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Kevin M. Gorey  
*University of Windsor*

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# The Effectiveness of Feminist Social Work Methods: An Integrative Review

Kevin M. Gorey  
Catherine Daly  
Nancy L. Richter  
David R. Gleason  
Mary Jo A. McCallum

**ABSTRACT.** This integrative review of the effectiveness of feminist social work methods compared 35 independent studies of feminist interventions with 44 independent studies of social work practice that were based on other theoretical orientations. Feminist interventions were observed to be more effective than those based on other practice models. And among feminist social work interventions, radical methods seemed to be more effective than liberal methods. These findings are consistent with a theory by target system interaction that was suggested by a previous meta-analysis (Gorey, Thyer, & Pawluck, 1998). While personal theoretical orientations such as cognitive-behavioral modes of practice seem more supportive of individual client change, systemic-structural models, including feminist ones, seem to be more effective in supporting mutual client-worker strategies to change larger system targets. This study's review-generated finding of feminist, specifically radical femi-

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nist, social work's differential effectiveness is essentially a screened hypothesis. Its validity remains to be tested with well controlled primary research. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Feminism, social work practice, practice theories, meta-analysis, review, group work, family violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse

A recent meta-analysis of social work's effectiveness inferred that contemporary social work interventions are highly effective. Integrating the findings of 88 studies, eight of every ten clients were estimated to have done better than the average person in a comparison condition (Gorey, 1996). A secondary analysis of this data base then explored the effects of prevalent social work models ( $N = 45$  studies; Gorey, Thyer, & Pawluck, 1998). Though Gorey and colleagues did not observe a statistically significant main effect of practice model, they did find a nonsignificant trend of larger effects among interventions commensurate with radical-structural, including feminist, theoretical orientations. Their tentative inference was that nine of every ten feminist social work participants do better than the average nonparticipant. These previous meta-analyses, which selected studies from the so-called core research-oriented social work journals, were not designed to purposefully sample the feminist social work literature, and as a result, lacked adequate power to specifically test related hypotheses. This integrative review will endeavor to extend our knowledge on the effectiveness of prevalent social work models by systematically replicating previous meta-analyses with a sample of studies from the target population of feminist social work practice. Consistent with previous meta-analytic knowledge development, feminist interventions are hypothesized to be more effective than others.

### ***HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT***

Nineteen eighty seems to have been a watershed year in which cultural and professional trends converged on recognition of the importance of gender in social work and allied practice. That was the year, for

example, of the National Association of Social Worker's first conference on practice with women (Weick & Vandiver, 1981). The year before, the exploratory notion that feminism may add significantly to the efficacy of psychotherapy was introduced in a study of consciousness-raising group members (Marecek, Kravetz, & Finn, 1979). Almost twice as many of those who had experienced psychotherapy with a feminist therapist deemed their experience "very helpful" as compared with the participants of traditional psychotherapies (67% vs. 38%). Unfortunately, nearly two decades later, the task of validating this notion remains to be accomplished: (a) women's issues are still grossly unrepresented in social work's literature (Millner & Widerman, 1994; Nichols-Casebolt, Krysik, & Hamilton, 1994); and (b) the profession's empirical literature is essentially one of behavioral methods. Recent summaries of 26 relevant traditional reviews and 35 meta-analyses, accomplished during these same two decades, found that interventions were almost exclusively based on cognitive-behavioral methods (92%; Myers & Thyer, 1997; Reid, 1997). Most of the review authors were psychologists and psychiatrists. However, even a review which specifically sampled studies of interventions with social work practitioners, authored by social workers, and reported in journals affiliated with professional social work associations was predominated by cognitive-behavioral methods (49%; Gorey et al., 1998).

Documentation of the impressive representation of cognitive-behavioral models among empirical outcome studies notwithstanding, consistent evidence in support of their differential effectiveness has not been found. In fact, evidence exists which tends to support an alternative notion. Ample evidence in support of the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral interventions with personal intervention targets notwithstanding, when the target of change is more progressively defined as some element of the environment or the structures of society, then social work models such as generalist problem-solving, task-centered, systemic, and structural, including feminist ones, seem to be more effective (Gorey et al., 1998). This review-generated inference remains to be tested though with primary studies of social work's effectiveness by different practice models.

