



Comparisons Between Caucasian Students, Students of Color, and American Indian Students on their Views on Social Work's Traditional Mission, Career Motivations, and Practice Preferences

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COMPARISONS BETWEEN CAUCASIAN STUDENTS, STUDENTS OF COLOR, AND AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS ON THEIR VIEWS ON SOCIAL WORK'S TRADITIONAL MISSION, CAREER MOTIVATIONS, AND PRACTICE PREFERENCES

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Secondary data analysis of a California statewide sample of nearly 7,000 entering MSW students between 1991 and 1999 sought to find out whether MSW students are less motivated by social work's traditional mission of serving the poor and whether students of color are more motivated than Caucasian students by this mission. Results indicate that (1) MSW students are highly attracted to clinical practice but are simultaneously attracted to traditional, non-clinical domains of social work; and (2) they are least attracted to private practice and psychotherapy relative to other areas of social work. MSW students of color and Caucasian students are also generally more alike than different in professional philosophy; however, students of color, especially American Indians, express views more consistent with social work's traditional mission.

Social Work's Traditional Mission

WHATEVER THE SOCIAL or political climate, the profession of social work has historically accepted responsibility for attempting to improve the plight of the poor (Baggett, 1994; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Williams, 1990). Many within the social work profession (Bogo, Michalsk, Raphael, & Roberts, 1995; Falck, 1984; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994) define the traditional social work mission as (a) helping disadvantaged populations through interventions that address the conditions of the individual, and (b) improving social conditions through social action and reform. Reamer (1991) and Will-

iams (1990) propose that among human service professions, none can equal social work's traditional and consistent commitment to individual improvement, structural change, and social action on behalf of vulnerable populations. Specht and Courtney (1994) contend that social work has often been viewed as a vocation or "calling" to serve the disadvantaged in society, thus compensating for the disincentives of low pay and less-than-adequate working conditions experienced by many social workers.

Some maintain that the profession's involvement with the problems of poverty and the public sector appear to be steadily losing

ground. For example, Reeser and Epstein (1987) examined social workers' attitudes and values about poverty and social action from 1968 to 1984. They found that social workers in 1968 were more involved in direct services to the poor, placed greater emphasis on social policy and community organization, and favored more devotion of social work resources toward helping the poor as compared to workers in 1984. Further, they report that the workers surveyed in 1984 expressed stronger desires to be involved in psychotherapy and private practice—areas narrower than social work's traditional mission.

With regard to students, Cryns (1977) reported that students in graduate programs were more likely to attribute poverty to individual character flaws than were their undergraduate counterparts and expressed concern that social work education may be dimming student attitudes toward the poor. More recently, the assessment of social work student commitment to traditional social work values and disadvantaged populations has been a recurrent topic (Abell & McDonnell, 1990; Specht, 1991; Van Soest, 1996).

Upon graduation from an MSW program, public social services employment can often serve as a professional training ground where experience (licensure) is gained and wider professional contacts can be made in preparation for movement into the private sector or independent practice where the expectation may be higher pay and an easier clientele (Grosser & Block, 1983; Stevens, 1992). Although some public social service and private agencies serve the same clients, public social service agencies maintain almost exclusive

responsibility for the most poor and disadvantaged of society. Thus, helping students select the area of social work practice where they can best contribute professionally while keeping in mind social work's traditional mission is an important element for social work education. Such efforts can be improved by understanding student motivation for choosing social work as a career.

Student Practice Preferences and Motivations for Entering an MSW Program

The choice of social work as a career has been a topic of interest for the profession for many years (Kadushin, 1958; Merle, 1962). Gockel (1966) found that many social work students chose to pursue a career in social work because they were drawn by the opportunity to work with people. Golden, Pins, and Jones (1972) also found that students' belief that social work made a valuable contribution to society and individuals was an important factor in their decision to enter the profession.

The Lure of Private Practice

In the mid-1980s, Rubin and Johnson (1984) reported that 35% of their 257 MSW students indicated that the opportunity to do psychotherapy was the most appealing aspect of social work. Other careerist-oriented factors they found important were increasing employment options, autonomy, and potential for promotion. Butler (1990) surveyed 265 social work graduate students and found that while respondents expressed commitment to social work and a strong interest in its traditional mission, almost two thirds still chose to enter social work because it allowed them to

go into private practice. Similarly, Bogo, Raphael, and Roberts (1993) reported, in their study of 233 MSW students at the University of Toronto, that more students chose social work in order to enter private practice rather than community and policy development. Land (1987) states that the opportunity for financial gain offered by private practice has given rise to a growing number of students entering the field of social work.

