RESILIENCE AND JOY IN SOCIAL WORK

by

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Abstract
This study explores the concepts of joy and resilience in Social Work. It also creates a context for the effect that neoliberalism has had on the profession. It explores how social workers, who have been seen as practicing with excellence, have remained resilient and joyful in this field. The present study provides some insight into the joys of being a social worker, as well as the current political challenges that are inherent within the social work profession. Through a semi-structured interview process, nine participants provided knowledge about joy being a single thread in a multifaceted rope that strengthens resilience in the field and enables social worker to do their jobs. It also provides insight into the benefits of positive collegial alliances, positive client interaction and the importance of education and mentorship for new members of the profession.

Keywords: joy, resilience, job satisfaction, neoliberalism, burnout, change, education, Social Work
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Resilience and Joy in Social Work

The profession of social work has seen many changes in its hundred year of history in Canada. Jennissen and Lundy (2011) write that while we move from the twentieth century we are facing tremendous shifts in our social, economic and political world. We have not only changed our political leanings from social democracy to capitalism, but rather we have reorganized our political stance, embracing the concept of globalization and ridding the government of its socialist agenda. Jennissen and Lundy explain that those in need must once again utilize the support of charity organizations for help (p. 292). These shifts have, for some professionals, caused the inability to remain resilient in the field of Social Work and a loss of joy and focus in their work. Others have left the field altogether as a reaction to the shifts.

To date, a good deal of research and information has been generated about burnout, moral distress, and role conflict in the profession of social work. At the same time, there appears to be social work professionals who have grown resilient and are fulfilled in their professional identity.

The objective of this research is to explore resilience and joy in the profession of social work. This research was developed to gain a deeper understanding of what keeps social workers, vibrant and alive within their profession. The study explores the concept of resilience and attempts to give greater insight into how joy and resilience are viewed by social workers who are recognized by their peers as showing excellence in the field. The initial research question is multifaceted, asking: What factors do social workers whose skills are highly regarded by their peers, identify as most important in maintaining resilience and joy, in light of the shift from a social democratic to neoliberal workplace agenda? Kinman and Grant (2012) drew on Klohen (1996), and Youssef & Luthan’s (2007) work, explaining that “to be resilient is to be able to overcome stressors or withstand negative life events and, not only recover from such
experiences, but also find personal meaning in them” (p. 606). Manion’s (2003) definition of joy is “an intensely positive, vivid, and expansive emotion that arises from and internal state or results from an external event or situation... It is a transcendent state of heightened energy and excitement” (p. 653) will be used here as it best aligns with the purpose of this research.

**Background and Context of the Issue**

Social work has evolved from its inception through a synthesis of collaboration, cooperation, resilience and resistance. According to Jennisson and Lundy (2011), social work has borrowed from both Britain and the U.S., and embraced two dominant schools of thought, the Charity Organizational Societies (COS), and the Settlement Movement. They point out that Canada’s charity movement became organized, not for the sake of helping “those in need”, but because of the concern that some people were receiving help from more than one organization. To regulate services, many Canadian Societies became members of the US National Association of Societies for Charitable Organizations upon its inception in 1911. They further explain that during World War I, social workers were in high demand. Family work, working with the homeless including men, women and children was required during this time. Emergency social work help was needed after the Halifax explosion of 1913, and new alliances were formed within social work with agencies such as Public Health.

During World War II the need for social work and social services continued to expand. Jennissen and Lundy (2011) point out that social workers were directly enlisted into the Armed Forces. Their roles included recruitment, supporting those unable to enlist, and helping soldiers with various needs access resources both during and after service. They also stated that many civilian social workers continued to work in areas of housing, welfare, health and family functioning. Another dimension that was added to their portfolio was inclusion in the Civil
Defense portfolio. The responsibility of emergency preparedness and evacuation was taken on by the social workers of the time (pp. 65-102).

