Finding Joy in Social Work II: Intrapersonal Sources

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Despite the social work profession's strengths orientation, research on its workforce tends to focus on problems (for example, depression, problem drinking, compassion fatigue, burnout). In contrast, this study explored ways in which social workers find joy in their work. The authors used an appreciative inquiry approach, semistructured interviews ($N = 26$), and a collaborative grounded theory method of analysis. Participants identified interpersonal (making connections and making a difference) and intrapersonal (making meaning and making a life) sources of joy and reflected significant personal initiative in the process of finding joy. The authors present findings regarding these intrapersonal sources of joy.

KEY WORDS: *joy; positivity; social work practice; social workers; strengths*

Do social workers find joy in their work? If so, how does that happen? In this article, we report findings from our qualitative research on social work joy. At the outset, we could not remember ever reading about social work joy, or even hearing people talk about it. We looked in vain for research about social work joy, but discovered data about social workers and depression, problem drinking, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue (that is, problems) but little about the positive experiences of our work (Bride, 2007; Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006; Siebert, 2004, 2005). Ironically, the profession of social work has long embraced a strengths perspective for clients (Saleebey, 2013) but neglected that same perspective with regard to its own workforce. Only recently have researchers begun to focus specifically on positive well-being as it relates to social workers and their practice, and much of this literature was not available when we began our research on social work joy in 2008. This newly emerging attention seems to reflect the rapidly growing positivity research within the social sciences, and it is this research that inspired and informed our investigation of social work joy.

POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES

Psychology and business have begun to apply a positive lens for viewing workplace behavior, including experiences of human service professionals. Incorporating a positive perspective allows for the development of a more complete understanding of employees' behaviors and experiences in organizations. Specifically, positive psychology and appreciative inquiry provided a useful framework for our research.

Positive Psychology

Rather than pathology, positive psychology is concerned with individual, organizational, community, and societal experiences of well-being, contentment, satisfaction, flow, happiness, hope, and optimism (for example, Fredrickson, 2001, 2003, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2009). It focuses on what makes life worth living, how individuals find meaning and purpose in their lives, and how organizations foster positivity among their members. Research, theory, and practice grounded in positive psychology are guided by a search for what is right with people and their systems rather than on deviance, dysfunction, and deficiency. Positivity researchers and practitioners are interested in the identification and amplification of what is working well as a means of promoting, sustaining, and strengthening well-being and growth.

Recent studies grounded in positive psychology and positivity theory have focused on various human service professionals, including therapists (Linley & Joseph, 2007), nurses (Albaugh, 2005; Manion, 2003), mental health providers (Sprang, Clark, & Whitt-Woosley, 2007), domestic violence workers (Hayley-Lock, 2008), and foster care workers (Schwartz, 2011). Specific to social workers,

Radey and Figley (2007) argued for a paradigm shift from a focus on avoiding burnout and stress to promoting compassion satisfaction. In an assessment of the subjective well-being of Canadian social workers, salient contributors were identified as work environment, interpersonal relationships, and type of work (Graham & Shier, 2010a, 2010b). Collins (2007) examined resilience, positive emotions, and optimism among social workers.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (AI), a concept that emerged from the field of business, is "the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 1). A central tenet is that a focus on the positive in human organizations and human experiences provides a powerful corrective to traditional, problem- or deficit-focused research. AI proponents argue that a traditional deficit focus calls forth problems and triggers negative spirals, whereas an affirmative focus stimulates positive spirals.

A provocative article by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) initially sparked our curiosity about social work joy by posing some challenging questions regarding the absence of attention to joy in the study of business, management, and organizations: "Is there a book on the Harvard Business book-list, or anywhere for that matter, on *Executive Joy*? . . . Why aren't we including this topic in our change efforts? What might happen if we did?" (p. 16).

These questions led us to ask similar ones of social work. We began to wonder whether our profession ever talks about social work joy; whether social workers actually experience joy in their work; and, if so, how social workers find joy.

