

**TOWARD RELEVANT AND
USEFUL SCHOLARSHIP
IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD**

PROCEEDINGS
of the
**Sixth National Symposium
on Doctoral Research
and Social Work Practice**

Presented by



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The Ohio State University
College of Social Work**

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FORWARD

The Ohio State University College of Social Work National Symposium on Doctoral Research and Social Work Practice is intended to provide a mechanism for improving linkages between doctoral scholarship and the practice of social work. The symposium papers serve to recognize the contributions of recent graduates of social work doctoral programs by featuring those research efforts which offer potential for making a significant contribution to the development of new knowledge for the practice of social work. The format of the symposium is designed to provide practitioners with active roles in the discussion of dissertation research presented by recent Ph.D. graduates from around the country. Through extensive panel and floor discussions, the practice implications and applications of research findings are elucidated and new questions for further research are generated. Through exchanges of this kind, the symposium organizers hope to encourage a better appreciation and utilization of research on the part of practitioners and, similarly, to encourage an appreciation, on the part of researchers, of the nature of significant crucial researchable questions pertaining to social work practice.

The papers from our Sixth National Symposium represent the college's continuing dissemination of recent dissertation research findings to the social work community. Through this dissemination, we encourage the wider utilization of research in practice. The Sixth National Symposium on Doctoral Research and Social Work Practice took place on January 29 and 30, 1993, on the campus of The Ohio State University. The symposium theme was "Toward Relevant and Useful Scholarship in a Fragmented World." The keynote address, entitled "The State of Research Scholarship in Social Work: Imperfect Models and Approximate Truths," was delivered by Dr. Mark Fraser, Director of the Ph.D. Program, University of Utah, Graduate School of Social Work. Sixteen papers, representing a broad spectrum of social work topics, were presented. The presenters represented 15 different social work doctoral programs from all sections of the country. Our conference was additionally enriched by the words of eight respondents, representing the University of Michigan, the University of Cincinnati, Children's Hospital, Columbus, and The Ohio State University. We were grateful for the insights and information shared with us by all who presented at our symposium.

The symposium was an exciting and memorable intellectual event, and we hope that readers of the papers presented in this volume will find the ideas both stimulating and enlightening.

Richard E. Boettcher, Dean
March 1993

PREFACE

We in social work were recently reminded by the Editor of Social Work of the breadth and variety of our profession, of the multiple roles we play, of the vast array of populations we serve, and of the different problems we face in our daily work lives. However, in the eyes of some, this image portrays social work as a Texas river--a mile wide and a foot deep. How can a research enterprise support and inform the practice of social work with this ostensible breadth and diversity?

For purposes of the Symposium, we chose to view the world of social work as an arena in which scholars struggled at the cutting edge of knowledge and change for control of the profession's concepts. The intellectual/cultural situation of social work can be viewed as well in terms of Yeats' construction of intellectual and moral crisis in his poem, "Second Coming."

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Should we not be able to make sense of our collective research effort when we view it as a whole, or is each study no more than an island of idiosyncratic self-promotion? Isn't there a challenge for social work scholarship to search out the meaning in what we do collectively in the name of inquiry? This Symposium tried to search for such meaning in dissertations completed in 1990, 1991, and 1992.

Briar (1985) in his keynote address to the Symposium reported that in his review of one year of dissertations, descriptive/explanatory studies comprised 75% of the studies that were conducted. In the same analysis, he found that 16% of the dissertations involved research on Social Work Interventions. He urged researchers to undertake intervention research and to focus on practice applications of such research.

Hopps argued in her address to the Symposium in 1989 that research on clinical intervention which best contributes to the knowledge base of social work has three requisites: theoretically based, empirically informed, and evaluated implementation. She reported that 6 of the 449 articles included in her study reflected all three of the criteria she proposed. Who is listening?

Efforts to devise a credible approach to systematic inquiry in social work are characterized by a lively competition among scholars advocating alternative strategies. Some propose ethnomethodological inquiry into concerns of practitioners; some urge evaluation of developmental research interventions while others urge evaluation of interventions based on empirical generalizations derived from social and behavioral science.

In planning this year's Symposium, we took as a starting point that we would seek and select for presentation recent dissertations that exemplified Hopps' criteria of theoretically based and empirically informed by appropriate and rigorous methodology. We would accept studies done in the naturalistic paradigm and in the positivist paradigm; we would accept descriptive/explanatory studies and studies that evaluated social work interventions. We were pleased to receive 100 submissions, many exemplifying superior scholarship, and representing a noteworthy range of doctoral programs.

The result was a two-day symposium consisting of 16 presentations, an unaccountably exciting mix of competently executed and well presented dissertations. The chemistry among presenters and participants told us that this meeting established a standard for those present for all future communication with research scholars about their work! No less significant an ingredient in this mix was the milestone keynote contribution of Dr. Mark Fraser who addressed the Symposium on the state of research scholarship in social work.

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