*Feminist Theories.* Others have lamented social work's emphasis on personal attributes (thoughts, feelings, behaviors and lifestyles) as primary intervention targets, while rhetorically espousing a holistic, ecological perspective, as well as an interest in solving *social* problems (e.g., Epstein, 1994; Jacobson, 2001). Feminism's structural perspective seems a far better fit than that provided by orientations which

merely focus on personal behaviors or intrapsychic processes (Collins, 1986; Mullaly, 1993). A number of general attributes of feminist practice may serve to set it apart from other practice modes: (a) the importance of gender is explicitly addressed as are such related issues as inequalitarian resource distribution and oppression; (b) efforts are made to eliminate, or minimally, to diminish false dichotomies and artificial separations; (c) power is reconceptualized; and (d) a strengths perspective is emphasized (Bricker-Jenkins, Hooyman, & Gottlieb, 1991; Burt & Code, 1995; Russell, 1989; Tavris, 1992; Van Den Bergh, 1995). Among the continuum of major feminist theoretical orientations, we think that two are most germane to social work practice: liberal and radical (Trainor, 1996). The liberal orientation tends to fit with traditional modes of practice. Though it emphasizes the importance of equal rights for women, it still focuses on the correction of individual deficits. The radical perspective, on the other hand, focuses systemically on a variety of intervention targets: social relationships, larger institutional systems, and the structures of a patriarchal society (Israeli & Santor, 2000; Nes & Iadicola, 1989; Sands & Nuccio, 1992). This study hypothesizes that social work interventions based on radical feminism are significantly more effective than liberal feminist social work methods.

### METHODS

First, studies were selected from three journals listed in *An Author's Guide to Social Work Journals* (1997) which explicitly refer to feminism in their mission statements: *Affilia*, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, and *Women and Therapy*. The key word search [(feminism or feminist) and (effect, effectiveness, efficacy, evaluation, benefit, follow-up or outcome)] produced 112 relevant studies. The eight of these for which an effect size (ES) was calculable were included in this review's sample. Then general published (*Social Work Abstracts* and *PsycINFO*) and unpublished (*Dissertation Abstracts*) social work literature was searched on the same key word scheme. Twenty-seven conceptually and empirically relevant studies were so selected. The compact disks searched in January of 2001 included references until September of 2000. The 35 studies thus selected for this analysis did not differ significantly from Gorey and colleagues' (1998) sample of 44 studies on their representation of major research design characteristics (e.g., respectively, experimental, including quasi-experiments [54% vs. 58%], randomized [23% vs. 29%], standardized outcome measure

[43% vs. 43%]), and so we are confident that their comparison was probably not confounded by them.

This study used the identical ES metric used by Gorey and colleagues (1998). The *r*-index, straightforwardly interpretable as Pearson's correlation coefficient, focuses on the strength of the intervention-outcome association and is, therefore, the most appropriate ES metric for analyzing studies that for the most part are not experiments (Cooper, 1998). The *r*-index was calculated for each of the 35 independent studies. It is calculable from a variety of outcome statistics (group *M*s and *SD*s, *t*-test, *F*-ratio,  $\chi^2$ , and *p*-level with group *N*s), and thus allows for ease of across-study comparison. For two of the studies that used an uncontrolled post-test only design, a meta-analytically constructed comparison group allowed for the computation of their effects (among the 13 studies in Gorey's [1996] meta-analysis with waiting-list comparison groups, 28% of their members improved while waiting). Cohen's (1988)  $U_3$  statistic was used as an index of practical significance. It is an intuitively appealing metric which compares all intervention group members with the typical comparison group member on a dependent measure (qualitative or quantitative) at post-test. We think that Cohen's  $U_3$  is a particularly good clinical effect indicator to integratively summarize feminist practice because it can be used to emphasize people rather than scores. For example, a  $U_3$  of 75% resulting from the comparison of participants in feminist group work intervention for battered women with similarly challenged women in an alternative intervention comparison group would be interpretable as follows. Three-quarters of the feminist group work participants were doing better at follow-up (scored better on a dependent measure) than the typical (median) comparison group member. Finally, the aggregate effects of the 35 studies on feminist practice, as well as the separate effects of radical and liberal feminist interventions, were compared to Gorey and colleagues' sample of 44 studies of prevalent social work interventions based on other theories.

