases With Time 2 Data Only	Total No. of Study Subjects	Total Population of Cases by Entry Year	% of Population Responding to Survey at Least Once
1992	266	680	181	1,127	1,260	89.44
1993	292	644	204	1,140	1,231	92.61
1994	331	609	277	1,217	1,229	99.02
1995	364	519	260	1,143	1,339	85.36
1996	378	596	192	1,166	1,354	86.12
Total	1,631	3,048	1,114	5,793	6,413	90.33

Note. Sources for population statistics (estimates) include: Lennon, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997. These figures are based on data collected on students upon entry into graduate studies. These figures do not reflect population attrition due to dropouts, transfers, etc. In addition, isolated schools in isolated years failed to provide information to CSWE regarding admissions. When admission figures from CSWE publications were not available, population estimates were obtained from the school in question or from an average of the available data related to the years of this study.

tional 1,114 (19.23%) cases completed the Time 2 survey but not the Time 1 survey. In total, 90.33% of all MSW students responded to either one or both of the survey instruments distributed. Please note, the representative nature of the group of students who entered in 1996 may grow in subsequent years. Many part-time students who entered in 1996 are not included in this study because they completed their studies in 1999 or would do so after the analyses were completed. Further, because the students sampled for this study were from California, caution should be exercised when generalizing findings to students enrolled in schools of social work elsewhere in the United States. Inferences derived from analyses and made in this paper apply to the population of students enrolled in California schools of social work during the study period.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used for this study was developed by Bart Grossman and Tony Santangelo of the University of California at Berkeley. An attempt was made in the construction of the questionnaire to adapt items from prior studies in order to facilitate comparison with earlier findings. Santangelo (1993) notes that questions meant to provide a demographic profile of students, as well as describe their attitudes toward the poor and the causes of poverty, were adapted from Golden, Pins, and Jones (1972) and Reeser and Epstein (1990). Questions meant to examine student motivations for pursuing social work were adapted from Abell and McDonell (1990). Questions related to career interests and appeal ratings for working with specific

clients and case situations were adapted from Rubin and Johnson (1984), Rubin, Johnson, and DeWeaver (1986), and Butler (1990). This last set of questions is of primary interest for the purpose of developing practice preference constructs used in this study.

Development of Practice Preference Constructs

Scales were developed from a factor analysis of 31 individual items that attempt to examine the desirability and level of appeal of each respondent (when considering future job roles and possibilities) to work in specific fields of practice and with specific client groups or case situations. Students were asked (while considering future employment opportunities) to rate their level of appeal to work with 21 client group types and 10 fields of practice on an ordinal Likert-type scale from 1 to 7 (where 1=low appeal and 7=high appeal). An aggregate sample of five independent student cohorts of entering students from 1992 through 1996 (the cohorts of principal interest for this study) was used for the factor analysis. Principal component extraction and an orthogonal rotation using the varimax method was used for the generation of factors that serve as scales. Results of this factor analysis are detailed elsewhere (see Perry, 1999, 2001). For the purposes of this analysis, one identified construct contained three items that measured students' desire to work with homeless families, homeless adults, and people in poverty needing resources. The factor loadings for these items were .88, .86, and .68 respectively with a factor eigen value of 1.67. Given that an orthogonal solution was obtained for the data matrix, it appears

there is considerable variation in the preferred methods (casework, client advocacy, counseling, etc.) of those interested in working with the poor and homeless populations.

Treating this factor as a separate scale (and dependent variable for analyses), respondents' scores on this scale were summed and subsequently treated as interval-level data. When treated as a scale that measures respondents' levels of interest (while considering future job opportunities and career interests) in working with the poor and homeless, the Cronbach's alpha ratings across cohort samples of entering students between 1992 and 1996 range from a low of $\alpha=.82$ to a high of $\alpha=.85$.

Independent Variables. There are five classes of independent variables in this study. They include variables related to (1) sociodemographic characteristics; (2) ideological beliefs as they relate to politics; (3) past social work–related experiences; (4) motivations for pursuing a graduate degree in social work; and (5) field work experiences and school attended. Given that some cases have missing data on some of the independent variables at one point in time, dummy variables were created to measure the extent to which cases with versus without a measurement on any independent variable differ in terms of their desire to work with the poor and homeless (the dependent variable). The dummy variable is a nominally classified variable of 1/0, where a case does/does not have a missing value with respect to each independent variable under question. Should the coefficient on the dummy variable be statistically significant (at $p<.05$), this serves as an indication that the effect (coefficient) of the

related independent variable on the dependent variable is possibly biased.

