

Motivation: The Crucial but Unexplored Component of Social Work Practice

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THE IDEA of motivation is everywhere in social work. Cutting across micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice, motivation is referred to secondarily in social work literature with consistent frequency. Almost every article on practice, the change process, or the worker-client relationship alludes to motivation as a crucial ingredient in assessment and in the formulation of a treatment plan.

However, in spite of the importance social work ascribes to motivation, there is a surprising paucity of social work literature that addresses motivation as the primary object of study. Within social work, the construct has not been defined in such a way that it can be implemented and then empirically tested so as to further workers' knowledge and enhance their ability to use it in practice. Some of the "classic" social work literature touching on motivation (Hollis, 1964; Kadushin, 1972; Perlman, 1957) is perceptive and pragmatic, if not empirically based; other classic works (for example, Richmond, 1925a, 1925b; Strean, 1971, 1978; and Taft, 1948) do not discuss motivation at all, making only token, perfunctory references. The social work abstracts for the past 10 years index only 10 articles under "motivation," and, of these, more than half are not from social work at all, but rather from psychology, presumably indexed in social work abstracts because they are seen as being of interest to the social work profession. This neglect of motivation by social work is perplexing, considering the importance of the concept for the profession.

In contrast, motivation has been intensively investigated in psychology literature over the past 10 years. However, this study has resulted in no simple conclusions. Psychologists view motivation as a complex and highly problematic construct. In this article, the author looks at some of the problems of the construct, then examines

Motivation is an important construct in social work, yet it is one that has been relatively unexplored. In this article, motivation is defined, the social work literature on the subject is briefly reviewed, and the recent empirical research in psychology is summarized. The most significant findings that relate motivation to theories of locus of control and self-determination are discussed in terms of applications to social work practice. Further empirical study in this area is strongly recommended.

some of the most recent theoretical and empirical findings within psychology, and finally relates these findings to social work literature on the subject. The author discusses these ideas in terms of potential applications to practice.

Definition of the Construct Difficulties

Motivation in everyday speech has two diametrically opposed meanings. Although Freud (1958) saw dual meanings of a word as a sign of its meaningfulness, this duality in relation to *motivation* poses some serious difficulties in definition. In everyday speech, we use the word to refer to an internal process ("That client lacks motivation") as well as to an external process ("You have to provide your students with some motivation"). Thus, it is used to mean both the extrinsic incentives that are supposed to influence the inner process and the inner process itself.

Within the field of psychology, the situation is no clearer: Cofer and Appley (1964), for example, contrast five different definitions of motivation, each from a different theoretical framework,

and thus illustrate the difficulty in arriving at some common, agreed-upon definition of the term. Ferguson (1976, p. 5) made the same lament:

Many writers and researchers use a common term such as 'drive' or 'motivation' but imply quite diverse meanings using the term. Much of the current difficulty in the scientific study of motivation springs from this very uncertainty: what do we mean by motivation?

According to Ferguson (1976), part of the difficulty with definition has to do with the fact that historically motivation has been used to explain "too much with too little" (p. 6). One legacy from the theoretical past, when motivation was seen as "instinct" or "need," is the tendency to explain all behavior by motivation (for example, a child is aggressive because he has an aggressive need). Such an explanation does not add significantly to knowledge about motivation, nor does it enhance the ability to predict behavior if all behavior is accounted for by one variable, because in that case, one cannot predict what action will result from it. Ferguson calls for "empirical anchors" that could specify beforehand the circumstances under which a given variable operates, so that validation is possible. A useful theory of motivation, according to Ferguson, would state the conditions that activate motivation and say how this is manifest in behavior, so that the term can be said to hold some scientific value (p. 6).

Proposed Working Definition

Given the caveats of Ferguson (1976), *motivation* must be defined both behaviorally and observably. Atkinson (1964), an important theorist of achievement motivation, offered a useful working definition based on two known properties of motivation: (1) it is an inferred, rather than an observed, event

(in psychological terms, it is an intervening [inferred] variable that mediates between the stimulus [the extrinsic incentive] and the response [the behavior expressing the degree or level of intrinsic motivation]), and (2) it is said to energize as well as direct behavior (Ferguson, 1976). This direction often is said to be provided by the goal that a person strives to attain; therefore, the level of motivation can be inferred from the response to extrinsic incentives, by its energy and by whether or not it approaches a given goal or engages in a given task. Atkinson (1964) thus defined motivation as "activation of a disposition . . . [that] can be thought of as an action tendency" (Ferguson, 1976, p. 306), which is a tendency "to approach success or a given goal" (Ferguson, 1976, p. 306). For the purposes of this article, then, motivation is used according to this definition, with goal-directed action (or task engagement) as the behavioral indicator of its presence.