One of the early discussions regarding social work's shift from its traditional mission to accepting (and often encouraging) students to enter private practice came over 40 years ago. In 1958, Beck, under the direction of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) stated, "The Commission on Social Work Practice sees the private practice of social work as falling within the present working definition of social work practice and views, therefore, NASW members who are self-employed and offering social work services as social work practitioners" (as quoted in Reamer, 1991, p. 99). On the other hand, in 1960, Rapoport argued that "Social work is a practice undertaken in a social agency. This classic definition puts practice within an institutional framework and specific setting. . . . For social workers, it is the agency which makes practice possible and which is the source of sanction or censure" (as quoted in Reamer, 1991, p. 99).

More recently, Specht (1991) stated that the major difference between social work and psychotherapy is that ". . . the social worker primarily helps the client to make use of social resources, whereas a psychotherapist is primarily concerned with changing the self (personality) of the patient" (p. 103). He warned

that training professionals to do psychotherapy in private practice further distances them from the problems, clients, and agencies social workers were intended to serve. Barker (1991), on the other hand, claimed that student attraction to private practice hinges on their desire for greater autonomy, independence, and control over the workplace environment and that schools of social work can provide the best preparation for successful practice.

Students of Color and Social Work

The rapid growth in the number of people of color in the general population has not generated a subsequent growth in the number of students of color in higher education settings. For example, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 1999) reported that MSW degrees awarded to students of color throughout the 1990s averaged around 18% and only 15% of doctorates in social work were awarded to students of color. Kadushin (1958) found that people of color ranked social work as having greater prestige than did their Caucasian counterparts, and Stevens (1992) reported that life experiences, attitudes about social justice, and baccalaureate degrees in social work combined to partially explain why students of color were interested in social work and disadvantaged populations.

The influence of race and ethnicity has been shown in social work research to be related to preferences for working with disadvantaged clients and commitment to public services (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Raber, Febb, & Berg-Weger, 1998; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Stevens, 1992). For example, Jayaratne et al. (1992) reported that workers of color wanted

to help clients of similar backgrounds and cultures, and Mullen et al. (1993) found that over 50% of students of color in their survey expressed a strong desire to work with people of color and disadvantaged client groups. Further, research comparing the practice preferences of students of color and Caucasian counterparts report higher ratings of public services, and lower ratings of private practice, in students of color (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Rubin & Johnson, 1984).

Why Students of Color Choose Social Work

Data on trends of income and inequality among people of color do not look promising and indicate that the United States is moving in the opposite direction in bridging the economic gap between rich and poor (Chan, 1990). The fact that many MSW students of color come from families that are disproportionately poor and may favor working in the public sector more than Caucasian students (Abell & McDonnell, 1990; Rubin & Johnson, 1984) should further the proposition that class and racial/ethnic background are important factors to consider when recruiting students to promote social work's traditional mission.

While there have been studies that examine why students choose social work as a career, only a handful have included students of color. While Abell and McDonell (1990) and Rubin and Johnson (1984) did not focus exclusively on career choices of students of color, findings from these two studies have been important in establishing differences between racial/ethnic groups. Abell and McDonell (1990) reported that students of color placed a significantly higher value on

social work's traditional commitment to disadvantaged populations than did Caucasian students and that only 4% of students of color, versus 27% of Caucasians, planned to pursue private practice careers.

Rubin and Johnson's (1984) study revealed that MSW students of color were more likely to rate protective services and case management higher in level of appeal than Caucasian students. Caucasian students, on the other hand, ranked counseling higher in level of appeal than students of color as a method of intervention. Rubin and Johnson conclude that "most entering direct-practice students view the MSW degree as a route to practicing personal or interpersonal therapy. By and large they seek to become private practitioners, with little or no commitment to social work's mission" (p. 13). More research is needed comparing the career motivations of students of color and white counterparts, as well as comparisons of different students of color groups.

American Indians and Social Work

Among the poorest and most disadvantaged of any of the racial/ethnic groups are American Indians. American Indians' unique racial, cultural, and political status make this group an especially important population for social work. Farris (1975) states that while there are many commonalities between the values of American Indians and the profession of social work, social work has to a large extent failed to reach, and in many ways actually harms, one of America's most deprived groups. While there have been a few studies that examine MSW students of color, the social work literature is nearly void of studies that examine

American Indian MSW student professional views, motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice preferences.

Tate and Schwartz (1993) conducted a national survey of 84 American Indian undergraduate and graduate social work students and found that many potential American Indian social workers are not entering the field because of cultural barriers, problems associated with being nontraditional students, and absence of faculty support. Sadly, Tate and Schwartz also report that American Indians have the lowest graduation rate of any racial/ethnic group of students from graduate social work programs.

For the few American Indians who do enter and complete social work programs, many do so in order to facilitate change from within the social service system. For example, American Indians are overrepresented in both the child welfare system and in public social services generally (Courtney et al., 1996; Weaver, 1999). As American Indian social workers voice their opinions and views regarding culturally appropriate services to American Indian clientele and communities, they have the unique opportunity to influence service delivery and laws that affect American Indians. Given the extreme lack of research on American Indian MSW students, more research is badly needed regarding their MSW experience so that such knowledge can be used to better recruit and train this precious student resource.