Sociodemographic Variables and Political Ideology. Information regarding sociodemographic characteristics was collected at Time 1 and Time 2. These variables include respondent age, sex, race or ethnicity, relationship status, educational status (full- or part-time), and socioeconomic status while growing up (self-identified as low-, middle-, or upper-income/class). Student "relationship status" has been reclassified as "relationship history" for analysis. Given that the majority of students indicated that they are "single never married" (53.50% at Time 1), these students are compared with other students who are or have been married, or are currently in a domestic partnership. Unfortunately, this classification does not capture those students who have been—but are not currently in—a domestic partnership. Insofar as this variable attempts to gauge the extent to which being in a committed domestic relationship influences one's career goals, those individuals who have been in a domestic partnership in the past and have never been married are counted among those who are single and have never been in a committed domestic relationship. This variable was included because the author hypothesized that family or relationship commitments (or the lack thereof) may influence career goals and employment options. For example, should it be known (or learned over the course of their education) that pay varies across certain service sectors, perhaps some students may be drawn to work in a higher paying sector if they have a financially dependent partner.

Sex of student was identified as 1/0 in accordance with whether students identified themselves as male or female. With respect to socioeconomic status during upbringing, those respondents who reported having been raised in a middle-class family were used for baseline comparisons. Those from middle-class backgrounds were the modal group. Identification with a political ideology was classified as a binary variable 1/0 in accordance with whether a student identified him or herself as liberal or left-wing progressive versus right-wing conservative or moderate.

Past Social Work–Related Experiences. Respondents were first asked whether they had any social work experience in the 5 years prior to entering graduate school. If they indicated social work experience, respondents were asked whether it was in seven work-setting categories: public welfare (eligibility/income maintenance, adult protective services), medical social work (including public health), community mental health, public child welfare, nonprofit child or family agency (including residential), senior services, or other categories not listed. The number of months of experience in each work setting over the past 5 years was determined and each respondent was asked which of the work experiences had made the greatest impact on their views of social work.

Motivations for Pursuing an MSW Degree. Information regarding motivations for pursuing a graduate degree in social work was collected at Time 1 and Time 2. Here, a nominally classified binary variable was used that measured whether or not (1/0) each of the seven motivators were an important factor in a student's decision to pursue an MSW. These motivations include

a. A desire to increase my potential for promotion/job advancement
b. The MSW is a logical extension of my BSW
c. A desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations
d. The occupational versatility of a social work degree
e. Social work offers the greatest opportunity for self-expression and personal growth
f. A desire to prepare myself for private practice
g. Through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society

Although the importance of each motivator is examined separately, respondents were asked to rank which of the seven fixed choices was the most important motivator in their decision to get an MSW. Here, a set of seven (nominally classified) mutually exclusive and exhaustive variables were created to indicate whether or not (1/0) each respondent rated a motivator as most important. Those who rated the general motivation to make "an important contribution to individuals and society" as most important were excluded for baseline comparisons (this was the modal choice among respondents at Time 1 and Time 2).

School Attended and Field Work Experiences. A nominally classified mutually exclusive and exhaustive set of variables was created to measure the impact of the school attended upon student interest in working with the poor and homeless. Students attending the University of California at Berkeley

were excluded from models and used for baseline comparisons.

Finally, a set of variables was created to collect information regarding each respondent's field work experiences. This information was collected in the survey of all exiting students at the end of each academic year. Although students were asked to identify only one group (among 21) that best represented those serviced, a number of students identified more than one group. A group combination category was created for these students. Population groups were condensed or reclassified into nine groups for analyses. These groups and the individual items comprising each include

- Child welfare populations: abused and neglected children, abusive parents, and people who want to adopt a child.
- Emotional, marital, or family problems: people with marital or family problems, people who are depressed and college students in emotional crisis, and clients with a turbulent adolescence.
- The aged and those with varied disabilities: the aged, the physically disabled, the developmentally disabled, and the chronically mentally disabled.
- Criminal justice populations: adult criminal offenders and juvenile status offenders.
- The poor: homeless families, homeless adults, people in poverty needing linkage to community resources, and teenage mothers with limited resources.
- People with AIDS: adults with AIDS and children with AIDS.
- Alcohol or substance abusers.
- People receiving health care services

(other than AIDS-related).
- Combination of above.

Ten fields of practice that were the primary focus of students' field work agencies were reduced into five principal groups for analyses. These groups and the individual items comprising each include

- Therapy/counseling: counseling, family/marital therapy, group work, and psychotherapy.
- Casework/advocacy: casework/case management and client advocacy.
- Policy/administration: administration and program/policy design.
- Protective services.
- Combination of above.