Summary of Recent Empirical Findings on Motivation

The motivation research of the 1950s was characterized by a proliferation of animal studies, testing for "drive" or "instinct," the historical precursors to motivation. Theorists of the time were excited by the idea that perhaps animals could be "motivated," because the experiments they were conducting seemed to indicate that motivation was something that could be manipulated and controlled in animals, under certain laboratory conditions. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, extrinsic incentives were seen to have consistently positive effects on the motivation (or "intrinsic motivation," as it came to be termed) of animals, or to put it simply, the motivation of all rats for bar pushing increased when they got cheese for pushing the bar. This effect became known as the principle of "additivity." The consequence of belief in additivity was the advocacy in the 1960s for token economies in classrooms and similar incentives in the industrial and corporate sectors.

The two assumptions prevailing then were that additivity was the rule, typifying the relationship between extrinsic in-

centives and intrinsic motivation, and that individual variations in response to extrinsic incentives were not significant (all rats go for the cheese).

A study conducted by Deci (1975) challenged both of these assumptions. Deci's experiments suggested that external incentives did not increase intrinsic motivation, but rather that they actually diminished it—the effect of the extrinsic incentives on intrinsic motivation was "nonadditive." The issue was complicated further by some of the work done around the same time in work motivation theory, which seemed to confirm that under certain conditions, the additivity effect did in fact remain operative (Mawhinney, 1979). These contradictory findings suggested that although in the majority of cases intrinsic motivation is diminished in the face of extrinsic incentives, there might be differences among people that lead to different responses to these incentives.

Deci's understanding of the interaction between extrinsic incentives and intrinsic motivation implies a complex mediating process, involving both cognitive and effective dimensions. His cognitive attribution (or cognitive evaluation) theory answers some important questions (such as why the "undermining" of the effect of extrinsic incentives sometimes does not occur) that remain unanswered by other theories (for example, the competing response hypothesis [Blocker & Edwards, 1982]). For a review of other theories, see Blocker and Edwards (1982). (It should be noted, however, that Blocker and Edwards fail to explain the "sometimes additivity" effect. In spite of a thought-provoking critique of Deci's (1975) interpretation of his findings, this shortcoming significantly limits the conceptual value of these alternative theories.)

The work of Deci (1975) is influenced by Bem's (1972) self-perception theory and by de Charms' (1968) personal causation theory. Deci's assumptions that internal states cause behavior and that motives, emotions, and cognitions play a central part in energizing and directing behavior (Blocker & Edwards, 1982, p. 261) are to a significant extent indebted to Bem's and de Charms' theories, as is the first part of his own two-part explanation of the process that

mediates motivation. This two-part explanation connects Deci's theory of motivation to two adjoining constructs: (1) theories about locus of causality (or locus of control) and (2) theories of competence and self-determination.

Locus of Control

Deci (1975, p. 130) wrote:

One process by which intrinsic motivation can be affected is a change in the perceived locus of causality from internal to external. This will cause a decrease in intrinsic motivation, and will occur, under certain circumstances, when someone receives external rewards for engaging in intrinsically motivated activities.

When Deci talked about a shift in locus of causality as explaining the undermining effect, what he was referring to was a kind of cognitive dissonance. For example, the person who normally would play the piano out of pleasure (intrinsic) perceives that now that an extrinsic incentive is offered, he or she is playing for the academic credit. The person thus concludes that playing piano is caused externally and therefore that she or he does not really enjoy playing piano (that is, she or he has little or no intrinsic motivation for this activity). When a task becomes only a means to an end, it loses its value (Deci, 1975). Benware and Deci (1975) demonstrated this with admirable clarity by paying subjects to espouse opinions that they already held. Their results showed that commitment to these opinions weakened upon being paid to espouse them, and Deci's hypothesis about a shift in locus of causality or control provides an adequate explanation of the process whereby this occurred.