It should be noted that substantial criterion validation for this review's key moderator variable of liberal versus radical feminism was observed. First, consistent with a survey that found most social workers identify with a liberal feminist focus (Freeman, 1990), the majority of this integrative review's sample of feminist studies were based on liberal feminism (22 of 35, 63%). Also as expected, significantly more of the liberal interventions were concomitantly based on behavioral theories (14 of 22, 64%). Only two (15%) of the radical feminist interventions used such methods; continuity-corrected  $\chi^2 (1, N = 35) = 5.70, p < .05$ .

And perhaps most validating, radical methods were nearly synonymous with the choice of nonpersonal, larger system intervention targets (11 of 13, 85%). While in contrast, most (18 of 22, 82%) of the liberal feminist interventions targeted personal behaviors of their participants for change; continuity-corrected  $\chi^2 (1, N = 35) = 11.99, p < .01$ .

## RESULTS

### *Sample Description*

The 35 studies of feminist methods typically (69%) had samples of fewer than 100 participants (median = 44, ranged from four to 1,040). The practice intervention evaluations were nearly exclusively of group work (83%, Table 1), and predominantly of brief duration (median = 10 weeks, ranged from 4 to 30). Study manuscripts were for the most part written by women (80% of the first authors) about work with women (74%). The prevalence of group work interventions (83% vs. 57%,  $\chi^2 [1, N = 79] = 6.17$ ), female first authorship (80% vs. 45%,  $\chi^2 = 9.67$ ) and exclusive female service consumership (74% vs. 9%,  $\chi^2 = 35.13$ ) were all significantly greater ( $p < .01$ ) among this sample of studies as compared with Gorey and colleagues'. However, none of these characteristics were found to be associated with intervention ES so they are not likely to confound the comparison of feminist versus other theoretical orientations. It should also be noted that nonstatistically significant, though practically significant trends were observed which suggested greater participation in the development of feminist practice knowledge by non-academic (32% vs. 18%) masters-level (27% vs. 14%) practitioners than among adherents of other perspectives. And concerning the generalizability of this integrative review's findings to social work practice, while more than half of the studies were first-authored by social workers, 24 were co-authored by at least one social worker (69%), and an additional three provided evidence that social workers were engaged in the practice being evaluated (77%). Profession (social worker or psychologist) was not associated with ES. Finally, this integrative review's 79 intervention studies targeted 39 distinctly different problems or challenges from nearly all of the major fields of social work practice. Its meta-analytic sample, however, lacked the statistical power necessary to test specific theory by such specific target comparisons beyond its planned feminist (liberal or radical) versus other theoretical orientation level of resolution.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Profile of the 35 Studies on Feminist Social Work Methods

Design Characteristics	Studies		Client and Author Characteristics	Studies	
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Level of the Intervention			Clients Served <sup>a</sup>		
Small group	29	82.9	Women	26	74.3
Individual	5	14.3	Men	3	8.6
Family (couple)	1	2.8	Both	6	17.1
Research Design			First Author a Woman	28	80.0
Pre-experimental	14	40.0			
Quasi-experimental	11	31.4	First Author a Social Worker	21	60.0
Experimental	8	22.9			
Single-system(AB)	2	5.7	First Author a Non-Academic <sup>b</sup>	7	31.8
Outcome Measures			First Author Education <sup>b</sup>		
Standardized, quantitative <sup>c</sup>	15	42.8	MA/MSW	6	27.3
Individualized, qualitative <sup>d</sup>	12	34.3	PhD/DSW	16	72.7
Both <sup>cd</sup>	8	22.9			

*Note.* Initial inter-rater agreement among three raters (two initially naive) who coded 23 variables from the study manuscripts was 94.6%. Disagreements were discussed so that the ratings were ultimately unanimous (100% agreement).