METHOD

Sample

Beginning in fall 2008, we used a snowball sampling process to recruit social workers for the study. First, we asked students in our practice classes to nominate social workers who "find great joy in their work." Because we taught at the University of South Carolina, the nominees were all from Columbia. After the study began, Pooler and Freeman moved to other institutions. In Texas, Pooler conducted three additional interviews. In North Carolina, Freeman used the interview protocol as a BSW practice class assignment, resulting in six additional interviews. The final sample included 26 participants (23 women and three men; 19 white and seven people of color) ranging in age from 23 to 73. There were two BSWs and 24 MSWs whose practice experience ranged from two to 50 years in the fields of medical social work, hospice care, child welfare, mental health, community health, sexual assault services, school social work, substance abuse, and homelessness. The study was approved by our institutional review boards.

Interview

Drawing on the AI and positive psychology literature, and our own curiosity, we devised interview questions to promote and elicit reflections about joy in social work practice. Consistent with grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006), after some initial pilot interviews, we refined the interview protocol, resulting in the final interview guide (Pooler, Wolfer, & Freeman, 2014). Sample questions included the following:

1. Tell me about a recent time when you found great joy in your work. [If the person asks what you mean by "joy," respond, "Whatever you consider joy."]

6. As you reflect back on your experience as a social worker overall:
   a. In what do you find the most joy?

10. We're especially curious about the process involved:
    a. How do you find joy at work?

We trained three MSW graduate assistants as our initial interviewers. After they interviewed our first 10 participants, we interviewed 10 participants ourselves, and BSW students in Freeman's practice course interviewed six other participants.

Data Analysis

After student assistants transcribed the interviews verbatim, we analyzed the data using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006) facilitated by Atlas.ti (Muhr, 2012), software for managing textual data. We collaborated throughout on data analysis, beginning with coding and memos for the first 10 transcripts. We reviewed our individual data analysis efforts in weekly meetings. Initially, we all coded the same transcripts to ensure a high level of common understanding regarding the inductively derived codes and to increase the

validity of our analysis. Later, we coded the remaining interviews individually. As the code list grew, however, it became necessary to recode earlier transcripts, including those coded individually, using the expanding code list. In that way, even the most recent transcripts were coded by at least two of us.

We wrote analytic memos to promote and capture emerging insights about the data, and we experimented with network views (that is, concept maps) to represent relationships in the data and aid analysis. These two analytic processes helped us to categorize and connect the entire set of codes. In the final stages of analysis, we collapsed some codes into broader categories and recognized relationships between seemingly divergent codes. The final code definitions and analytic memos provide the primary basis for the findings that follow.

RESULTS

Our findings are reported in three levels including four clusters, six subclusters, and 24 codes. Clusters are groups of related codes and include making connections, making a difference, making meaning, and making a life. Subclusters are groups of related codes within a cluster. Two clusters include only codes and no associated subclusters. Codes are the names we gave to discrete sources of joy. For reporting our findings, we included only codes used for at least five participants and at least 10 times.

In analyzing our findings, we classified the first two clusters—making connections and making a difference—as *inter*personal sources of joy because they result from interactions between the social worker and other people (Pooler et al., 2014). In contrast, we consider the third and fourth clusters—making meaning and making a life—as *intra*personal sources of joy because they are more internal to the social worker. This article focuses on these intrapersonal sources of joy. First, however, we provide a brief summary of the interpersonal sources of joy (clusters 1 and 2) presented in the previous article.

Cluster 1: Making Connections
The social workers in our study often mentioned relationships as a major source of joy. These usually involved clients but also included colleagues, students, and others. In general, they developed these relationships as a normal part of their work responsibilities. However, the relationships were remarkable because of the apparent intensity or depth of human connection or engagement. We named a cluster of codes related to relationships *making connections*. This cluster included four codes: connecting with clients, being present, being heard, and finding positive colleagues. As evidence of its importance and prevalence, all but two of the participants ($n = 24$; 92 percent) mentioned something that we coded with one of these four codes. Indeed, we used the single most common code in this cluster with a large majority of participants.

Cluster 2: Making a Difference
Social workers frequently spoke of finding joy by making a difference in their work (that is, through effecting positive outcomes). They experienced joy when their efforts contributed to positive change for clients, colleagues, supervisees, interns, programs, organizations, policies, communities, politics, and service delivery systems. We sorted this cluster of 10 codes into four subclusters. These included making a difference with clients, positively affecting colleagues, effecting macro-level change, and innovating. The largest subcluster—making a difference with clients—included facilitating client change, seeing long-term outcomes, facilitating client belonging, relieving client distress, and receiving gratitude. But the cluster as a whole encompassed change from individuals to larger systems. See Pooler et al. (2014) for more information about clusters 1 and 2. The remainder of this article reports on clusters 3 and 4.