Rotter, the originator of the locus-of-control theory, offered this definition of locus of control (1966, p. 1):

When reinforcement is perceived by the subject as . . . not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labelled this a belief in external

control. If the person perceives the event is contingent upon his own behaviour or upon his own relatively permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in internal control.

A person's locus of control is part of a general belief system that, according to Rotter, is based on a variety of past learning experiences, and this general belief system influences behavior in any given situation. Interpersonal trust, or the conviction that one has control over one's fate, are examples of such belief systems (or "traits," as Rotter [1966] called them), and these form the basis of one's "motivational disposition." These traits are not rational, as Edwards (1961) demonstrated in his "gambler's fallacy" experiment.

Rotter (1966) emphasized the interaction between the general (traits) and the specific (situational determinants of action)—that is, the immediate environment in which behavior occurs—both being products of learned experience. For example, a man believes women do not like him (trait). He is at a party, and a woman has just asked him to dance (situation). How do these two factors interact? The relationship between them is fundamentally a product of "expectancy," a key concept in locus-of-control theory, which Rotter (1954, p. 107) defined as

the probability held by the individual that a particular reinforcement will occur as a function of a specific behaviour on his part in a specific situation.

In other words, what chance does the man think he has of success in this situation, or of meeting his goal? The answer to this question is extremely subjective, of course, tied up with, among other things, his self-perception, self-esteem, and the relative realism of his aspirations. To Rotter, expectancy is the crucial variable that transforms the latent motivational disposition into motivation (that is, an action tendency, as in our definition). In similar terms, Ferguson (1976) described Atkinson's understanding of the potential for achievement motivation:

This disposition becomes manifest as motivation when the individual encounters a situation in which there is a moderate expectation of success. (p. 306).

By "moderate expectation," Atkinson meant that the goal has to be (or, more accurately, the goal has to be perceived to be) "not too easy, not too hard"; otherwise, the person will not bother to direct energy toward that goal. Atkinson supported this contention with a fascinating experiment in which children were asked to stand wherever they wanted in relation to a stick for a ring toss game. Almost all of the children stood at an intermediate distance from the stick, demonstrating (in Atkinson's view) that motivation (or the tendency to approach success) is at its maximum when the probability of success is moderate (that is, intermediate) (McClelland, 1958).

There is also experimental evidence that expectation of positive consequences or outcomes increases effort and persistence in activities and task performance (Stotland, 1969). Therefore, one's expectancies and perceptions about ability to control one's environment (one's locus of control) will affect one's behavior and task performance (or task competence). Many studies confirm this view, including Lovitt and Curtiss (1969), Schuldt and Bonge (1979), and Wolk and Ducette (1974). Seeman and Evans (1962) found that among hospitalized tuberculosis patients, those with an internal locus of control ("internals") knew more about their illness and asked doctors more questions than did "externals" and Seeman (1963) reported that prisoners who were internals retained more information about parole than did externals and were more likely to see this information as instrumental and useful in improving their life conditions. Internal locus of control also has been positively correlated in the empirical literature with task enjoyment (Deci, 1975), with job satisfaction (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980), and with general satisfaction with life (Abbey, Dunkel-Schetter, & Brickman, 1983). In fact, there is evidence from a number of studies to suggest that achievement motivation, locus of control, and attributing one's success to one's skill and effort form a cluster of beliefs that lead to successful performance. (This is consistent with Malan's (1976a, 1976b) finding that high motivation in clients is the best predictor of favorable outcome

in therapy, which implies a strong correlation between motivation and good performance.)

The research also indicates the converse of this idea. Although the studies summarized above reflect the association between internalized locus of control and competence and well-being, it has been shown that the perceived inability to influence one's environment (externalized locus of control) has devastating effects on performance (competence) (Hiroto & Seligman, 1975) and on the well-being (Kanfer & Seidner, 1973) and even the survival (Richter, 1958) of animals and humans. Laboratory studies where rats were put in inescapable aversive situations where they could do nothing to alleviate the aversiveness showed that non-eating (Mower & Vizk, 1948) or death (Richter, 1958), could result. Lefcourt (1973) inferred from such studies that loss of control over one's environment has an adverse affect on the well-being of the organism, and Kanfer and Seidner (1973) demonstrated that female college students placed in an aversive situation (one hand in ice water) who were not given the opportunity to control some other aspect of the environment had a far lower tolerance for pain than did those who were allowed to exercise some other control. Seligman (1975) related such findings to "learned helplessness," the idea that organisms are helpless when they believe that their actions do not influence outcomes.