Model Development

Due to an abundance of missing data on individual items comprising the dependent variable, a total of 41 cases (or 0.71% of 5,793) were excluded from analyses. Thus, the final study sample size is $N=5,752$. As noted earlier, developed models need to control for sample attrition and differences between respondents who could be matched versus those who could not be matched (but in the broader cohort). Attempts were made to maximize the number of cases used to produce model estimates. The model-building involved the following steps:

Step 1. The creation of two variables (based on the school the respondent was enrolled in and her/his status as either a full- or part-time student) with expected values generated from a latent index of a

probit measuring the probability that a case responded versus did not respond to the Time 1 survey. The school attended and students' status as either a full-time or part-time student were known to impact upon response rates.

Step 2. The creation of two variables with expected values generated from a latent index of a probit measuring the probability that a case responded versus didn't respond to the Time 2 survey given the school the respondent was enrolled in and their status as either a full-time or part-time student (two variables known to impact upon response rates). The above procedures were adapted from Heckman (1979).

The newly created variables developed in step one and step two are used in the final models to attempt to correct sample selection bias. Each variable is applied to the respective mathematical expression representing each case's situation (i.e., did they respond only to the first survey, only to the second survey, or to both surveys) as denoted below in step four. The inclusion of these variables in the final model serves to control for the probability that a particular case did or did not return one of the surveys. This corrects possible sample selection bias due to missing data (Heckman, 1979).

Step 3. The use of a series of main-effect multiple regression models (using ordinary least squares estimates) that measure the impact of all independent variables on the dependent variable

(practice preference score) at Time 1 and Time 2 separately. The results from these analyses aid in the construction of final models that are more parsimonious. Should a variable demonstrate an insignificant effect upon the dependent variable during these preliminary multiple regression runs, it was excluded from the final models that intend to generate maximum likelihood estimates of independent variable effects on the dependent variable.

Step 4. The development of final (stochastic) models that use a log likelihood function for the entire sample of cases that responded to either the Time 1 or Time 2 survey or to both. This function is formed by summing the products of all the expressions for the likelihood for all individuals belonging to one of the three subsamples of cases. These subsamples include those respondents who only completed the Time 1 survey, those who only completed the Time 2 survey, and those who responded to both the Time 1 and Time 2 surveys. To accommodate those cases who responded to both the Time 1 and Time 2 survey, a bivariate density function was incorporated into the log likelihood function. For greater detail regarding the development and specification of these functions, see Perry (1999).

It is important for the reader to note that the final model does not substitute variable values for cases that did not participate in the study at one point in time. These methods/ models are commonly used within the field of

economics (Greene, 1993; Maddala, 1977). The final model represents an attempt to maximize the use of available data for generating coefficient (effect) estimates without substituting values for missing data at one point in time while controlling for the probability that a case belonged to one of three response groups (using data known to be related to response rates). Here, maximum likelihood estimation procedures are preferred (see Greene, 1993). In essence, the coefficient associated with each variable represents the cumulative measurement of a variable's influence upon the dependent variable for cases that responded to the survey at both times and on one occasion (either at the start or upon the completion of studies) while controlling for selection bias. Greater detail regarding model development and specification is contained in Perry (1999). The final model is a dynamic model as it can measure the influence of the same variables upon the dependent variable over time (if significant effects were noted in preliminary regression models). With the panel data, a specific independent variable's influence upon a student's interest toward working with the poor and homeless (the dependent variable) upon graduation is gauged while controlling for the effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variable at the start of their studies (i.e., controls for auto-correlation are made). Limdep, an econometric software package, was used for the above analyses. A key feature of this software is the cessation of data iterations when statistical assumptions (e.g., Gauss Markov assumptions for the above models) are not met.

Findings

In this section, results generated from the successful run of the final model denoted in the previous section will be reviewed. The findings in this section intend to address all the principal research questions for this study. As noted earlier, there is particular interest in constructing a comparative profile of the impact that select independent variables have on the desire and appeal of respondents to work with the poor and homeless.

Although separate tables have been constructed for different classes of independent variables, findings (coefficients related to specific independent variable effects) in one table (for each dependent variable) were not generated in isolation of other independent variable effects. As noted earlier, a dummy variable was created to accompany all variables (however classified) or variable groups (that were a mutually exclusive and exhaustive set). Unless otherwise noted in any table, the absence of data related to the coefficient on the missing data variable means no significant differences (in the dependent variable score) were observed between cases with missing data versus the omitted variable during multiple regression runs or in the computation of final effect estimates. Further, the absence of a specific variable or data in any table cell indicates that the variable (for that time period) was excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the dependent variable score during preliminary multiple regression runs. Subsequently, that variable was not considered for the final model used to produce maximum likelihood effect estimates.