The Current Study

In order to assess student views on social work's traditional mission, motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice pref-

erences, secondary analysis of data from a database of entering MSW students throughout the state of California was conducted to address the following goals. First, descriptive data were generated for all MSW students; second, comparisons were made between MSW students of color (i.e., Asian Americans, African Americans/Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, Filipinos/Pacific Islanders), Caucasians, and American Indians. These comparisons were intended to test assumptions in the literature that students of color are more likely to favor working with the poor and disadvantaged and other areas long associated with social work's traditional mission, as compared to Caucasian students. Finally, given the lack of information in the literature on American Indians, all comparisons were made between American Indian MSW students, other students of color (without American Indians), and Caucasians in the above areas of interest.

Background of the Database

The original survey instrument was developed by Bart Grossman and Anthony Santangelo of the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) at the University of California at Berkeley. The questionnaire consists of a 12-page survey, primarily of closed-ended questions, divided into six sections: opinions and values; social action activities; past work experience; career motivations; personal characteristics; and interest in the IV-E child welfare financial aid program. During its development, the questionnaire was pretested three times during the summer of 1991 with 30 MSW and doctoral students at the University of California

at Berkeley who did not participate in the study. Additionally, faculty members at San Francisco Bay Area schools of social work reviewed the survey instrument's content and design for clarity and to assess its face validity (Santangelo, 1993).

The questionnaire was first distributed in 1991 and has since been administered annually in the fall semester. The distribution and collection of questionnaires were overseen by project coordinators affiliated with CalSWEC and based at each of the participating MSW schools. Prior to commencement of studies, questionnaires were given to all entering students in (1) a mandatory orientation session preceding the beginning of classes where student attendance was required and monitored; (2) one specific class (typically an introductory course) taught to all students by one instructor; or (3) during the 1st or 2nd week of a required course divided among more than one instructors.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed as part of the current study:

1. What are MSW student views on social work's traditional mission (i.e., serving the poor), motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice preferences?
2. Do MSW students, from the following race/ethnic groupings, differ in their views of social work's traditional mission: (a) students of color (without American Indians); (b) Caucasians; and (c) American Indians?
3. Do MSW students, from the following race/ethnic groupings, differ in their motivations for entering an MSW program:

(a) students of color (without American Indians); (b) Caucasians; (c) American Indians?

4. Do MSW students, from the following race/ethnic groupings, differ in their practice preferences: (a) students of color (without American Indians); (b) Caucasians; (c) American Indians?

Method

Participants

For purposes of this study, secondary analysis of data were analyzed on newly admitted MSW students that participated in a survey of all accredited MSW programs in California. The first sampling of students occurred in 1991. As additional MSW programs received accreditation from CSWE and became members of CalSWEC, they were included as part of the annual survey administration. In total, 13 graduate schools of social work (11 public and 2 private institutions) in California received the survey from 1991 to 1999. Response rates to the CalSWEC survey have varied year to year and the average response between 1991 and 1998 was 73%.¹

Data from 7,412 survey participants were used for this study. As can be seen in Table 1,

¹ Surveys received were compared to student enrollment numbers submitted by each MSW program to CSWE, but lack of available statistics did not allow a reliable determination of response rates for the academic years 1996 and 1997. Thus, when an individual school did not provide enrollment numbers to CSWE for a given year, numbers of students for years in which information was known were used as estimates in determining response rates.

Caucasians comprised the majority of MSW students (61.6%) and American Indians the fewest (2.3%). Excluded from analyses were respondents identified as belonging to "Other" racial/ethnic groups ($n=136$, 1.9%), those who failed to report their race/ethnicity ($n=62$, 0.9%), and students who identified as multi-racial/ethnic ($n=288$, 4.1%), except for American Indian multi-racial/ethnic students. Students of American Indian descent were evenly divided into those who self-identified as American Indian only ($n=81$, 50.0%) and American Indian in combination with one or more other racial/ethnic categories ($n=81$, 50.0%). Given the small number of students of American Indian descent in the database, analyses were run to determine if these two subgroups could be combined for comparisons with other racial/ethnic groups. Comparisons were made between the two American Indian subgroups with regards to background characteristics, views on social work's traditional mission, motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice preferences; no differences were found (see Limb,

2000 for a detailed comparison). Thus, the final sample of students ($N=6,987$) represents 94.3% of potential valid cases that reported racial/ethnic background.

Measures and Data Analysis

For the current study, various survey measures, scales, and variables were selected to describe and compare MSW student views on social work's traditional mission, motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice preferences.