Cluster 3: Making Meaning
The participants often mentioned finding and making meaning as another major source of joy. This source is particularly related to participants' reflective and interpretive processes regarding the significance of their work in their lives. This cluster resulted from our grouping the codes of finding fit in work, finding meaning in serving others, finding meaning in social work, and finding purpose. Together, these codes distinguish several interrelated sources of meaning. Some social workers identified their chosen profession and its characteristic activities as a source of joy. Others found profound meaning, even joy, in the process of serving others. The other two codes—finding fit in work and finding purpose—have to do with the practical assessment of one's suitability for a particular social work job and an existential sense of suitability for the profession, respectively.

The participants often mentioned finding and making meaning as another major source of joy. Many of the segments we coded in this cluster are related to other clusters. They are distinguished, however, by an emphasis on participants' interpretive process. The *making a difference* codes, for example, include doing something with positive effect in a client's life. The *making meaning* codes include consciously savoring these positive effects and finding deep significance in them, suggesting a reflective and proactive approach by the social worker.

But these codes were less pervasive than those from other clusters, with no single code used for a majority of participants. We used the most common code in this cluster with only one third of participants ($n = 9$; 34.6 percent). As evidence of the cluster's importance and prevalence, however, all but six of the participants ($n = 20$; 76.9 percent) mentioned something that we coded with one or more of the four codes in the making meaning cluster.

Finding Fit in Work. Of several codes in the making meaning cluster, *finding fit in work* was the most common. We defined this as "making sure the job and the field of practice are best suited to your interests and needs," and used it 25 times for nine participants (34.6 percent). For example, a hospital social worker with 11 years of practice experience asserted, "What makes me happy and gratified and is paying my soul back is that [I] found the right fit for me" (participant 7). Another social worker said, "There are aspects of my job that suit me, that I love. I think those [aspects] suiting me as a person help me find joy in them" (participant 13). A juvenile justice social worker said, "I still get the hyped-up and excited vibe about [my job] and that to me is the sign that this is the population that I like working with, that I'm supposed to be working with" (participant 15). Another social worker explained that "the fine-tuning of what it is that I really wanted to do in my profession" led to greater joy over the course of her career (participant 20). These social workers agreed that finding an area of social work that fit their preferences and inclinations was essential for finding joy in social work.

Serving Others. We defined *serving others* as "finding pleasure and satisfaction in helping others," and applied it to 16 segments from 10 social workers (38.5 percent). Illustrative of this code is a social worker's comment, "I don't feel like myself if I am not helping someone else . . . or not trying to do something for other people . . . Doing things for others is where I get my joy" (participant 4). Another clarified that it was the helping process in which she found joy, rather than the helping outcome. She explained that while she was not always able to make a difference, she found joy in the opportunity to use her skills and to give back (participant 17). On the basis of social workers' comments about helping others, it seems that this source of joy lies in the meaning drawn from the process of engagement rather than the outcome. What matters is using one's skills to serve, even if this does not produce a tangible outcome.

Finding Meaning in Social Work. We defined *finding meaning in social work* as "recognizing the significance and value of professional social work" and applied this code to 12 segments from about one-third of participants ($n = 9$; 34.6 percent). Although not explicitly naming the profession as a source of joy, they gave examples of activities characteristic of professional social work practice. For example, one social worker helped reunite an older adult with her family following Hurricane Katrina. She explained that such experiences give meaning to the work that social workers do, that is, "that what you do matters" (participant 2). A social worker who worked with sexual assault survivors commented, "You know that you're doing something meaningful" (participant 3). These social workers found joy through recognizing the deep significance of their work.

Finding Purpose. Some social workers found joy in a deep sense of personal purpose. We named this *finding purpose*, defined it as "discovering my existence benefits others," and applied it to 12 comments from about one-third of the participants ($n = 9$, 34.6 percent). For them, social work was not only intrinsically meaningful work, it also connected them to their personal reason for existence. For example, a longtime geriatric social worker said, "It still brings me joy to help our less fortunate seniors. And I feel like it's my mission to do that, that's why I'm here . . . at the end of the day I am where I am supposed to be" (participant 8). A longtime foster care social worker described her sense of purpose as a source of joy. "This is my purpose! . . . I think we all have a purpose in life . . . And, I was raised for this, from the day I was born." It appears that a sense of personal purpose was a significant source of joy.

