Grey documentation is not a notable source of knowledge within the social work profession. The dominant perspective in social work is the positivist-empirical approach which emphasizes the scientific paradigm. The role that grey documentation can play as a knowledge base is presented. Five areas were identified where grey documentation can contribute to the social work knowledge base. Three organizational frameworks which are conducive to the production of grey documentation in the social work profession are described. The problem of dissemination of knowledge based on grey documentation in the social work profession is raised.

Grey Documentation as a Knowledge Base in Social Work

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Information systems have been heralded as indispensable tools for enhancing the performance of human services and for producing positive outcomes for people (Poertner and Rapp 1988). Such systems can play an important role in the processes of formulating social policy, planning, and programming. This role includes the identification of social issues and their formulation, goal clarification, practice, the identification of priorities and alternatives to these processes, in social monitoring and evaluation (Berman 1985). In contrast to the political aspects of decision making, information systems aid in bringing about rationalization of the decision-making process in the public policy sphere (Weirich 1985). The effective use of information systems, however, is dependent on the accessibility of the system to the decisionmaker

during the decision-making process. The place of the decisionmaker in the administrative structure determines the type of information he or she needs and its mode of application. The value of the information system in decision making is contingent on the relevance of the information content, availability, and timeliness.

Policy, planning, and practice in social welfare are an environmentally based process (Berman 1992; MacRae 1987). Indigenous social, economic, and cultural factors are important elements in the determination of the form and content of the social welfare policy and planning process and its implementation. This environmentally based process has its own dynamic environment and associated "irrational" factors, which are an essential part of the decision-making process. Social welfare policy, planning, and program implementation are influenced by these more subjective factors in the decision-making process. These factors include the political environment which has a major influence on policy; the current socioeconomic situation, both objective and the subject interpretation of the "objective" data which play a role in planning priorities; and the current fashionable trend in the social work (welfare) profession.

This process, with its own dynamic environment, has produced a proliferation of literature. This literature, however, remains relatively obscure since it is usually not published in scientific journals. This literature that describes policy-making, planning, and program implementation does not usually reach the stage of publication in professional journals. Rather, it is found in grey documentation.

Grey documentation is any document that is issued informally in limited numbers and/or is not available through normal bookselling channels. Examples of grey documents are scientific research reports, theses, papers presented at professional meetings, proceedings, internal reports, official documents, policy papers, working papers, and information output. They may come from voluntary organizations, universities, research and policy institutes, national and regional governments, and from professional and scientific meetings.

The contents of a grey document database include documents written for policy analysis, strategic planning, short-term planning, decision making, evaluation, needs assessment, management information, and reporting. The audiences for which these documents are prepared include elected officials or their representatives, policymakers, planners, administrators, experts, field-workers, practitioners, clients, voluntary associations, members of the lay public, journalists, and scientists.

Grey Documentation and Science

While there is a proliferation of grey literature, this type of documentation is often challenged as a viable source of knowledge within the academic community. To quote a university faculty member: "If the document is valuable and relevant why isn't it published in a journal?" This type of challenge may be based on faulty criteria but warrants consideration. Is an article valuable and relevant only because it was published in a journal? Emmert (1985) reports that science-based knowledge is most often transmitted via the formalized routes of scholarly journals and presentation. Some observers would say that publication in a scientific journal is generally considered as the criterion for labeling an article "scientific" (*Frye v. United States* 1923; Zuckerman 1988). However, may not an article have value and relevance even if it was not published in a scientific journal?

The scientific credibility of grey documentation has come before the United States Supreme Court in the case of Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals Inc. (No. 92-102) (U.S. Supreme Court 1993). The court was asked to decide whether only published articles in refereed journals are considered "science" can be admitted as scientific evidence in court or whether unpublished material (or what I call grey documentation) can also be considered as scientific evidence before the court. The lower court in this case based its decision on the Frye Rule, which derives from a case decided in 1923, which states that scientific evidence should not be admissible unless published in a journal subject to the academic process of peer review ("Court Hears Case" 1993). The decision (*William Daubert, et ux., et al., petitioners v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.* 1993) is quite revealing. The Supreme Court found that the reasoning or the methodology underlying testimony must be scientifically valid. The Court concluded that "the fact of publication (or lack thereof) in a peer-reviewed journal thus will be relevant, though not dispositive, consideration in assessing the scientific validity of a particular technique or methodology on which an opinion is premised" (p. 6). According to this decision, scientific knowledge can exist outside a peer-reviewed journal.