Sociodemographic Influences. African American students (compared with all other students) were significantly more interested in working with the poor and homeless at the start of their studies ($\beta_{before}=0.98$, $p<.001$). However, this difference was nonexistent upon graduation (see Table 2). Although those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (compared with those from middle-class backgrounds) expressed a significantly greater desire to work with the poor which was maintained over the course of their graduate education ($\beta_{before}=0.64$, $p<.001$; $\beta_{after}=0.27$, $p=.049$), the magnitude of this difference lessened over time by over 50%. Those from upper-class backgrounds were significantly less likely than those from middle-class backgrounds to want to work with the poor at the start of graduate studies ($\beta_{before}=-0.31$, $p=.021$). However, the differences observed at the end of their studies were not significant ($\beta_{after}=-0.18$, $p=.29$). The political ideology that students identified with seemed to influence their desire to work with the poor and

TABLE 2. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Independent Sociodemographic Variable Effects on the Poverty Practice Preference Scores of MSW Students Over the Course of Their Education

Variables	Upon Entry Into Program β (standard error, P [| Z | ≥z])		Upon Exit From Program β (standard error, P [| Z | ≥z])	
Constant (α)	10.91	$(.37, p<.001)$	10.27	$(.73, p<.001)$
Age			0.03	$(.01, p<.001)$
Missing age			1.16	$(.58, p=.04)$
African American*	0.98	$(.15, p<.001)$		
Low socioeconomic	0.64	$(.11, p<.001)$	0.27	$(.15, p=.049)$
Middle socioeconomic		Variable excluded from model.		
High socioeconomic	-0.31	$(.13, p=.021)$	-0.18	$(.17, p=.29)$
Relationship			0.22	$(.13, p=.09)$
Relationship history			2.23	$(.62, p<.001)$
Political ideology	0.56	$(.09, p<.001)$	0.45	$(.12, p<.001)$
Missing ideology	0.13	$(.21, p=.54)$		

Note. Standard error of the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is 3.10 and 2.98, respectively. The correlation between the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is $\rho=.472$. The absence of any variable or data in any table cell indicates that the variable (for that time period) was excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the poverty practice preference scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs. A dummy variable was created to accompany all interval-level variables or groups of variables that were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Unless otherwise noted the absence of data related to the coefficient on the missing data variable means no significant differences (in the dependent variable score) were observed between cases with versus without missing data during multiple regression runs or in the computation of final effect estimates. In this situation, the cases with missing data do not differ from those cases belonging to the group excluded from the model (and whose effect on the dependent variable is contained in the constant) in order to compute maximum likelihood estimates.

* Race/ethnic group variables were collapsed into one variable (African American/Not African American) given that no other ethnic group variable (for both time periods) demonstrated a significant influence on the dependent variable using multiple regression procedures.

homeless. Here, those who identified themselves as left-wing progressive or liberal (grouped together for analyses) were significantly more interested in working with the poor than those who identified themselves as right-wing conservative or moderate (grouped together for analyses), both before (β_{before}=0.56, p<.001) and after (β_{after}=0.45, p<.001) the completion of their studies.

Two variables that did not seem to affect the scores on student interests in working with the poor at the start of their studies did or approximated a significant impact on scores relative to their interest in working with the poor at the end of their studies. These variables included the student's age and relationship history. Here, age demonstrated a positive influence upon a student's interest toward working with the poor (β_{after}=0.03, p<.001). However, as noted in Table 2, the beta coefficient on age is negatively biased. Here, those who failed to report their age were significantly more likely than those that reported their age to want to work with the poor. Further, those who are currently or have been married or in a domestic partnership scored higher (although not significantly higher) in their desire to work with the poor and homeless. This effect is negatively biased and may or may not be significant if data from missing cases were considered ($\beta_{missing\ data}$=2.23, p<.001).

Over the course of a student's graduate education, sociodemographic variables lose their power as predictive influences over the student's desire to work with the poor and homeless. African Americans are disproportionately represented among impoverished groups in California and the United States

(Dalaker & Naifeh, 1998; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1998; Fay, 1995). Perhaps African Americans identify more with working with the poor than other groups (e.g., Caucasions) who are less likely to be disproportionately poor in the United States. Yet, these effects are erased or significantly reduced over the course of student professional education. Perhaps maturation, market demands, professional education/training, or a combination thereof enhanced this movement toward homogeneity of interest between groups of students. Upon exit from MSW programs, there is greater similarity of interest among varied sociodemographic groups in terms of their interest in working with the poor and homeless.