In the study of Hiroto and Seligman (1975), human subjects were exposed to either escapable or inescapable aversive sound and either soluble or insoluble problems. Subjects exposed first to inescapable aversive sounds subsequently performed more poorly at escaping escapable aversive sounds and more frequently failed to subsequently solve soluble discrimination problems. This study points not only to the passivity generated by such situations but also to the deterioration in competence and cognitive functioning that can result. From these studies, Seligman (1975) formulated his three-stage theory:

1. Information is gathered about the relationship between outcome and responding (that is, there is no association between action and reward);

2. This information results in the development of the expectation that responses and outcomes will remain independent in future (expectancy formation); and

3. Low expectancy causes deficits in future learning as well as emotional and motivational disturbances.

In addition, Seligman drew some fascinating parallels between the symptoms of learned helplessness and depression, both of which result in passivity and an absence of motivation. There also appears to be an important connection between a person's locus of control (internal or external) and his or her response to extrinsic incentives. Research has shown, for example, that internals and externals perform best in different environments: externals work hardest and perform best where they perceive the locus of control to be external (that is, in situations of chance) whereas internals do best where they believe their own ability is the determinant of success (Watson & Bauml, 1967) or where they can set their own standards for performance (Schuldt & Bonge, 1979).

This connection illustrates the importance of "situation," or, in social work terminology, "context." One cannot predict the degree to which a person will be motivated by knowing his or her traits alone; one needs to know the situation in which he or she lives (the likelihood of goal attainment). Having positive traits in a negative situation (a motivated child in a slum, to use a crude example) is just as problematic as having negative traits in a positive situation (for example, a middle-class child believing that there is no point in applying himself or herself to a task). As discussed below, it is the social work profession's mandate to address the lack of motivation of clients from both of these angles.

Self-Determination and Competence

Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, & Kauffman (1982) conducted a study that confirmed Deci's hypothesis that the experience of choice is a necessary condition for the maintenance or enhancement of intrinsic motivation. This study led them to corroborate the conclusion

of Deci and Ryan (1980) that "the central parameter mediating the effect of extrinsic incentives on intrinsic motivation is self-determination" (Deci et al., 1982, p. 852). Influenced by Brehm's (1966) reactance theory (that people will react to maintain or restore threatened or lost freedoms), Deci (1975) attributed the undermining effect to changes in the individual's feelings of competence, or self-determination. The idea here is that an intrinsic need for self-determination—freedom of choice—will mediate, and interfere with, an additive relationship between an extrinsic incentive and intrinsic motivation. Deci offers the example of person A offering to pay for person B on their vacation together, as long as they go to Mexico. Person B will resist the threat to self-determination, or freedom of choice, by choosing the vacation anywhere in the world but Mexico and foregoing the financial incentive, or person B might accept the offer, but enjoy the trip less, because person B has "paid" for it with his or her freedom of choice. In this case, the extrinsic incentive of money would undermine the enjoyment of the trip.

In the same theme of self-determination, Deci and Ryan (1980) distinguished between two kinds of communication events: "controlling" and "informational." Controlling events are those that pressure people toward specific outcomes, denying them the experience of choice; informational events are those that provide people with meaningful feedback in the context of choice (Deci & Ryan, 1980). By "meaningful feedback" Deci and Ryan mean feedback that signifies competence or helps a person become more competent. The results of the Deci et al. (1982) study show that the more controlling the teacher in the classroom (such a teacher tended to be more critical of students, to talk more, and to allow their students less choice and autonomy), the less the intrinsic motivation of the students and the lower their self-esteem (Deci et al., 1982). From an educational point of view, these findings are significant, because de Charms (1976) has shown that enhancing the intrinsic motivation of children also improves their learning, and because Deci et al. (1982) showed that the context in which teachers work

has an impact on the degree to which they are controlling: if they are pressured from above to show achievement in their students, they are more likely to be controlling.