Independent Variables

Racial/ethnic identification. In the survey, respondents are asked, "What is your race/ethnicity?" and given the following eight choices: "(a) African American; (b) American Indian; (c) Asian American; (d) Caucasian; (e) Hispanic/Latino; (f) Pacific Islander; (g) Filipino; and (h) Other (If you are bi-cultural/racial, please provide all letters which apply)." The original intent of the survey was to be more inclusive rather than to limit choices. No attempt was made to ascertain the magni-

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics of MSW Students in California (1991–1998)

Characteristics	All Students	Caucasians	Students of Color (w/o Am. Indians)	American Indians
N	6,987	4,305	2,520	162
Age (M)	31.0	31.7	29.6	33.5
Female (%)	81.9	83.3	79.7	79.6
Marital status (%)				
Married	28.6	30.6	25.0	32.1
Single	53.6	50.1	60.2	42.6
Other	17.8	19.3	14.8	25.3
SES while growing up (%)				
Low	23.7	14.8	36.3	38.0
Middle	64.1	69.4	57.3	55.1
Upper	12.2	15.8	6.4	7.0

Note. SES=socioeconomic status; "Other" includes divorced, domestic partner, separated, or widowed.

tude to which respondents identified with one racial/ethnic group over another nor any other aspects of ethnic identification. For example, with regard to American Indians, there is no information involving enrolled versus non-enrolled tribal member status or place of residence (urban-rural or reservation-non-reservation).

Dependent Variables

Views on social work's traditional mission. Five measures were used to determine student views on serving the poor. Three of the five measures generated percentages in that respondents were asked whether social work should focus on individual adaptation or societal and institutional change; whether social work should focus on all social class groups equally or primarily the poor; and which of six choices was the most important reason for the existence of poverty. For these three measures, Z tests were used to test differences between student groupings. The Z test of significance between independent proportions was based on the normal approximation to the binomial distribution and a *p* value of <.0167 (two-tailed)² was used as the level of significance to minimize potential multiple comparison problems.

² Although the exploratory nature of this study suggested not performing a multiple comparison adjustment, the large *N* size gives the study too much power. Due to the fact that comparisons were made among three racial/ethnic groups, the authors utilized a Bonferroni adjustment (.05/3=.0167) to determine a conservative significance level. Therefore, any *p* value falling under this critical value was considered significant.

The fourth and fifth measures were based on 4-point Likert-type scales (where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree) that assessed degree of agreement or disagreement regarding two statements about the solution to poverty. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was used to determine whether sums of student group ranks are different. This test generates a *z* score and is more appropriate than the independent *Z* test because of statistical assumption violations regarding the normality and homogeneity of variances, prompting the utilization of non-parametric statistical tests (i.e., tests that require limited assumptions about the distribution from which samples were obtained) in order to make comparisons. The significance level was again set at *p*<.0167 to adjust for multiple comparisons.

Motivations for entering an MSW program. With regard to motivations for entering an MSW program, 14 measures were used: six measures were used to assess student motivations for pursuing graduate school; one measure to examine the influence of religion/spirituality on student motivations for entering an MSW program; and seven measures to assess the appeal of future job characteristics. The first six measures involved 5-point Likert-type scales (where 1=very unimportant and 5=very important) that required respondents to rate the importance of six individual motivations. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was used to determine whether sums of group ranks are different between student groupings on each measure. The seventh measure generated percentages regarding how significant spiritual/religious values or experiences were in students' decisions to work in human services. Tests of significance between independent group proportions were used to

compare groupings of students. Regarding the last seven measures, respondents were asked to rate the importance of seven individual job characteristics on 4-point Likert-type scales. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was used to compare sums of group rank differences between student groupings on each measure.

Practice preferences. A factor analysis of the survey's 31 practice preferences, using the aggregate sample of independent student cohorts, was conducted in previous studies (see Perry, 1997) and produced seven unique factors. Principle component extraction was used in developing the seven constructs. An orthogonal rotation using the varimax method was used for the generation of factored constructs. This procedure was used because it was perceived as a more valid attempt at generating practice preference constructs in a manner that reduces researcher bias should measures be grouped together or treated as uni-dimensional in any set of analyses. Of the final factors selected, groupings were based on loadings of individual measures upon factors and all were required to have eigenvalues that exceeded 1.0.

When individual construct measures were summed and the resulting product treated as an interval level measurement or practice preference subscale, it was decided that each subscale must yield a Cronbach's alpha coefficient that exceeds .70 before the subscale was considered adequate. The reliability of the seven factored constructs were also examined across each individual cohort year so as to test the stability of these practice preference constructs (see Perry, 1997 for further details relating to specific factor analysis procedures used). The seven factors included

1. Clinical Practice, preferences for clinical work with individuals, couples, groups, and families;
2. Public Child Welfare, preferences associated with abused and neglected children or CPS;
3. Disabled/Aged, preferences associated with physical or mental disability including work with the aged;
4. Poverty, preferences associated with the poor and homeless;
5. Macro/Administrative, preferences associated with administration and management;
6. Criminal Justice, preferences associated with legal issues and including adult and juvenile offenders; and
7. AIDS, preferences for working with adults and children with AIDS. Survey questions relating to these factors were originally rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (where 1=low appeal and 7=high appeal). Construct measures loading on particular factors were then generated and compared using Z tests of significance between independent racial/ethnic groups ($p < .0167$).