Professional Motivations

Every motivator rated as important for pursuing an MSW had a significant positive or negative influence on students' desires to work with the poor at the start of their studies (see Table 3). Students motivated by job promotion and advancement goals (β_{before}= -0.36, p<.01), the occupational versatility of the MSW degree (β_{before}=-0.50, p=.01), a desire to prepare for private practice (β_{before}= -0.23, p=.02), and a desire to make an important contribution to individuals and society (β_{before}=-0.74, p=.005) were significantly less likely to be interested in working with the poor than those who ranked these motivations as unimportant in their decision to pursue an MSW. Those students who perceived the MSW as a logical extension of the BSW (β_{before}=0.29, p=.004), those who perceived graduate studies as an opportunity for self-expression and personal growth (β_{before}=0.41, p<.001), and

TABLE 3. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Independent Motivation and Past Experience Variable Effects on the Poverty Practice Preference Scores of MSW Students Over the Course of Their Education

Variables	Upon Entry Into Program β (standard error, P [|Z|≥z])		Upon Exit From Program β (standard error, P [|Z|≥z])	
Constant (α)	16.70	(.58, $p<.001$)	18.26	(.75, $p<.001$)
Whether following motivator rated as important in decision to pursue an MSW:				
Job promotion/advancement	-0.36	(.14, $p<.01$)		
The MSW was a logical extension of the BSW	0.29	(.10, $p=.004$)		
To serve economically disadvantaged populations	2.35	(.14, $p<.001$)	2.05	(.14, $p<.001$)
The occupational versatility of a social work degree	-0.50	(.20, $p=.01$)	-0.71	(.23, $p=.002$)
For self-expression and personal growth	0.41	(.12, $p<.001$)	0.52	(.13, $p<.001$)
A desire to prepare for private practice	-0.23	(.10, $p=.02$)	-0.54	(.12, $p<.001$)
To make an important contribution to individuals and society	-0.74	(.26, $p=.005$)		
Motivator ranked as most important in decision to pursue an MSW:				
Job promotion	-1.28	(.17, $p<.001$)	-0.95	(.20, $p<.0001$)
Extension of BSW	-0.90	(.39, $p=.02$)	-1.19	(.45, $p=.008$)
To work with the poor	Variable excluded from model.			
Occupational versatility	-1.28	(.17, $p<.001$)	-0.79	(.21, $p<.001$)
Self-expression	-1.04	(.22, $p<.001$)	-0.89	(.33, $p<.01$)
Private practice	-1.84	(.24, $p<.001$)	-1.42	(.31, $p<.001$)
Contribute to society	-0.66	(.15, $p<.001$)	-0.40	(.20, $p=.05$)
Missing data	-0.92	(.23, $p<.001$)	-0.27	(.28, $p=.32$)
Number of months (in 5 years prior to graduate school) working in:				
Community mental health	0.01	(.01, $p=.02$)	Not collected at Time 2.	
	-0.10	(.09, $p=.27$)		

Note. Standard error of the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is 3.10 and 2.98 respectively. The correlation between the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is $\rho=.472$. The absence of any variable or data in any table cell indicates that the variable (for that time period) was excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the poverty practice preference scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs. Past practice variables excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the poverty practice preference scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs include the number of months of past practice experience in public welfare, medical social work, senior services, public child welfare, nonprofit child and family service agencies, and other social work–related field work.

those who were motivated by a desire to serve economically disadvantaged populations (β_{before}=2.35, $p<.001$) were more likely to be interested in working with the poor that those who ranked these motivations as unimportant in their decision to pursue an MSW.

The motivation to serve economically disadvantaged populations is synonymous with the dependent variable measure. Indeed, those who ranked their motivation to serve economically disadvantaged populations as the greatest influence upon their decision to pursue an MSW scored significantly higher in their desire to work with the poor and homeless than all other respondents who ranked other motivations more important. Therefore, it is not surprising that those motivated to serve the poor maintain a higher level of interest to work with the poor over the course of their education. However, what is surprising is the magnitude of the effect of the motivation to serve the poor on students' dependent variable score. Here, the effect size upon entry (β_{before}=2.35, $p<.001$) and exit (β_{after}=2.05, $p<.001$) from graduate studies represents approximately two thirds the size of the standard error of the dependent variable measured at both times ($\beta_{Time\ 1}$=3.10 and $\beta_{Time\ 2}$=2.98 respectively). Thus, the desire to serve economically disadvantaged populations accounts for less variation in students' desires to work with the poor than the desire to prepare for private practice has on the clinical practice preference scores (see Perry, 1999). These findings may serve as a fidelity check of the strength of importance associated with students' motivations to serve the poor as part of their desire to achieve an MSW. Many students may state they are motivated

to work with the poor, but are less likely to express an interest in doing so when homeless families and homeless adults are identified or included among impoverished populations (as the dependent variable suggests). Equally plausible, students' interests in working with the poor may be secondary (but still important) to an interest in a field that works with individuals from varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