From a more general point of view, the Deci et al. (1982) study is significant because it solves the central riddle of why extrinsic incentives sometimes diminish intrinsic motivation and sometimes do not. Although Deci (1975) wrote about how the need for self-determination can lead to the undermining, nonadditive, effect—as in the case of persons A and B going on a holiday—he was not able to explain until this study why extrinsic incentives sometimes seem to increase the intrinsic motivation of already intrinsically motivated subjects. For example, in Vallerand's study (1983) of French-Canadian hockey players, verbal praise by the coach increased performance, and in O'Reilly and Caldwell's study (1980), recent master of business administration (MBA) graduates with greater extrinsic incentives in their jobs (for example, money) expressed greater job satisfaction than did those without such incentives. The problem is resolved through the application of Deci's theory. In the two cases referred to above, the extrinsic incentive was seen as informational, rather than controlling. The greater amounts of money earned by the people with MBAs was perceived by them as affirmation of their competence, not as "the reason they were in this job," and the hockey players experienced and interpreted their coach's verbal feedback as competence affirming, not as an attempt to manipulate or control them (that is, to improve their performance) (of course, there is a subjective component in experience and interpretation; however, all of the hockey players had the same reaction, which requires looking to the intent and content of the coach's communication for an explanation). In a study by Gottfried (1983), children's explanations of why child characters in stories they were told did what they did (because they wanted to [internal] or because they had to [external]) relied heavily on whether or not the child (subject) perceived that the adult in the story was attempting to manipulate the child in the story. This distinction

between informational and controlling events thus appears to apply to children as well as to adults.

The study of Deci et al. (1982), then, indicates that not only the intrapsychic component but also the extrinsic incentive of the process of motivation is a complex, composite, rather than a simple, unifacted, variable. Because there are at least two kinds of extrinsic incentives, the nature of the incentive contributes to a person's response to it. There will be an additive interaction between intrinsic motivation and an extrinsic incentive when the extrinsic incentive is informational—when it does not seek to limit choice or to diminish competence. The relationship, however, will be nonadditive (that is, motivation will be undermined) if the extrinsic incentive is controlling and challenges a person's experience of himself or herself as self-determining and competent.

A crucial thematic thread unites the two constructs associated with Deci's theory. Perception of locus of control and feelings about self-determination and competence hinge on a person's relationship to control over his or her environment (competence may be seen as control enhancing). This may explain the strong correlations in the empirical work between the two variables.

Social Work

Review of the Literature

Although some social work theorists (for example, Taft, 1948; Richmond, 1925a, 1925b; and Strean, 1971, 1978) virtually ignore the question of motivation, others seem to have understood intuitively a great deal about it. Perlman (1957), for example, offers some insights on motivation that are startlingly consistent with the recent findings discussed above. She referred to the following ideas:

- The importance of self-determination in clients
- The need for social workers to see competence in their clients (to see the client "as a functioning person, not just a needful one") (p. 198)
- The importance of assessing whether the client's goals are "real" or "unreal" (a parallel to assessing the im-

pact of one's belief systems or traits on achieving one's goals)

- Knowing a client's "willingness" to change through the client's efforts to engage in work (similar to the behavioral definition of motivation)

- The importance of locus of control—seeing oneself as a potential force in shaping one's ends (p. 186)

- Seeing motivation not only as a means to an end (helping client meet goal) but also as a reality of its own: "In many instances, it is the client's lack of motivation . . . that [is] the very essence of his problem" (p. 197)

- The importance of client's goals and values: "Enabling means helping a person to mobilize his own drives and abilities for use in a desired direction" (p. 197)

Hollis (1964), too, was concerned with the issue of self-determination. She stressed the importance of the client's values and goals and wrote in some detail about the dangers of "punitive motivation" (for example, threatening to remove a child from the home as a way of ensuring client compliance). This is, of course, consistent with the conclusions of Deci et al. (1982) regarding controlling events in teaching situations.