Results

Views on Social Work's Traditional Mission

On the first of five measures, 54.8% of all students chose societal and institutional change over individual adaptation when asked which social work change strategy they most favored. On the second measure, 60.1% chose "Equal attention and resources on all social class groups" versus focusing attention on problems of the poor as the goal

of social work. On the third measure, Table 2 contains student views on social work's traditional mission. Percentages of MSW students that ranked each of six statements as the top reason for the existence of poverty are compared. As can be seen, about 40% of all students chose "Powerful interests are fundamentally opposed to the solution of the problem of poverty" as their top choice for the existence of poverty. Additionally, while nearly a quarter of all students chose "people representing different interests do not 'often enough' sit down together to work out the problem," very few (5.8%) students chose "Poor people are not adequately motivated to take advantage of existing opportunities" as their top choice for the existence of poverty.

When comparing racial/ethnic groupings of students, no differences were found on the first two measures. On the third measure, students of color differed significantly from Caucasians in four of the six top choices for the existence of poverty. Significantly more Caucasians than students of color selected "People representing different interests do not . . . work out the problem" and "We do not as yet possess the necessary knowledge and techniques for abolishing poverty," while significantly more students of color than Caucasians chose "Those people who are better off will never give up anything . . . until forced" and "Poor people are not adequately motivated . . .".

American Indians differed from other students of color in only one of six top choices for

TABLE 2. Percentage of MSW Students, by Racial/Ethnic Groupings That Ranked Each of Six Statements as the Top Choice Regarding the Existence of Poverty

Belief Regarding the Existence of Poverty	All Students (N=6,756)	Caucasians (N=4,180)	Students of Color (w/o Am. Indians) (N=2,421)	American Indians (N=155)
Powerful interests are fundamentally opposed to the solution of the problem of poverty.	40.8	40.3	40.9	42.6
People representing different interests do not "often enough" sit down together to work out the problem. ^a	24.2	25.5	21.7	29.0
We do not as yet possess the necessary knowledge and techniques for abolishing poverty. ^a	12.1	13.4	10.4	9.7
Those people who are better off will never give up anything to the "have nots" unless forced. ^a	9.4	8.6	11.3	6.5
Poor people have not been organized to demand better treatment by society.	7.6	7.4	8.3	9.0
Poor people are not adequately motivated to take advantage of existing opportunities. ^{a,b}	5.8	4.9	7.4	3.2

^a Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between students of color and Caucasians on this measure.

^b Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between American Indians and students of color on this measure.

the existence of poverty in that significantly more students of color than American Indians chose "poor people are not adequately motivated. . ." No significant differences between American Indian and Caucasians were found on any of the six choices.

The fourth measure assessed student views on how to reduce poverty. Results indicate that students generally disagreed with the statement, "The only way to do away with poverty is to make basic changes in our political and economic systems." On the fifth measure, the rank score for all students regarding the statement, "The poor are in the best position to decide what services they need," indicated neither agreement nor disagreement.

With regard to group comparisons on the last two measures, the only difference between students of color and Caucasians was on measure 5 in that students of color more strongly agreed with the statement "The poor are in the best position to decide what services they need." While no significant differences were found between American Indians and other students of color, significantly more American Indians, as compared to Caucasians, chose societal or institutional change over individual adaptation as the goal of social work.

Motivations for Entering an MSW Program

Table 3 contains the first six measures used to assess student motivations for entering graduate school.³ Measure 7 is discussed

below while measures 8–14 are contained in Table 4. As can be seen in Table 3, the measure "through social work I will be able to make an important contribution. . ." received the highest motivation rating by all students followed by "the occupational versatility of a social work degree." Interestingly, "a desire to prepare myself for private practice" received the lowest motivation rating.

Regarding group comparisons, with the exception of measure 1—"Through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society," students of color differed significantly from Caucasians on all measures. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test indicated that Caucasian students rated "the occupational versatility of a social work degree" and "a desire to prepare myself for private practice" more important than did students of color. On the other hand, students of color rated "a desire to increase my potential for promotion," "a desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations," and "Social work offers the greatest opportunity for self-expression and personal growth" more important than did Caucasians.

No significant differences were found between American Indians and other students of color on any of the above measures. With regard to American Indians and Caucasians, significant differences were found on only one of the six measures. American Indians rated "a desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations" as more important than did Caucasians.