The desire to prepare for private practice has a sustained negative impact on students' desires to work with the poor (β_{before}=-0.23, p=.02; β_{after}=-0.54, $p<.001$). These observations may reflect a realistic understanding of the market demands for social work services in these fields. The public sector has been the principal venue in which service (income maintenance and otherwise) is provided to the impoverished. As noted earlier, the importance assigned to the opportunity for self-expression and personal growth that social work was thought to afford students demonstrated a significant positive impact on students' interest in working with the poor and homeless over the course of their education. Although self-expression and personal growth may take many forms and be differentially defined among respondents, it appears one's personality or identification with problems or populations served in different fields may account for some of the variation in practice preference. However, given that the desire to make important contributions to individuals and society demonstrated a significant negative influence on students' desires to work with the poor (β_{before}=-0.74, p=.005)—the significant positive influence of self-expression and personal growth aims on

the dependent variable may also be interpreted as an indication of the limited extent to which altruism shapes respondents' desires to be professional social workers.

Past Practice Experiences

Apart from those with experience in community mental health (see Table 3), there were no differences in the level of interest toward working with the poor and homeless among those with experience in all other practice settings. Although the number of months in community mental health had a positive impact on respondents' desire to work with the poor at the start of their graduate studies (β_{before}=0.01, p=.02), those who stated their experiences in community mental health had the greatest influence on their views of social work did not differ in their desire to work with the poor from any other group of students influenced greatly by experiences in other fields. The likelihood of being exposed to impoverished and homeless populations in many community mental health agencies may help explain the significant positive impact that time in these settings has on one's desire to continue to work with these populations. However, those working in other settings (especially public welfare and public child welfare) might be equally or more likely to have worked with impoverished populations. In fact, when practice fields that had the greatest influence on respondent views of social work are cross-referenced against their clients' principal social class during this practice experience, the vast majority of respondents reported the modal socioeconomic class of clients to be low.

School Attended. The results detailed in Table 4 suggest that students from all schools do not differ that much in terms of their desire to work with the poor and homeless. At the start of graduate studies, students from California State University, Long Beach (β_{before}=0.83, p<.001) and from San Jose State University (β_{before}=0.59, p=.01) were the only groups that demonstrated a significantly higher level of interest toward working with the poor than students at the University of California at Berkeley. These effects were nullified at the end of their graduate studies. In fact, apart from students at CSU Stanislaus, there was remarkable similarity at Time 2 among students (statewide) in terms of their interest in working with the poor and homeless. Generally, schools recruited students who expressed fairly equal levels of interest toward working with the poor. This level of commonality may not be surprising given the seemingly universal statements by schools regarding their commitment to train practitioners to work with a multitude of populations (of which the poor are members) and a variety of problems using varied methods (California State University, Fresno, 1998; California State University, Long Beach, 1997; San Jose State University, 1998; University of California at Berkeley, 1998; Loma Linda University, 1995).

The Influence of Practice Training Experiences

Although those who worked principally with the poor and homeless during their placements scored significantly higher in their desire to do so as part of their career objectives, the magnitude of these differ-

ences was fairly small across placement years (see Table 5). In fact, among students in their 2nd-year field placements, no significant differences in interest toward working with the poor and homeless (as a career objective) were observed among those who principally worked with the poor and homeless, populations living with AIDS, and those with alcohol and substance abuse problems. These findings may suggest that students acknowledge that they are likely to encounter and work with impoverished populations across a wide variety of situations even though the principal presenting problem demanding attention (or focused upon by the service agency at which they are employed) is not the client's economic situation.

Of interest is the low level of significance in the relationship between principal methods used during field placement and the influence of this variable on whether students report an interest in working with the poor and homeless. Only students who engaged in policy/administrative functions during their 2nd-year placement were significantly less likely ($\beta_{Year\ 2}$=-0.41, p=.015) than those using any other method(s) to be interested in working with the poor. Those trained in casework and client advocacy, therapeutic techniques, and those that worked in protective services were equally likely to express the same level of interest in working with the poor. In this regard, these social workers are generalists in terms of methods they wish to use but specialists in terms of the populations with whom they wish to work.