The issue of the relevance and use of grey documentation within science is not new. It was an important theme in a study carried out by the U.S. President's Science Advisory Committee (1963, 5). The study, known as the "Weinberg Report," concluded that "technical reports should be refereed or otherwise screened before they enter the internal information system." This proposal was an attempt to control the admission of grey documentation into recognized, legitimate channels.

But the issue of scientific literature as the bastion of academia and its accompanying professional journal may be related to nonscientific issues. Gieryn (1983) found that the "characteristics of science are examined not as inherent or possibly unique, but as part of ideological efforts by scientists to distinguish their work and its products from non-scientific intellectual activities" (pp. 781-82). This he defined as *boundary-work*. He then goes on to say that "when the goal is monopolization of professional authority and resources, boundary-work excludes rivals from within by defining them as outsiders" (p. 792).

Social Work and the Empirical Approach in Knowledge Development

In the 1950s, and with greater vigor in the 1960s, the empirical approach became a dominant perspective in the application of knowledge in the social sciences and social work (Karger 1983; Saleebey 1991; Witkin and Gottschalk 1989). In following this trend toward empiricism, social work began to focus on phenomena that could be quantified and statistically analyzed (Weick 1987). The version of science which has been proposed to achieve this goal is positivist; all propositions must be reducible to statements that describe data and that inference is attainable from observable data.

The empirical approach in social work has an impact on the knowledge base to be used by social workers. Karger (1983) informs us that teaching of research in schools of social work is designed not only to create informed consumers but is also designed to develop a constituency of social workers who accept the scientific paradigm. Karger goes on to say that reinforcing the empirical method in social work gives researchers "the power to define the reality of the profession" (p. 203). This leads not only to establishing the knowledge base of the profession but also establishes the practice method of the profession, for example, empirically based practice (Blythe 1992). It further sets the tempo of the profession as science tends to support and preserve the status quo (Raskin and Bernstein 1987).

The move of social work toward the scientific method committed the profession to use knowledge obtained by the scientific process as the base of its practice (Karger 1983). Because it lacked its own knowledge base, social work was required to borrow its knowledge and methods from the social sciences (Goldstein 1990) to fill its own empirical knowledge gap.

Has empirical knowledge then become part of the social worker's way of knowing? Rosenblatt (1968) found that relatively few practitioners make use

of research findings or rate them as helpful. Goldstein (1990) notes a number of studies which found that there is little connection between theoretical knowing and practical doing. A most revealing study of the weakness of the empirical knowledge base in social work is that of Fraser et al. (1991). They analyzed 1,825 articles which were published between 1985 and 1988 in ten social work journals. They found that 55.2 percent (1,008) of all articles published were research based. Social workers wrote 269 or 26.7 percent of the research-based articles. Of the 919 articles written by social workers, only 269 or 29.3 percent were research based. Fraser et al. found that "relative to other professionals, social workers appear to publish proportionately fewer research-based reports" (p. 12). They conclude, "The methods of modern science do not appear to be on the verge of dominating ways of knowing in the profession" (p. 13). Even after two decades in the quest for an independent empirical database, the social work profession is still dependent on its social scientist "cousins." One may hypothesize that conceptually there may be no inherent difference between most of the articles that social workers write for refereed journals and those that appear as grey documentation. Fraser et al. found that most articles by social workers were characterized by interpretation of theory, social comment, personal anecdote, and program advocacy. As we will see below, some grey documents may use a postpositive approach to generate knowledge and fall within the empirical scientific tradition. Needs assessment and evaluation are just two examples of empirically based knowledge found in grey documentation.