When asked about the influence of religious/spiritual values or experiences in their decision to work in the human services (mea-

³ Analyses involving the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test are reported in tables with mean scores to convey individual variance between student groupings.

sure 7), 69.8% of all students stated that this was a "significant" or "somewhat significant" factor. With regard to group comparisons, significantly more students of color than Caucasians reported religion/spirituality being "significant" or "somewhat significant" (75.2% and 66.5%, respectively). American Indian students did not differ from other students of color or Caucasians on this measure.

Table 4 details measures 8–14, which assess the appeal of future job characteristics. As can be seen, "work with others as a team" and "help most economically disadvantaged people" received the highest appeal ratings of the seven job characteristics for all stu-

dents, while "psychotherapy" and "choose own clients" received the lowest ratings.

With regard to group comparisons, the Wilcoxon Rank Sum test revealed that students of color rated five of seven future job characteristics as more important than did Caucasians: "work with others as a team," "help the most economically disadvantaged people," "flexible work hours," "earn above average income," and "work with highly motivated clients."

American Indians rated "work with highly motivated clients" as less important than did other students of color, and rated "Help the most economically disadvantaged people" as more important than did Caucasians. As noted

TABLE 3. Mean Rankings of Student Motivations for Entering an MSW Program by Racial/Ethnic Groupings

Motivation	All Students (N=6,956) M (SD)	Caucasians (N=4,285) M (SD)	Students of Color (w/o Am. Indians) (N=2,510) M (SD)	American Indians (N=161) M (SD)
Through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society	4.69 (0.66)	4.70 (0.59)	4.66 (0.72)	4.69 (0.69)
The occupational versatility of a social work degree ^a	4.57 (0.79)	4.62 (0.70)	4.51 (0.79)	4.57 (0.73)
A desire to increase my potential for promotion/job advancement ^a	4.30 (0.94)	4.27 (0.95)	4.36 (0.94)	4.27 (1.00)
A desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations ^{a,b}	4.29 (0.80)	4.16 (0.83)	4.47 (0.80)	4.52 (0.72)
Social work offers the greatest opportunity for self-expression and personal growth ^a	4.08 (0.85)	4.06 (0.84)	4.12 (0.88)	4.10 (0.83)
A desire to prepare myself for private practice ^a	3.52 (1.24)	3.55 (1.26)	3.47 (1.24)	3.62 (1.23)

^a Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between students of color and Caucasians on this measure.

^b Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between American Indians and Caucasians on this measure.

Note. Due to occasional missing data, the size varies slightly for individual measures across student groupings; these measures were derived from responses to Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important).

on Table 4, differences between these rankings were statistically significant.

Practice Preferences

Table 5 contains seven practice preference factors assessing preferred client groups and fields of practice. As can be seen, all students rated factor 1, "clinical practice," highest of the client groups or fields of practice. MSW students also indicated a somewhat strong preference for the "public child welfare" and "poverty" factors, while the "criminal justice" and "disabled/aged" factors received the lowest appeal ratings.

With regard to group comparisons, students of color rated five of seven factors significantly higher than Caucasian students: "public child welfare," "disabled/aged," "poverty," "macro/administrative," and "criminal justice." American Indians did not

differ significantly from other students of color on any of the seven practice preference factors. American Indians did differ significantly from Caucasians in their higher preference for the "public child welfare," "poverty," and "macro/administrative" factors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to build upon the literature regarding MSW student views on social work's traditional mission, motivations for entering an MSW program, and practice preferences and to compare groupings of students by racial/ethnic background. This study responds to the lack of such research during the 1990s by conducting secondary data analysis on a statewide California sample of nearly 7,000 MSW students between 1991 and 1999. Results are also helpful in addressing two important

TABLE 4. Mean Rankings of Future Job Characteristics of MSW Students by Racial/Ethnic Groupings

Job Characteristic	All Students (N=6,935) M (SD)	Caucasians (N=4,267) M (SD)	Students of Color (w/o Am. Indians) (N=2,510) M (SD)	American Indians (N=158) M (SD)
Work with others as a team ^a	3.44 (0.69)	3.40 (0.69)	3.51 (0.66)	3.39 (0.74)
Help most economically disadvantaged people ^{a, b}	3.24 (0.76)	3.06 (0.77)	3.51 (0.65)	3.45 (0.67)
Flexible work hours ^a	3.19 (0.72)	3.16 (0.72)	3.25 (0.71)	3.17 (0.69)
Earn above average income ^a	3.02 (0.73)	2.93 (0.73)	3.16 (0.68)	2.99 (0.82)
Work with highly motivated clients ^{a, c}	2.77 (0.72)	2.76 (0.69)	2.81 (0.77)	2.61 (0.81)
Choose own clients	2.35 (0.78)	2.36 (0.75)	2.35 (0.81)	2.30 (0.81)
Psychotherapy	2.26 (0.94)	2.26 (0.96)	2.24 (0.92)	2.24 (0.91)

^a Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between students of color and Caucasians on this measure.

^b Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between American Indians and Caucasians on this measure.