TABLE 4. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Independent Variable Effects of School Attended on the Poverty Practice Preference Scores of MSW Students Over the Course of Their Education

Variables	Upon Entry Into Program β (standard error, P [| Z | ≥z])		Upon Exit from Program β (standard error, P [| Z | ≥z])	
San Diego State University	0.13	(.20, p=.53)	-0.02	(.25, p=.95)
CSU Long Beach	0.83	(.20, p<.001)	0.27	(.24, p=.26)
University of Southern California	-0.02	(.18, p=.90)	-0.001	(.22, p=.99)
UCLA	-0.06	(.22, p=.79)	-0.42	(.31, p=.19)
CSU San Bernardino	0.56	(.30, p=.07)	-0.03	(.38, p=.94)
CSU Fresno	0.37	(.26, p=.16)	0.17	(.31, p=.59)
San Jose State University	0.59	(.24, p=.01)	0.01	(.32, p=.97)
San Francisco State University	0.26	(.33, p=.44)	0.37	(.46, p=.41)
CSU Sacramento	0.41	(.21, p=.05)	0.39	(.24, p=.11)
Loma Linda University	-0.09	(.34, p=.78)	0.79	(.46, p=.09)
CSU Stanislaus	0.64	(.38, p=.09)	1.28	(.51, p=.01)
UC at Berkeley	Variable excluded from model.			

Note. Standard error of the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is 3.10 and 2.98, respectively. The correlation between the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is ρ=.472. Variables excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the dependent variable scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs include respondents status as full- or part-time students.

Discussion

Over the course of MSW students' education, there was a change in the type of sociodemographic variables that seemed to influence their interest in working with the poor and homeless. Where the ethnicity of respondent (whether or not they were African American) and their socioeconomic background significantly influenced their poverty practice preference scores at the start of their graduate studies, it appears (limitations noted) older students and those who have a history of relationship commitments are more interested in working with the poor and homeless upon the completion of their graduate studies. At first glance this might seem perplexing; the author expected older students in committed relationships to be *less* interested in working with the poor and homeless. This hypothesis was based upon an assumption

TABLE 5. Maximum Likelihood Estimates for Independent Practicum Variable Effects on the Poverty Practice Preference Score of MSW Students Over the Course of Their Education

Variables	With Respect to 1st-Year Placement β (standard error, P [| Z | $\geq$z])	With Respect to 2nd-Year Placement β (standard error, P [| Z | $\geq$z])
Principal population group served during practicum:		
Child welfare groups	-0.74 (.24, p=.002)	-0.94 (.26, p<.001)
Mental health populations	-1.05 (.25, p<.001)	-0.93 (.27, p<.001)
Aged/varied disabilities	-0.84 (.24, p<.001)	-0.91 (.28, p<.001)
Criminal justice populations	-1.32 (.37, p<.001)	-1.63 (.41, p<.001)
The poor and homeless	Variable excluded from model.	
People with AIDS	-0.95 (.43, p=.025)	-0.31 (.44, p=.48)
People with health problems	-1.13 (.28, p<.001)	-0.73 (.29, p=.01)
Alcohol and substance abusers	-1.26 (.34, p<.001)	-0.71 (.46, p=.12)
Combination of above	-0.68 (.54, p=.21)	-0.65 (.42, p=.13)
Missing population data	-1.06 (.46, p=.02)	-1.23 (.41, p=.003)
Principal field methods used during practicum:		
Policy/administration*		-0.41 (.17, p=.015)
Agency type (public/private)		0.41 (.12, p<.001)
Missing agency type data		0.96 (.38, p=.012)

Note. Standard error of the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is 3.10 and 2.98, respectively. The correlation between the dependent variable measured upon entry and exit is ρ=.472. The absence of data in any table cell indicates that the variable (for that time period) was excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the dependent variable scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs.

*Principal field methods used during practice training were collapsed into one variable (policy/administration versus not) given that no other field method group variable (for both time periods) demonstrated a significant influence on the dependent variable using multiple regression procedures. Other variables excluded from the final model due to insignificant effects on the dependent variable scores of respondents during preliminary multiple regression runs include general service type (i.e., direct/indirect practice).

that mature students would place greater emphasis upon salary and benefits when seeking and securing employment. Although no attempt was made to ascertain the salary respondents expected to receive during their first job following graduation, the author thought service jobs associated with the poor and homeless would pay less than employment in other service sectors (e.g., private mental health, corrections, etc.). The significant negative influence of job promotion/advancement motivations (see Table 3) upon student interest in working with the poor and homeless at the start of their graduate studies may support this position.