Ripple, Alexander, and Polemis (1964) found that their clients' use of casework service depended on motivation, capacity (reminiscent of Rotter's [1966] traits), and opportunity (Rotter's situation). Their conceptualization of motivation is taken from French (1952), and in their reference to the "push" of discomfort and the "pull" of hope (Ripple et al., 1964; Ripple & Alexander, 1956), she echoed the traditional hedonistic view of motivation (seek pleasure; avoid pain). The work of Ripple et al. is noteworthy in that it represents a serious attempt to understand the interrelationship among three concepts that they identified as connected and that seem to approximate closely the interconnected constructs identified by Deci (1975). The work of Ripple et al. is also the only attempt at empirical research on motivation in the social work literature.

Kadushin (1972) also subscribed to French's (1952) essentially hedonistic view and followed it logically into social learning theory:

People will be motivated to participate in the interview when they anticipate that the inducements and incentives, the gains and the pleasures, will outweigh the penalties and the pains. (p. 109)

He referred to "instrumental" and "expressive" satisfactions in the interview (reminiscent of extrinsic incentives and intrinsic motivation), and he spoke of these as available in the therapeutic relationship:

The extrinsic rewards and intrinsic gratification in the intervention contact itself are prime considerations motivating the client to participate in the interview. The more the interviewer can prove his utility to the client by helping him solve his problems and by providing a socially and emotionally satisfying experience, the greater the likelihood that the client's motivation will be enhanced. (p. 110)

Kadushin did not see the initial "lack of motivation" of a client as problematic, implying that the worker almost always can engage such a client. Unfortunately, Kadushin did not explain how this is to be done. Perhaps he imagined the use of extrinsic incentives. However, as the findings from psychology indicate, this is anything but a simple solution.

Where does this leave social workers? On the one hand, they can feel proud that they, as a profession, "already knew" what is just becoming established in the empirical work in psychology (the importance of belief systems of clients, of focusing on client-centered goals, and of the relationship between the right to self-determination and motivation). On the other hand, "knowing" intuitively is not a sufficient basis for understanding such a complex phenomenon, nor does it always help when workers are confronted with real clients who do not seem motivated.

In spite of the lack of empirical social work research in this area, relevant applications to social work practice can draw from our own knowledge and the findings in psychology discussed above. The most significant of these are discussed below.

Application to Social Work

The above-summarized research yields a number of valuable applications

for social work practice. Especially useful insights can be gleaned from analyzing the goals that motivate clients and using these in intervention. Three aspects of these goals are particularly important: (1) the selection and definition of clients' goals, (2) the value issues implicit in goal selection, and (3) the effects of reinforcement on clients' commitment to their goals.

Selection and Definition of Clients' Goals. One of the most important implications deriving from the literature is the pragmatic importance of not imposing the social worker's goals on the client. The client must select which goals are to be pursued, because goals will be motivating only if they are truly the client's—meaningful to, and "owned" by, him or her.

However, although it is the client who selects the goals, the worker has an important role in defining and operationalizing these in a way that keeps them motivating to the client. In social work practice, it is not uncommon to find that a client has set goals that are "too hard." As the theory indicates, goals that are out of reach or beyond the present capacity of the client are frustrating and demotivating (as are goals that are "too easy"). Because it is essential that the client work toward goals that he or she has chosen, it is inadvisable to encourage the client to abandon goals that are too hard for goals that are easier but that may be less meaningful.

One way to keep a client's chosen goal reasonably achievable, and therefore motivating, is to break it down into a number of subgoals (or short-term goals), and to help the client work toward them in sequence. For example, a 38-year-old man whose goal is marriage but who has never been on a date is working toward the following subgoals: first learning about and then beginning to use social skills in the therapeutic situation, then practicing these skills outside the worker-client relationship in "safe" social situations (for example, with family or male friends), and only then trying the skills out with women and asking someone on a date. In such a case, the client remains motivated because he can see a clear relationship between the goal

and the subgoals, and the long-term goal is defined in such a way that he does not feel hopeless and helpless about the possibility of ever reaching it.