Grey Documentation

Knowledge producers and knowledge users are often seen to occupy two separate camps (Beyer and Trice 1982). Booth (1988) sees this issue on a more practical level in regard to research. He found that research for policy is designed around the user's information needs and not the knowledge building of the academic community. Boggs (1992) describes knowledge use as the knowledge producer transferring knowledge to the knowledge user. Boggs defines the knowledge producer as a social scientist, while Rose (1976) calls the knowledge user a decisionmaker. If one recognizes the legitimacy of the content of grey documentation then it can play a role within the knowledge base of social work. The knowledge user, the social worker, becomes also a knowledge producer.

Who are the audiences for grey documentation? They are those who get things done, like social workers. This manifests itself in the differing views

of social scientists and decisionmakers regarding information. Rose (1976) writes that a public official views knowledge or information as a means to an end, whereas a social scientist views it as an end in itself. The incompatibility of empirical research in an academic setting to the decisionmaker has been demonstrated. Rose cites an Austrian study (Knorr 1975) of attitudes toward social science research which found that public officials viewed academic research as inappropriate to their organization.

Grey documentation can play a unique role in knowledge transfer in a social work setting. Grey documentation as opposed to academic scientific research can fulfill the standards of documentation needs of decisionmakers. Rose (1976) writes that "any conclusions arising from research must be tested by political standards, as well as by the criteria of social science disciplines" (p. 112). Grey documentation can be a bridge between what Bauer (1990) calls science and technology.

Grey documentation can be functional in the social work process. It may be a more useful tool for the transfer of what Goldstein (1990) calls "practice wisdom." Emmert (1985) tells us about "ordinary knowledge" which is distributed without being subjected to the systematic examination of science-based knowledge. Yet it is "field-tested" by those who hold such knowledge. Emmert says that it owes its degree of verification to "common sense, causal empiricism, thoughtful speculation and analysis" (p. 99). Harris (1992) reports that much of grey documentation which is pertinent to social work is the nonscientific expression of experience. A unique characteristic of grey documentation in the human services is that it is conducive to action. This documentation comes directly from the field. In this way, one may relate to grey documentation as "primary" documentation. A predominant amount of grey documentation is published by field professionals as a communication device, reporting on their work. This type of documentation has the characteristic of "raw material" as opposed to the documentation published in scientific journals or commercially published books. The lag time between the event being described and the date of its publication is also considerably less in grey documentation compared with articles published in scientific journals or commercially published books.

Grey Documentation and the Social Work Knowledge Base

What does a grey documentation database that relates to a social worker's knowledge needs have to offer to the social worker? I have elsewhere

(Berman 1992) identified five areas in which a grey documentation database contributes to and sustains the social work knowledge base:[1]

1. Similar areas of concern to the social worker.
2. Description of a situation.
3. What is being done?
4. How it is being done?
5. Is it doing any good?

Similar Areas of Concern
to the Social Worker

Grey documentation describes areas of common concern within the profession. These could be cross-national comparative studies or individual national studies relating to a specific issue. For example, the Hoger Instituut Voor De Arbeid (1990) in Belgium carried out a cross-national comparative study, *Services for the Elderly in Europe: A Cross-National Comparative Study*, which found that each of the European Community member states is addressing the question of what socioeconomic facilities have to be extended to handle the increasing need of care adequately. The study found an enormous diversity across the different countries. The Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs in Bratislava has carried out a study on *Child Care Costs* (Tonhauserova and Dlouhy 1990), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (1989) carried out a study, *Differences in Overall Spending Patterns and Spending on Child Care by Family Type*. The variation of studies leads to the practical issue of definition of terms and methods of measurement in similar areas of concern, not as an empirical issue but as a communication and learning mechanism.