<sup>a</sup> Fourteen studies (40.0%) evaluated work with client problems related to their experience of physical or sexual abuse (the three studies with men concerned work with perpetrators of such abuse), eight studies (22.9%) involved depression, stress or low self-esteem secondary to other problems (e.g., an eating problem), the other 13 studies were of practice across an array of individual and familial problems.

<sup>b</sup> Dissertations and theses excluded.

<sup>c</sup> Median reliability coefficient was .86. Substantial evidence of their criterion validity (concurrent and predictive) was also reported.

<sup>d</sup> For the most part were intuitively appealing and clearly face valid (e.g., termination of an abusive relationship [yes, no]).

### ***Effectiveness of Feminist Methods***

The combined results of the 35 studies on feminist interventions were found to be significant in both a statistical and practical sense ( $U_3 = 83.6\%$ ,  $p < .001$ , Table 2). This aggregate finding allows for the inference that approximately 17 of every 20 people who participated in them did better than the



average person in a comparison condition. In support of our main hypothesis, the average ES among the feminist interventions ( $r = .440$ ,  $SD = .259$ ) was significantly greater than that observed among social work interventions which were based on other theories ( $r = .324$ ,  $SD = .215$ );  $F(1, 77) = 4.53$ ,  $p < .05$ . In contrast, an estimated 15 of every 20 people who participated in these non-feminist interventions did better than the average nonparticipant ( $U_3 = 75.4\%$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Evidence in support of this study's secondary hypothesis was also found. Radical feminist interventions that are generally based on structural orientations ( $N = 13$  studies,  $r = .557$ ,  $SD = .183$ ,  $U_3 = 90.0\%$ ) seemed more effective than their more liberal, personal theoretically-based, counterparts ( $N = 22$  studies,  $r = .375$ ,  $SD = .267$ ,  $U_3 = 79.1\%$ );  $F(1, 33) = 5.69$ ,  $p < .05$ . Nearly all (18 of every 20) of those people engaged with a practitioner espousing a radical feminist orientation were estimated to have benefited from such mutual work.

## DISCUSSION

Comparing a sample of studies on the effectiveness of feminist social work interventions ( $U_3 = 83.6\%$ ) with a sample of social work practice

TABLE 2. The Effectiveness of Feminist Social Work Practice Interventions versus Those Based on Other Prevalent Theoretical Orientations

Effect Size (ES) Statistics	Feminist	Other Theories <sup>a</sup>
Studies ( $n$ )	35	44
Minimum $r$	.000	.021
Maximum $r$	.986	.880
Mean $r$	.440 <sup>b</sup>	.324 <sup>b</sup>
$SD$	.259	.215
$r$ 95% confidence interval	.354, .526	.261, .387
Cohen's $U_3$ (%)	83.6	75.4
$r > .30^c$ ( $n$ , %)	26, 74.3	23, 52.3

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from Gorey, Thyer and Pawluck (1998). For the present analysis, one study of a feminist intervention that was included in their original sample was excluded from that sample, but included in the feminist sample of studies (Mancoske, Standifer, & Cavley, 1994).

<sup>b</sup> Combined probability by the method of adding sample size-weighted  $z$ s (Rosenthal, 1978),  $p < .001$ .