Summary. Together, the codes in this cluster distinguish several interrelated sources of meaning.

Some social workers identified their chosen profession and its characteristic activities as a source of joy. Others identified the core process of serving others as a source of joy. The other two codes—finding fit in work and finding purpose—have to do with the practical assessment of one's suitability for a particular social work job and an existential sense of suitability for the profession, respectively. Although the distinctions between these codes are not always clear or precise, the interviews provide ample evidence of these multiple meanings.

Cluster 4: Making a Life

Social workers told us about finding joy through certain attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that they used as guides in their practice and, for some, in other facets of their lives. We named this cluster of codes making a life and identified outlook and growing at work as two subclusters associated with it. The subcluster of outlook included the codes of gaining perspective, managing expectations, and rejoicing in little things. The subcluster of growing at work included the codes of learning continually, gaining confidence and maturing. These codes captured interrelated sources of joy having to do with developing perspective and growing and developing as a person. For some participants, these sources of joy were situated in their lives outside of work but clearly set the stage for finding joy in work.

The subcluster of outlook includes the codes of gaining perspective, managing expectations, and rejoicing in little things.

The subcluster of growing at work includes the codes of learning continually, gaining confidence, and maturing.

Gaining Perspective. We defined *gaining perspective* as "recognizing what's important, abandoning illusions" and used this code with 31 comments from 50 percent of participants ($n = 13$). A hospital social worker remarked, "Sometimes, you know, [social work] is very depressing. There is no question about it. But all that has a tendency to make my life in perspective and make me happier" (participant 4). Another person reflected how a client's suicide changed her perspective:

> While I could not stop him from taking his life I felt like I missed the boat in some ways because I was coming to him from my agenda instead of really hearing him authentically and meeting

him where he is. That was very eye opening for me . . . it changed my whole perspective on how you connect with people. (participant 5)

A social worker in the field for more than 30 years reflected on her life and said, "You know the little irritations in life are just little irritations in life. They are not big deals, anymore" (participant 4).

Managing Expectations. *Managing expectations* was defined as "being realistic in terms of what you can expect of yourself" and was used 18 times by 42 percent ($n = 11$) of participants. A social worker in her early thirties said that joy comes from

> not being dependent on how it has to turn out and it is alright if it doesn't turn out a certain way . . . relaxing my expectations on myself as a social worker, and realizing it's not always going to go smoothly, especially when you're working with people, and it's still okay and you can still be happy about it, even though it didn't necessarily turn out the way I wanted it to. (participant 16)

Rejoicing in Little Things. We defined *rejoicing in little things* as "finding satisfaction and joy in little things over time" and used this code 14 times with 27 percent of the social workers ($n = 7$). A social worker in her late 20s who had finished her MSW four years previously described this as "being able to find joy in the small things, the simple pleasures of life, and with home, with family, with whatever they're doing, and doing some self-exploration of what brings me joy" (participant 18). One social worker articulated this code clearly: "Learning to find the joy has been a process and I've been doing this now, for 15 years, so like I said, you just learn . . . to find joy in small details of every day at work" (participant 25).

Learning Continually. *Learning continually* was defined as "always learning new things, expanding your understanding and skills, and learning by doing." It was used 11 times by 35 percent of the social workers. A seasoned social worker reflected that one "thing about social work that brings joy is that it is always a learning curve. You are always improving your information and your understanding of human behavior and the society" (participant 9). Another said, "The great thing about being a social worker is that once you're in the field and

working, you realize, 'I'm never going to stop learning.' I've always got to have the joy of learning something new" (participant 22).

Gaining Confidence. We defined *gaining confidence* as "an increased sense of self-confidence over time" and applied this code 10 times with 23 percent of the social workers. A young social worker in practice with people who are homeless said,

> So, I guess my joy in being able to help people was always there, but now I feel like I'm actually good at it. And that's really satisfying to sit down in the office with someone and feel like I said the right thing. That happens more often these days than when I first started. (participant 24)

Reflecting on her career, another said, "I find more joy because I feel more comfortable . . . because when I started out 30-something years ago, I did not feel as confident, as self-confident, but I feel much more self-confident" (participant 12).