^c Significant difference ($p < .0167$) between American Indians and students of color on this measure.

Note. Due to occasional missing data, the size varies slightly for individual measures across student groupings; these measures were derived from responses to Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 4 (very important).

issues in the literature: (1) whether MSW students in general are abandoning social work's traditional mission to pursue careers in clinical private practice; and (2) whether students of color are more dedicated to social work's traditional mission than are Caucasian students.

With regard to the first issue, prior research and writings (e.g., Bogo et al., 1993; Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Specht & Courtney,

TABLE 5. Mean Rankings of Practice Preference Scores on Seven Factors for MSW Students by Racial/Ethnic Groupings

Practice Preference Group With Individual Scale Measures	All Students (N=6,987) <i>M (SD)</i>	Caucasians (N=4,305) <i>M (SD)</i>	Students of color (w/o Am. Indians) (N=2,520) <i>M (SD)</i>	American Indians (N=162) <i>M (SD)</i>
Clinical Practice	5.17 (1.64)	5.18 (1.66)	5.14 (1.59)	5.32 (1.59)
Family/marital therapy				
Counseling				
Psychotherapy				
People with marital/family problems				
Group work				
People who are depressed				
Public Child Welfare ^{a,b}	4.83 (1.79)	4.65 (1.83)	5.12 (1.70)	5.23 (1.62)
Abused and neglected children				
Abusive parents				
Protective services				
Poverty ^{a,b}	4.82 (1.59)	4.64 (1.59)	5.12 (1.54)	5.00 (1.54)
Homeless families				
Homeless adults				
People in poverty needing resources				
AIDS	4.65 (1.81)	4.65 (1.81)	4.63 (1.80)	4.79 (1.69)
Children with AIDS				
Adults with AIDS				
Macro/Administrative ^{a,b}	4.42 (1.82)	4.23 (1.83)	4.71 (1.78)	4.70 (1.91)
Program/policy design				
Administration				
Community organizing				
Criminal Justice ^a	3.85 (1.86)	3.70 (1.84)	4.08 (1.85)	4.03 (1.92)
Adult criminal offenders				
Juvenile status offenders				
Disabled/Aged ^a	3.81 (1.79)	3.74 (1.80)	3.91 (1.77)	3.94 (1.71)
The physically disabled				
The developmentally disabled				
The aged				
The chronically/mentally disabled				

^a Significant difference ($p<.0167$) between students of color and Caucasians on this measure.

^b Significant difference ($p<.0167$) between American Indians and Caucasians on this measure.

Note. Due to occasional missing data, the size varies slightly for individual measures across student groupings; these measures were derived from responses to Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (low appeal) to 7 (high appeal).

1994) have expressed considerable concern that increasing numbers of social work students are abandoning social work's mission in favor of careers in private practice. Yet, the overarching pattern of results emerging from this study is that: (1) MSW students are indeed highly attracted to clinical practice but are simultaneously attracted to traditional, non-clinical domains of social work; and (2) MSW students are least attracted to private practice and psychotherapy relative to other areas of social work. Thus, it appears that MSW students accurately situate clinical practice within the broader domain of general social work practice.

For example, while students expressed highest practice preferences toward the clinical practice factor (i.e., family / marital therapy, counseling, psychotherapy, group work, and working with people who are depressed), they simultaneously expressed high appeal towards the poverty factor (i.e., homeless adults and families, getting resources to the poor) as well as the public child welfare factor (i.e., protective services, abused and neglected children, abusive parents). Also, when students were asked about motivations for entering an MSW program, "A desire to prepare myself for private practice" received the lowest rating from among a list of six different motivations. The highest rated motivation was that through social work, students could make an important contribution to individuals and society. Further, when students were asked to rate the appeal of seven future job characteristics, psychotherapy was rated lowest preceded by choosing one's own clients, and working with highly motivated clients. Highest ratings went

toward working with others on a team and helping the most economically disadvantaged people. Thus, while prior studies (Reeser & Epstein, 1987; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Stevens, 1992) claim increasing student appeal toward private practice and decreasing appeal toward public sector work, findings from nearly a decade of data from a California statewide database of MSW students do not support such concerns.

With regard to views on poverty and social work's mission, slightly more than half of all students believe social work should focus on societal and institutional change versus individual adaptation, and two thirds believe that poverty exists because either powerful interests are opposed to solutions or because members of such interest groups do not work together enough on solutions. Despite these liberal-leaning views, students disagreed that poverty could be solved by changing political and economic institutions, and nearly two thirds believe that social work should focus its attention and resources on all social classes versus just the poor. Students were also neutral regarding the idea that the poor are in the best position to decide what is best for them. This mixture of views in entering MSW students may reflect the mixture of liberal and conservative ideologies in the general population regarding the complex issue of poverty and how to reduce it.