<sup>c</sup> Moderate to large effect (Cohen, 1988);  $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 4.03$ ,  $p < .05$ .

studies which were based on other theories ( $U_3 = 75.4\%$ ), we found the feminist interventions, on average, to be more effective. Moreover, we found that radical feminist interventions ( $U_3 = 90.0\%$ ) seemed to be even more effective than their liberal feminist counterparts ( $U_3 = 79.1\%$ ). These findings are consistent with a theory by target system interaction that was suggested by a previous meta-analysis (Gorey et al., 1998). That is, while personal theoretical orientation such as cognitive-behavioral modes of practice seem more supportive of individual client change, systemic-structural models, including feminist ones, seem to be more effective in supporting mutual client-worker strategies to change larger system targets. Moreover, this study empirically tested the potential confounding influence of research design (experimental vs. other designs, standardized vs. other outcome measures, and sample size), author/worker (professional affiliation and gender) and client (gender) characteristics. None of these factors represented potent alternative explanations for this study's central finding: The differential effectiveness of feminist interventions was consistent across all of them.

### ***Potential Review Limitations***

We believe that the two most potentially potent alternative explanations for the findings of this meta-analysis are both related to the issue of selection bias. First, the possibility of publication bias ought to be addressed in all such reviews. The average effect of social work interventions reported in unpublished forums has been observed to be approximately 15% smaller than those published in peer-reviewed journals (de Smidt & Gorey, 1997; Grenier & Gorey, 1998). Our sample of studies, by including unpublished dissertations and theses on feminist practice (37% of the sample), actually made for a very conservative comparison with Gorey and colleagues' (1998) sample of published studies. The average estimated effect of published feminist social work methods is actually slightly larger ( $U_3 = 88.7\%$ ) than this review's finding of 83.6%.

Second, it could be argued that the meta-analytic method for integratively reviewing, particularly its criterion that an ES is calculable from each study, precludes the selection of studies which are truly representative of feminist methods, *a la*, the ongoing debate on logical positivism versus relativism. We believe that such a false dichotomization of our inquiry with clients, across a *continuum* of important questions about what works, does the profession a great disservice. Concerning the present review's findings, we believe such an argument to be moot

for the following reasons. Interest in social work's effectiveness has been observed to be nearly identical among the feminist (10%) and other social work literatures (12%). Next, though significantly fewer of such feminist studies report data adequate for ES estimation (7% [this study] vs. 31% [Gorey, 1996]), this literature provides essential qualitative knowledge from the field about the suggested or implied effectiveness of what are in many instances innovative interventions. Some may interpret this relatively low prevalence of quantifiable ES estimates among feminist studies of social work practice as a methodological problem, and consequently, as a limitation of the present study. We do not. Rather, we think that it merely reflects the relatively naturalistic emphasis among feminist practitioners on theory building and hypothesis generation. In support of this notion, nearly half (41%) of the studies that were excluded from the present analysis on empirical grounds were cited in the included studies. Thus, the earlier work of feminist practitioners laid the theoretical groundwork for the development, and ultimate testing, of hypotheses uniquely relevant to feminist social work practice. Finally, while we concur with the notion that this review's sample of relatively positivist feminist research studies represents a skewed sample from a field of studies that is predominantly qualitative, we do not conceive of this as a limitation, but rather a strength. As a field's knowledge develops, research questions and methods of answering them tend to become increasingly complex. Gratefully, some feminists social work practitioners and researchers use multiple methods, including positivist ones. Regardless of our diverse philosophies and theoretical perspective, at some point in the development of knowledge about a particular intervention we have a professional responsibility to rigorously evaluate it in such a compelling way that even philosophical, theoretical or political adversaries can agree or disagree with the validity of our findings (Freedberg, 1993; Gorey, 1996; Keller, 1985; Ivanoff, Robinson, & Blythe, 1987; Myers & Thyer, 1997; Swigonski, 1994). Given the cultural and political milieu in which we presently practice, such inquiry necessarily includes logical positivistic adherence to the scientific method.