Maturing. *Maturing* seems related to the previous two codes, and we defined this as "personal and professional growth through experience and over time." We used this code the most, with 13 instances for 35 percent of the social workers. A social worker reflected,

> The changes have been in me, they have not so much been the things I do, they have been in me. I have matured all the way through this whole career. All of the clients, all of the experiences, have taught me so much about myself, and have taught me so much about life, and what is really important. (participant 4)

DISCUSSION
Limitations
We did not draw a representative sample (for example, of social workers or NASW members). We also used no measures or objective criteria for selecting joyful social workers. Instead, we relied on nominators to identify social workers who find great joy in their work. As a result, we know only that these social workers appear joyful to someone else and readily agreed to be interviewed for research on joy.

Implications
In a previous manuscript, we discussed the implications of making connections and making a difference

(Pooler et al., 2014). These interpersonal sources of joy revolve around deep human connections with clients and colleagues, the centrality of these relationships, and how through these connections social workers make a difference in people's lives.

Making meaning, a cluster of intrapersonal sources of joy that includes finding fit in work, finding meaning in serving others, finding meaning in social work, and finding purpose, seems to underpin and build on the two interpersonal sources. Making meaning appears to be an integrative emotional and cognitive process in which experiences with clients and colleagues are given special significance (in part through choice of work and serving others). Social workers think about relationships and outcomes in purposeful ways that may enhance and deepen investment, that is, possibly magnifying their meaning. Next, we link our work with emerging ideas and other concepts to make application to our lives and our work.

Finding meaning in connections provides motivation to continue to purposefully and artfully participate in the lives of others. Seligman (2011) included meaning as one of the five interrelated pillars of well-being and defined it as belonging to and serving something that one believes is bigger than oneself. Kanter's (2013) organizational development research identified meaning and membership as two of the three primary sources of motivation in highly innovative organizations. Our participants clearly spoke of the meaning they derived from their chosen work and from the connections (that is, membership and belonging) they had with others.

Research findings from business are consistent with these findings as well. Ariely (2012), a behavioral economist, found that workers thrive when they feel both a sense of purpose and a sense of making progress. Fredrickson's (2009) research on positivity suggested that people who flourish are motivated by a sense of purpose; are adding value to the world; and are highly engaged with their work, families, and communities. Other recent research has suggested that making meaning is integrative (for example, connecting past, present, and future) and cultural (for example, involving beliefs, values, practices), indicating deep engagement with people and with life (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2012).

This deep engagement and meaning making may be keys to a gratifying social work career.

When social workers believe that "this is what I'm here to do," they may have increased resilience. We suspect that making meaning helps social workers see positives, keep focused, and persist in the face of difficulties (for example, low pay or lack of systemic resources). People who have significant meaning in their lives focus on giving to others, what we called *serving others* (Baumeister et al., 2012). Meaning may be the underpinning that keeps us as social workers saying, "This is all worth the risk and effort."

Making a life, the second cluster of codes associated with intrapersonal sources of joy, includes the subclusters of outlook and growing at work. Outlook includes the codes of gaining perspective, managing expectations, and rejoicing in little things. The outlook subcluster appears to parallel Folkman's (2008) suggestion that "knowing what matters most now . . . is an essential ingredient for formulating goals, allocating resources, and determining strategies for moving forward" when there is stress or challenge (p. 11). In addition, the social workers in our interviews reported finding special significance in everyday experiences with clients and others (for example, rejoicing in little things). Similarly, Folkman (2008) found that "people took ordinary events and deliberately infused them with positive meaning in order to experience a positive moment" (p. 11).

Growing at work, the second subcluster associated with making a life, includes the codes of learning continually, gaining confidence, and maturing. Humility, openness, and curiosity describe social workers who are teachable. These social workers found joy in growing and availing themselves of opportunities to grow. Social workers with a strong sense of purpose may be eager to enlarge and expand their knowledge base and skill sets to improve their effectiveness. New learning opportunities can be cherished and enjoyed. Instead of enduring them, continuing education opportunities can be transformed into sources of joy. A not-knowing stance may stimulate curiosity and new learning about the self and others. Furthermore, curiosity and self-awareness are conduits to mindfulness (that is, the capacity to be fully present with self and others) and self-care. Quality supervision and a formal mentoring program could contribute to social workers' learning, confidence, and maturation. Learning continually and growing in confidence, both sources of joy, contribute to

mastery, which Kanter (2013) identified as the third of the three primary sources of motivation. The other two motivation sources, meaning and membership, were discussed earlier. Thus, the sources of joy that social workers identified in our research are clearly linked to motivation research in organizations.