Value Issues Implicit in Goal Selection. Focusing on the goals that motivate a client may involve recognizing that the client's goals reflect values that are unacceptable to the social worker. This recognition implies the possibility of value conflicts between client and worker, as expressed in the different goals they may see for the client. For example, a client who is motivated only by the goal of acquiring drugs and getting and staying stoned has a goal and value system that probably conflicts with the worker's. As a result, the worker is very likely to label this client "unmotivated." The label is inaccurate; in fact, the client is motivated, but motivated to pursue goals whose underlying values the worker finds alienating or meaningless. This is an important distinction, because whereas it is possible (though difficult) for a worker to work with a client with whom the worker has value differences, it is almost impossible for the worker to work with those whom the worker or others have labeled "unmotivated." In such a case, the problem is primarily the worker's in not acknowledging a value difference for what it is and not being able to find a common basis for working with the client in spite of it.

One way to motivate a client in spite of value conflicts is to find an operational approach where the divergent values meet. For example, one teenage mother responded only with resistance to her social worker's earnest exhortations that she feed her daughter more nutritiously and ensure that she receive adequate medical and dental care (the worker's goal). However, this mother was able to join with the worker when the worker drew out of her the hidden goal of getting a certain child protection agency that was threatening to take away her child "off her back" (the client's goal). The worker and client in this case were able to develop a common operational approach based on the mother's motivation toward her goal, but also including improved care to the child as a means to this end.

Effects of Reinforcement on Clients' Commitment to Their Goals. One of the clearest implications of the research is the importance of the social worker using him- or herself as a "reinforcer" to enhance client motivation. The research suggests that how the worker uses him- or herself as a reinforcer should derive not from his or her preferred model of practice, but rather from the particular motivational pattern of the client involved. (Within social work, certain models of practice have advocated one general approach to the reinforcement of all clients. For example, behaviorists advocate the use of extrinsic incentives to all clients, whereas, at the other extreme, psychodynamically oriented workers discourage such extrinsic incentives with equally sweeping generality.) Whether the client pursues a given goal because its attainment is intrinsically gratifying or because it will please others is essential information in terms of the worker's use of self. The worker will need to intervene differently, depending on whether a client has a more internal or external locus of control.

Extrinsic incentives appear to be very effective in fostering motivation in clients with a more external locus of control, as well as with certain client groups, such as the developmentally handicapped (Lovaas, Koegel, Simmons, & Long, 1973). In contrast, extrinsic incentives, such as verbal praise, used with clients who have a more internal locus of control tend to undermine these clients' commitment to their goals, the only exception being reinforcement that is informational (that is, competence enhancing and not controlling).

The way in which social workers use extrinsic rewards, therefore, requires great thoughtfulness and sensitivity, because (even where the intent is non-controlling) they may be construed easily as patronizing or undermining and thereby alienate, rather than further engage, clients. For instance, many well-meaning social workers unthinkingly reinforce clients for behaviors that should be taken for granted (for example, "You sat down very well, Susan!"). Such comments are perceived as implicitly insulting and suggest a lack of confidence in the client's basic competence.

An equally serious therapeutic error lies in neglecting to reinforce extrinsically a client with a more external locus of control. Such a lack of reinforcement when the client needs it represents a missed opportunity to strengthen client goal commitment and to have a profound impact on the motivation of the client. On the other hand, extrinsic rewards must be used cautiously, with awareness of both their potential short-term benefits and their long-term dangers. Extrinsic rewards can foster the client's dependency on the worker. With such a client, the worker must actively promote the client's independence and his or her ability to generalize what has been learned in the worker-client relationship to the "real life" goals outside, where the incentives may be subtler and more indirect. Although a client with a more external locus of control will likely make changes as a result of the instrumental or expressive rewards from the worker, the real goal (which should motivate the worker) is to help the client move from a more external to a more internal locus of control.

Ultimately, it is the importance of facilitating a shift in the locus of control of the client that the research studies on motivation reveal. Difficult as this is to achieve, it is consistent with the essential social work mandate, which advocates building on a client's strengths and empowering the client as an individual and as part of a larger collectivity. Achieving such a shift includes a clear belief on the part of the worker that this is a crucial part of the professional role and that the key to professional intervention lies in exploring with clients their choices, alternatives, and goals, while avoiding the temptation to make decisions for them, intervene too actively on their behalf, or impose the worker's values. Social workers can be very useful as motivators to their clients by increasing their sense of competence and control and helping them to recognize the power in "seeing oneself as a potential force in shaping one's ends; and charging oneself with making whatever changes must come about" (Perlman, 1957, p. 186).

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