Because the majority of intervention studies (feminist and other theory-based) included in this integrative review were not randomized controlled trials or so-called true experiments, another word of caution is certainly warranted. To the extent that the findings of its sample of primary studies are open to challenge, so to could this review's findings be challenged. This integrative review's key comparisons—feminist interventions versus those based on other theories—probably met this

methodological challenge fairly well. It should be recalled that though in both respective cases the vast majority of the studies did not use randomized experimental methods (77% and 71%), the majority of them did use experimental or quasi-experimental methods that tend to approach the control provided by true experimental research designs (54% and 58%). Moreover, the application of standard statistical tests indicated that in neither case did this study's key meta-analytic comparison groups (feminist vs. other theory-based intervention studies) differ significantly on these categories. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that this review's comparisons could have been confounded by such nonexperimental-experimental variability. Relatedly, because of the possibility that meta-analysis may merely compound erroneous inferences drawn from research that is not well controlled, and because some analysts have observed the effects of nonexperiments to be systematically larger than those of otherwise similar experiments, numerous caveats have been offered regarding the use of meta-analysis with nonrandomized or nonexperimental research (Petitti, 2000; Stroup et al., 2000). In fact, recent meta-analyses of social work research, including one authored by a member of this research team (Gorey, 1996), have been similarly critiqued (Epstein, 1999; Hogarty, 1989). One could, therefore, have made a rational argument for the exclusion of nonexperimental research from this meta-analytic study's sample. In this instance, however, such an exclusion criteria was not applied for both theoretical and empirical reasons. We wanted the continuum of ways practitioners and researchers presently gain knowledge to be represented (Caspi, 1992; Tyson, 1992). Then we empirically tested the proposition that certain studies ought to be excluded (Cooper, 1998; Greenland, 1998; Rothman & Greenland, 1998, pp. 77-78). Not only did the design distinction of nonexperimental versus experimental not confound the observed aggregate comparison of feminist with other intervention methods, but neither did an array of other methodological, contextual, and worker and client characteristics. Thus, by exercising due empirical caution, this integrative review provided ample assurance that its inclusion of nonexperimental research did not produce conclusions substantively different than those one could have expected from the synthesis of randomized experiments only.

### ***Future Research Needs***

Having presented all such supportive arguments, a systematic review such as this one still necessarily produces review-generated findings.

And even though its sample of primary studies used various research designs, at the level of meta-analysis the research design is essentially cross-sectional. Studies were sampled and analyzed at one point in time: January of 2001. Therefore, all of the so-called review-generated findings of this meta-analysis are most appropriately thought of as screened hypotheses awaiting the confirmation or refutation of future primary research. Given the consistency of its findings across research design and contextual characteristics of the studies it analyzed though, it also seems appropriate to label this review's conclusions as strong hypotheses that we can be confident will be affirmed with superior primary research methodologies. Even though this study could not test specific theory by specific target interactions beyond its planned feminist (liberal or radical) versus other theoretical orientation comparisons, its central finding that certain, broadly defined, methods seem more effective for the targeted change of certain, broadly defined, problems or challenges, strongly suggests that analogous specific intervention by specific target inquiries are needed. In our view, this ought to be one of the central goals of the next generation of social work practice research.

Having argued for the inclusion of nonexperimental studies in this meta-analysis, one of the central purposes of which is to develop and screen hypotheses through the systematic integration of extant knowledge, we want to make it clear that we believe that the future research needs of the profession as it poses and then tests the next generation of hypotheses concerning the differential effectiveness of various practice methods is quite a different matter. Specifically, we believe, that in this matter what are most urgently needed are well designed, powerful clinical trials that compare different social work intervention methods with specific client populations and target problems/systems. Such well-controlled comparative research could be based on any number of the profession's ongoing theoretical debates. Its goal, however, would not merely be to advance a particular interest group's agenda at the cost of others or to merely continue an *ad nauseam* professional debate, as so often seems to be the case, but rather, such research could provide the kind of confident knowledge that puts relatively inferior ideas (ineffective interventions) to rest and practically advances better ones (offering the most effective interventions). In other words, such compelling study would offer the hope of being convincing to those who may be outside of the professional, theoretical or decision making choir, so to speak. We wonder if our own profession's research, or that of any other for that matter, is worth its societal, professional, and personal investments if it does not offer even the possibility of changing the minds and behaviors

of practitioners and policy makers? We think not. Our fear is that without such controlled study another research group could systematically replicate this integrative review a generation from now and reach the same rather tentative conclusion that we have.