Fredrickson's (2009) "broaden and build" theory lends credence to our research findings as well. Her research suggests that positive emotions, including joy, "broaden people's ideas and open their awareness to a wider range of thoughts and actions than is typical" (p. 21). Through this increased openness, "positive emotions allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge, and new ways of being" (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 24). Our cluster of making a life, including sources of joy relating to outlook and professional growth, is similar to Fredrickson's findings.

A primary implication of our research centers on caring for self and creating a sustainable career. Self-care is far more than exercising or getting rest; it includes thinking about life, events, self, and others in a meaningful way. Social work is clearly not without its challenges, yet we think that social workers who practice self-care can increase the joy they find in their work. Simple ways of caring for self include practicing gratitude in spite of stress or difficulties, appreciating the simple and small things, actively looking for good in colleagues and clients, and living in the present (Cox & Steiner, 2013). The present moment is always pregnant with possibilities (Stern, 2004), and a balanced life may be discovered by savoring what is good and right in us and around us. Such focused attention may bring meaning to all of life, not just to work. We also suggest sharing stories with colleagues about joyful experiences as a way of creating spirals of joy. Indeed, we wonder what would happen if supervisors created structured opportunities for social workers to share joyful experiences, for example in staff meetings.

We also wonder whether finding joy is related to psychological vulnerability. Although social workers did not explicitly discuss vulnerability, their efforts to find joy often seemed to carry some risk. They appeared to embrace life wholeheartedly with clients, colleagues, family, and friends (that is, to be "all in"). These social workers demonstrated the courage to show up and be seen, to "dare greatly" (Brown, 2012). Clearly there is inherent risk of

failure, disappointment, and pain. However, they seemed to think it was worth it. They transformed experiences by focusing on the meaning derived from them. We think that there must be a benefit to risk taking and being vulnerable. It may even relate to self-care, because vulnerable social workers may respond to their need to replenish and seek sources of nurture and support. Brown's (2010, 2012) groundbreaking research on vulnerability also helps us to make sense of our research findings. According to Brown (2010), "We have to walk through the hard stuff to get to joy." We think that most social workers probably do take risks, but without realizing it may be the route to joy. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable may increase our experiences of joy, and the experience of joy itself requires vulnerability. As Brown (2010) added, "The most vulnerable emotion we experience in the human condition is joy."

Social workers find joy in their work through numerous interpersonal and intrapersonal sources, as outlined in this and a previous article (Pooler et al., 2014), and our findings suggest a mutually reinforcing process. Social workers make connections with other people, and these connections enhance their ability to make a difference in others' lives. Subsequently, social workers draw meaning for their own lives from these relational connections and the differences made, and this internal meaning making provides further impetus to make connections and to make a difference. These processes occur within the larger context of ways that people choose to make a life, in both their work and outside of work.

Finally, the research methodology used in this research also serves as an intervention. We found that when social workers told their stories of joy it stimulated additional joyful experiences. We were reminded that eliciting stories of joy overlaps with narrative therapy, which holds that individuals and organizations live multistoried lives, often with competing story lines (White & Epston, 1990). Problem-saturated stories, when given greater attention than preferred alternatives, become the predominant narrative. Conversely, when people construct their life narratives by connecting a series of joyful events into a unified plot over time, their stories become ones of effectiveness, connection, meaning, and lives well lived. In fact, presenting our findings to professional groups and inviting their own stories of joy had the same effect.

CONCLUSION

By offering our research questions and findings, we do not intend to dismiss the real problems that plague our profession—low pay, high caseloads, and lack of recognition—but to highlight ways social workers find joy despite these challenges. In the course of doing this research and sharing our findings, we have been surprised and delighted by the positive shift that occurred when we asked social workers to talk about finding joy in their work. Although it requires intentionality, we realized how simple it is to talk about joy.

A Native American story provides a vivid metaphor of our findings. A grandfather told his grandson about two wolves that live and do battle inside us all. One wolf is snarling, angry, and ill-spirited, and the other is peaceful, kind, joyful, and loving. When the grandson asked which wolf wins, the grandfather replied, "The one you feed" (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 179). **SW**

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POINTS & VIEWPOINTS

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