With regard to the second issue, the overall pattern of results suggests that while MSW students of color and Caucasians are generally more alike than different, students of color, and particularly American Indians, express views more consistent with social work's traditional mission as well as motiva-

tions for entering MSW programs and practice preferences.

For example, with regard to views on poverty and the mission of social work, more students of color than Caucasians advocated for societal and institutional change over individual adaptation, when asked what the main focus of social work should be, and more students of color agreed with the statement "The poor are in the best position to decide what is best for them." Students of color were also more likely to believe that poverty persists because people who are better off will never give up anything to the "have nots" unless forced. In contrast, Caucasians were more likely to attribute poverty to a lack of necessary knowledge and techniques and to a lack of problem solving on the part of interest groups.

Interestingly, while American Indian views of poverty and social work were most similar to other students of color, they were even stronger in their adherence to social work's traditional mission. For example, American Indians' scores were higher in the views that social work should focus on societal and institutional change versus individual adaptation and should focus attention and resources on the problems of the poor versus all social classes. American Indians were also more likely to believe that poverty persists because powerful interest groups are opposed to solutions and do not sit down often enough to work out problems. Finally, American Indians were less likely than other students of color to endorse the statement, "Poor people are not adequately motivated to take advantage of existing opportunities."

With regard to six different motivations for entering an MSW program, students of color differed from Caucasians on all but one measure. That is, while both groups were most motivated by making a contribution to individuals and society, students of color were more motivated to serve economically disadvantaged populations and less motivated to prepare themselves for private practice as compared to Caucasian students. Students of color were also more motivated by religion/spirituality and by viewing social work as a vehicle for self-expression and personal growth. Except for serving economically disadvantaged populations, American Indians did not differ from other students of color or Caucasians on any of the six motivation measures.

Students of color also rated five of seven future job characteristics as more appealing than did Caucasians: "work with others as a team," "help the most economically disadvantaged people," "flexible work hours," "earn above average income," and "work with highly motivated clients." These findings suggest that while students of color may be more likely than Caucasians to work with the poor, they are not less interested in making money or working with motivated clients. It should be noted, however, that while American Indians and other students of color reported similar appeal to most future job characteristics, American Indians reported less interest in working with highly motivated clients and earning an above average income.

Similar to motivations for entering an MSW program, differences between Caucasians and students of color emerged in preferences for practice areas and client

populations. While students of color, Caucasians, and American Indians expressed highest appeal towards the clinical practice factor, students of color and American Indians expressed higher appeal towards five of the six remaining practice preference factors: poverty, public child welfare, macro/administration, criminal justice, and disabled/aged. These results corroborate prior research (Abell & McDonnell, 1990; Butler, 1990; Rubin & Johnson, 1984) indicating that students of color are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to desire working in domains of social work dealing more with poor, disadvantaged, and stigmatized populations.

There are several limitations in the current study that should be noted. First, the categorizing of specific racial/ethnic groups poses potential problems. Specifically, the combining of the two American Indian subgroups could potentially be a limitation. While no differences were found in comparisons made between these groups, with regard to demographic-dependent variables caution should be exercised when interpreting findings. It should also be noted that because race/ethnicity was of primary interest in the current study, no controls were made regarding age, gender, marital status, or socioeconomic status on dichotomous or interval level analyses. Additionally, when comparing American Indians to Caucasians and other students of color, the discrepancy between sample sizes and the need to adjust for multiple comparisons are possible issues of concern. While the level of significance was conservatively adjusted ($p < .0167$), there still were findings that may have been statistically significant but not substantive.

Second, as with most studies involving secondary data analysis, there may be some limitations in terms of validity and reliability. The research questions examined in the current study were not part of the original study, nor was race one of the major variables of interest. Here, the assumption is made regarding face validity—the results reflect the actual views and opinions of respondents. While anonymity and confidentiality were assured, because of the extensive and the somewhat personal nature of the survey questionnaire, there is always the possibility that respondents may not have accurately revealed their views and opinions. While the original questionnaire was pretested, no test-retest assessment of the survey questionnaire or other reliability measures were performed. Psychometric properties in the current study serve as a baseline. Finally, analyses were also run regarding the stability of student responses over time (see Perry, 1997 for a more detailed discussion) but limitations often occur when combining student responses over almost a decade into one group, given the political and economic circumstances that could potentially influence respondent views and motivations.

With regard to future research, an important consideration is to better assess race/ethnic membership (e.g., ethnic identity, acculturation, tribal membership, etc.) in order to assess more subtle differences between student groupings. Issues surrounding graduate school recruitment and retention of ethnic minorities are also important. If social work is to continue adequately solving problems related to poor and disadvantaged populations, then recruiting and retaining students

who are most committed to such populations and corresponding practice areas is vital. Given that students of color, and particularly American Indian students, expressed the strongest interest in the above areas, and are likely to work with similar client populations (Limb & Perry, *in press*), the profession needs to make a more concerted effort to recruit and train such valuable groups of students.

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