Conversely, this assumption may be incorrect. Although the number of months of experience in community mental health settings prior to entering graduate school positively influenced respondents' desires to work with the poor and homeless, there was no measured difference in this desire among students with experience in five additional work settings, namely public welfare, medical social work, public child welfare, nonprofit child or family agencies, and senior services. This may speak to the fact that the poor and homeless can be served across a myriad of service fields and service agencies with diverse salary structures. This interpretation is reinforced by the results of the initial factor analyses that suggested the three items (comprising the dependent variable in this paper) represent a distinct practice preference construct. The three items are population-focused. Subsequently, the desire to work with these populations was not overwhelmingly correlated with any field of practice or practice setting. Here, no one context for the

provision of service to these populations dominates the interest of those motivated to work with the poor and homeless following graduation. Schools of social work interested in preparing students for work with these marginalized populations might best serve students' career goals and market demand (if students' interests reflect market demand) with the provision of field placements and a curriculum that reflect the variety of contexts for which the poor and homeless are encountered.

These findings might also speak to differences between age cohorts. Perhaps the interests of older students in working with the poor and homeless did not change over the course of their education. Rather, younger students' interest in working with the poor may have waned over the course of their graduate education as they learned more about market opportunities in social work apart from those opportunities related to working with marginalized populations. Here, mature students' interests would be perceived as more stable than those of younger students (i.e., those with minimal or no practice experience). These thoughts, however, are merely the author's conjectures. Additional analysis and research is required to test the reliability of these findings and the influences upon them.

Regardless, sociodemographic variables appear to present an unstable influence upon respondents' interest in working with the poor and homeless. Subsequently, caution should be exercised if these variables are used as recruitment criteria for schools of social work that are interested in preparing MSWs for public sector employment with the poor.

However, a respondent's political ideological affiliation is an exception to this rule. Those who identified themselves as left-wing progressive or liberal were significantly more interested in working with the poor and homeless than those who identified themselves as right-wing conservative or moderate, both before and after the completion of their studies.

When the importance of different motivations for entering graduate school were examined, the "opportunity for self-expression and personal growth" was more likely to have a significant positive effect upon students' interest in working with the poor and homeless both before and after the completion of graduate studies than students' motivation to make "important contributions to individuals and society." In fact, the desire to make "important contributions to individuals and society" showed a significant negative effect upon students' interest in working with the poor and homeless at the start of their studies. These findings seem to corroborate Golden, Pins, and Jones' (1972) findings that personality or self-growth aims (as opposed to an identification with the goals of the profession) are the primary factors influencing the practice orientation of graduates of MSW programs. In addition, these findings raise questions regarding the extent to which altruism shapes students' desires to work with the poor or homeless.

Students who worked principally with the poor and homeless during their first practice training experience were significantly more interested in working with these groups than students who worked with other population groups. As noted earlier, this is not entirely surprising. Here, students are placed in settings with the populations they most want to work following graduation. However, these findings cast doubt on the suggestion that those students *most* interested in working with the poor and homeless can be found across a variety of service settings (including public child welfare, mental health and criminal justice settings). Findings presented in Table 5 suggest that students most interested in working with the poor and homeless have little interest in working with other populations. The opposite is true for those interested in working with mental health populations (see Perry, 1999).

This finding is tempered somewhat during students' second (and final) practice training experience. The increased commonality across schools of social work over time in terms of student interest in working with the poor and homeless (see Table 4) may account for the increased commonality of interest in working with the poor and homeless among students who worked with alcohol and substance abusers and with populations living with AIDS. Although alcoholism and substance abuse are problems frequently cited in conjunction with homelessness (and across socioeconomic groups), the author is unsure how to interpret this finding given the lack of information regarding the distribution of these populations according to their social class.

Conclusion

This study used statistical models seldom used with published survey data in social work research. While correcting for sample error and respondent attrition, the final, log-linear stochastic model produced

maximum likelihood estimates of a multitude of independent variable effects upon MSW students' interest in working with the poor and homeless.

Sociodemographic variables are the least stable predictors of student interest in working with the poor and homeless. Although the number of months of experience in community mental health settings prior to graduate school appeared to be positively linked to student interest in working with the poor and homeless, generally this interest was not influenced by past social work–related experiences nor the school attended. Yet those working primarily with the poor and homeless during their practice training were a distinct group that showed little interest in working with other populations (apart from substance abusers and those living with AIDS). Should schools of social work be concerned with recruiting students most interested in working with the poor, they are best directed to focus upon applicant political ideology and personal motivations for pursuing the Master of Social Work degree. Here, politically liberal or left-wing students who are motivated to work with the economically disadvantaged because of goals related to self-expression and personal growth (as opposed to altruistic reasons) are the best candidates.

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