You may recall at this point that approximately one of every four studies included in this review did indeed use randomized experimental methods. We would argue, however, that none of even these so-called “true experiments” could validly be called a controlled clinical trial. They rarely included more than 100 study participants, and the typical study included less than 50 participants: median samples among the experimental studies of feminist and other intervention methods were 39 and 43, respectively. Relatedly, among the few studies that reported client/participant attrition rates, the aggregate rate was 23%. A cursory review of such randomized experimental or clinical trial evaluations of social work methods that have been cited in the *Social Work Abstracts*, *PsycINFO* and *Medline* research literature data bases (1965 to 2001) suggests to us that what we have described among this sample of studies is probably generalizable to other fields of social work practice. The results of very few experiments or clinical trials have been published, and nearly all of these have been relatively small, uncontrolled trials. It is easy to imagine how it could be extremely difficult for someone who is not already singing from our hymnal (e.g., a decision maker not inclined to support social work and social welfare spending) to join our choir.

Such is not a new lament. It echoes those of many previous rational-empiricist authors (e.g., Meyers & Thyer, 1997; Newman & Roberts, 1997). We think that a very specific example may serve to clarify and so humbly add a new insight into what specifically is needed in the next generation of social work research. Let's take, for example, the most prevalent practice issue represented among the intervention effectiveness studies of feminist social work practice: family or intimate violence—work with children, adolescents and adults (most typically women) who have experienced such physical or sexual abuse, and work with the perpetrators of such abuse. Our meta-analysis has suggested that a modest, but probably very practically significant—clinical and policy—intervention success rate difference of approximately 10% may exist between feminist and other methods in this field. It becomes clear that definitive answers to such questions will be quite costly. Using the following well-established statistical power criteria (power  $[1-\beta] = .80$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ) and allowing for the control, adjustment or stratification of only three potential confounding, intervening or effect modifying vari-

ables (key client, worker, intervention or contextual characteristics), minimally, 1,650 study participants (825 in each of two intervention groups) would be required to perform a statistically valid hypothesis test (Fleiss, 1981, p. 279). And given prevalent participant attrition problems in this and related fields of practice, the actual initial sample size needed would probably be more than 2,000. True, such studies would be quite costly, probably requiring substantial ongoing federal funding. But if astute, principal investigating social workers do not make this federal case, who will? And at what alternative costs to the profession and society? This suggested future research agenda may seem a lofty dream to some, as our profession has little experience with this sort of research. But the confidence we could obtain about social work intervention effectiveness through such very large, probably multicenter clinical trials, can probably not be obtained in any other way. A commitment to such highly controlled study that may serve not to subjugate, but rather to compliment our rich developing qualitative knowledge based on the experiences of clients and workers, is desperately needed to advance the next generation of social work research. The initial research costs will likely pay large dividends in beneficial service outcomes, client and worker satisfaction, and professional prestige.

### *CONCLUSION*

Empirical evaluations of feminist social work interventions are generally underrepresented in the profession's peer-reviewed literature. However, when such methods have been so validated, it appears that they may be among the profession's most effective strategies. This is a review-generated finding though, and ought to be tested with primary social work research. It seems that while the majority of feminist scholars have reported their qualitative theory-building efforts, empiricist have preferentially chosen to test methods based on behavioral or other more personally-focused methods. Certainly, anyone with significant practice experience, be it agency or university-based, will have the wisdom to admit that they are not holders of the universal truth (e.g., Meyer, 1985). The next generation of social work knowledge building is challenged to increase the specificity of our practice knowledge across intervention, target, client, worker and contextual characteristics, as well as their interactions. Successful advancement of more complex knowledge will necessarily involve the collaboration of diverse people us-



ing a variety of practice and research methods, the union of diverse female and male voices if you will. The continued development, implementation and testing of innovative social work interventions will surely require a creative harmonic choir, rather than solo performances, no matter their individual virtuosity.

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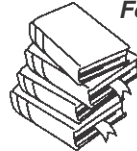
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