Description of a Situation

Grey documentation includes a wide variety of studies that describe a situation. This type can include macrostudies of national concern, small area studies, studies regarding specific population groups, or services. For example, the Institute for Mother and Child Health in Zagreb produced a study on the *Problems of Integration in the Children of Migrants* (Grguric, Svel, and Svob 1990). They found that, compared to native children, children of migrants suffer from more frequent and severe diseases. Medical surveillance over small migrant children and infants is less frequent and regular, and the migrant population less frequently seeks health care. In another example, the

Communidad de Madrid (1990) carried out a study on *The Needs of Children in the Community of Madrid* (translated from title in Spanish). The study describes the needs of children, their socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics, the effects of a newborn on the family dynamics, and issues regarding the social support of infants and children within the family. Studies of this type relate to Witkin's (1992) view that social work practice exists within a social and political arena and should not be reduced to a minimum deterministic approach. The relevancy in these types of studies may be their varied creative, reflective, and dramatic discourse which coincides with the existentialistic-humanistic view of social work practice.

What Is Being Done?

Documentation in this area of concern refers to work being done in the field of the application of social welfare policy, planning, and practice. Studies in this area include the description of field applications in the social services. The Department of Health and Social Welfare of the Open University at Milton Keynes, England produced a report on elder services, *Coordinating Care: The Final Report of the Care for Elderly People at Home Project, Gloucester* (Dant, Carley, Gearig, and Johnson 1989). The project developed and evaluated community-based workers in coordinating packages of care (statutory, voluntary, private, and informal care) to help elderly people remain in their own homes. The coordination largely involved links between existing agencies. The Economic Studies Program at the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC examined the determinants of paid home care utilization in the study on *Use of Paid Home Care by the Chronically Disabled Elderly* (Weiner and Hanley 1990).

How It Is Being Done?

An important part of grey documentation are documents based on field experience that describe how services and programs are carried out. This area of grey documentation brings the social work practitioner to the basic level of social work practice in the field. In the United States, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (1989) published a trainer's guide called *Developing Casework Skills*. The Israel Association for Child Protection in Tel Aviv developed an instrument *Indicators for Identifying Abused Children* (translated from title in Hebrew) (Zimrin 1989) for identifying abused children through observation. This includes indicators of physical abuse, behavior patterns of abused children, indicators of physical neglect, behavior patterns of neglected children, and indicators of sexual abuse.

Is It Doing Any Good?

Evaluation is the primary focus of many grey documents. A report from the Department of Gerontology at St. Thomas University in New Brunswick, Canada, called *Reaching the Rural Elderly* (Kenyon 1990), described the delivery of a low-impact exercise program for seniors sixty-five to eighty years old in five rural communities in the province of New Brunswick. The results include improved personal and community independence, significantly improved participation rates among the more isolated seniors, and continuity of the activity after project completion. In a study on *Ten Years Experience of Home Based Elderly Care in Sweden* (Thorslund and Johansson 1990) by the Department of Social Medicine, the University of Uppsala, Sweden, it was found that, by supporting elderly people in their homes, it was possible to decrease the number of institutional beds in relation to the number of aged in the population.

Dissemination

If grey documentation can be so useful to the social work practitioner, then why is it only marginally acknowledged as a significant contributor to the social work knowledge base? The distinguishing characteristic of grey documentation is its form of dissemination. Grey documentation in social work lacks accessibility. Because of its diffuse sources, differing audiences, classification systems, and communication patterns, access to grey documentation remains a key focus of concern. Grey documents are produced by thousands of social welfare and service organizations, government agencies, and research and policy institutes. What grey literature lacks is a central documentation database which could network the product. There are countrywide documentation databases such as VOLNET of the Community Development Foundation and the literature database of the National Institute of Social Work in the United Kingdom. There are also specialized document databases such as the document database of the American Association of Retired Persons in the United States. But what is lacking is an all-encompassing document database that serves a purpose similar to what ERIC does for education. The accessibility of ERIC is enhanced in that it is now on CD-ROM, which makes it accessible worldwide. In social work, the more accessible literature is the empirical literature which is available through the professional journals.

Social work is a practicing profession and, as noted above, social workers do not see a need to read what others are doing. Kling (1980) found that

transferring programs from others does not provide the same strong rewards as does local development. Therefore, reading what others are doing to transfer that knowledge to practice does not have high priority. A Community Development Foundation (1992) report found that among social development organizations there was little interest in on-line searching of databases. The interest was clearly in organizing and making available the organization's own information, rather than searching out more information and new sources. The transferability of knowledge at the practice level has not acquired roots in social work. Marin (1993) warns us regarding the practical implications of not using available knowledge in social welfare: "an insufficient application of available knowledge and the lack of systematic and rigorous evaluation makes social policies fail client's needs and waste public money" (pp. 34-35).

Restructuring Social Work
Knowledge Dissemination

The literature describes a number of frameworks that enable the structural integration of social work academicians with social work practitioners, thereby making possible the creation, diffusion, and utilization of alternate forms of knowledge, including grey documentation. Mathisen (1990) noted that users of research are not only customers but they are also good informants for researchers. The knowledge of such informants, he says, is disseminated only to a limited extent through discipline-specific and researcher-exclusive channels and forums. Rather, it is the kind of knowledge transferred through grey documentation (Harris 1992).

Gieryn (1983) describes a report entitled *Scientific Communication and National Security* (National Academy of Sciences 1982) which asserted that university-based science yields "basic" rather than "applied" knowledge. However, the report concluded that "at the cutting edge of science, the distinction between basic and applied research was becoming less relevant" (National Academy of Sciences 1982, 101-2). Nowhere can this be more true than in the school of social work in a university. It is in this setting that "scientific" social work meets applied social work. MacRae (1987) sees professional schools as partially guided by values of their own that are more practically oriented than those of basic knowledge. It is in this setting that grey documents, which are a mixture of empirical and practice knowledge, can be valuably exploited.

Rose (1976) informs us of another framework where grey documentation can make a valuable contribution to knowledge, the nonuniversity research

institute. The existence of these "middlemen" between university-based social scientists and government departments is evidence that academic social scientists do not meet the needs of government. The nonuniversity research institute is a valuable source of grey documents. MacRae (1987) views research institutes as technical communities which are "a group of experts who deal with layman's practical problems, conduct related research, and subject both these activities to independent mutual quality control" (p. 434). These activities fulfill the requirements of the "Weinberg Report" mentioned above, in that the work is refereed and yet serves as a bridge to the public. "For the technical community a condition for the relevance of its knowledge to policy is that its members interact with layman about the use of this knowledge" (MacRae 1987, 437). The knowledge in this setting is transferred through grey documentation.

In Norway, the irrelevancy of the academic community in solving "real" problems has led to the establishment of the "problem solving community" (Mathisen 1990). Problem-solving communities include nonscientists and are organized around particular types of social problems rather than a set of internal scientific problems. Mathisen comments that much of the research done is at cross-purposes with the criteria for what counts as valuable and recognized research from the academic's disciplinary perspective. The dissemination of knowledge in this setting emphasizes the needs of the users. This includes the method of presentation and the informal dissemination process. It is in this type of framework that grey documentation is prevalent.

Summary

In the social work profession, knowledge production and dissemination are diffuse. Social work as a profession has its knowledge base in the social sciences, with their accompanying scientific tradition. This tie between science and social work is most manifest in the university setting. At the same time, social work as a profession (even in the university setting) tends toward practical applications of knowledge. Other types of frameworks have devolved, "technical communities" and "problem-solving communities" which answer the knowledge needs of social work. The structure of these frameworks facilitates the dissemination of grey documentation. Grey documentation does not necessarily differ in content or methodology from "scientific" literature. Its basic characteristic is in its dissemination which is more limited and client oriented. It is this distinctive characteristic of grey documentation that constrains its usefulness (Ben-David 1971; Harris 1992). The result of this outcome is that knowledge is being lost to the social work profession.

Note

1. The following observations were taken from the INFUSE (Information Uses in Social Welfare Policy) Grey Document Archive. The INFUSE grey document archive is a joint project of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Jerusalem.

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