Following the First World War and during the Second World War, the government of Canada as well as many European countries adopted the Keynesian Theory of Economics. According to Lightman (2003), this model encouraged spending by both government and its citizens (p. 18). John Maynard Keynes believed that economic growth was cyclical, and that the more one person spends directly correlates with the amount another person earns. He touted that spending both by government and citizens was good for the overall economy. “This philosophy encouraged benevolence and social caring” (p. 18) and it supported spending on social services within the country’s economy. For many social workers practicing at this time, there was an abundance of services for their clients to access. A Welfare State emerged, meaning that there was a “series of social programs and policies aimed at reducing inequity” (Baines, 2011, p.29). LaForest & Philips (2012) stated that “during the 1950’s and 60’s, this societal and government vision translated into steady increases in government spending and purposeful involvement in political and economic life” (p. 5) for social workers.

Over time gradual changes were made to the economic vision. Baines and others use the term neoliberalism and explain that there was a de-emphasis of social supports, “discouraging collective or government services, instead encouraging reliance on the public market” (p. 30). Baines goes on to say that this system promoted pro-market and anti-government involvement explaining that “in the 1990’s neoliberalism took hold with the strong support of people such as Paul Martin Junior, finance minister, who was later to become Prime Minister of Canada” (p. 284).
Initially, social programs eroded slowly but the welfare infrastructure remained intact. Lightman (2003) explains that in Canada in 1993 the Liberal party was returned to power, and in 1995 they actively pursued their goal of eliminating the federal deficit. With this goal in mind, the Liberal government continued to make sweeping cuts to federal social programs, thereby downloading the responsibility of health, education, and welfare to the provinces. Lightman states that there was continued fallout with these shifts and further downloading occurred making social programs the responsibility of the municipalities and regions. As a result of these cuts, the work done by many social workers became more complicated and they were forced to change the high principles and values that were adhered to at the beginning of their careers (pp. 18-23). Social workers experienced stress as a result of insufficient resources and inadequate services (Bradley & Sutherland, 1995) and found themselves with additional paperwork and decreased autonomy in their jobs. Role conflict and ambiguity were also consequences of this shift in focus leading to distress and burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Um & Harrison, 2008). Many professions and programs including social work were forced to accept fewer resources but the demands and expectations of continued quality care and goal attainment remained unchanged.

**Personal Reflection**

I noticed during my practice that in the early 1990’s there was a marked decline in public sector services. Many citizens that were previously able to access services became ineligible for these same funded benefits. There was also an increase in the privatization of previously publicly funded social services. For some social workers this meant that they had to start using programs and systems that were previously not considered, some that conflicted with their values and beliefs causing moral distress and burnout.
To date, a good deal of research and information has been generated about burnout, moral distress, and role conflict in the field by researchers such as Curtis, Moriarty, & Netten (2010), Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth (2002), and Kim, Solomon, & Jang (2012). At the same time the question must be asked, in spite of these changes, what makes some social workers resilient and joyful in the field? What skills do some social workers possess that enables them to continue with a joyful attitude while others, who are similarly trained, not able to work through the challenges? Are there skills that can be taught or lessons that can be learned to support people who are thinking about leaving the profession?

It is important to note that this research is influenced by my own personal experience and bias. As a practitioner of over fifteen years, I have been affected by the political decisions that I have seen while practicing. At times, I too have felt tremendous moral distress, burnout and conflicted in my role as a social worker. Upon reflection I see that my own resilience comes from the work that I do with my clients and the instances of joy I receive from our interactions. I also find joy in challenging the system and performing acts of resistance to create the best possible opportunities for the people that I work with.

I also think about rookie social workers in the field and wonder if there is more that social work, as a profession, can do to help them find their way in these challenging times. What can we do to help them remain resilient and joyful in their chosen field? I feel that the experiences of new professionals, from the start, are fraught with conflict and turmoil, unlike mine which was supported by an economic model that encouraged benevolence.
Theoretical Frameworks

Baines (2011) and Fay (2011) explain that the changes in Canada’s social policy to that of a neoliberalist, global model, have forced change in the way social work is seen and the way it is done. Many practitioners have chosen to align with the values associated with Anti-Oppressive Practice in social work. Freire (1990), Baines (2011), Young (2011), and Fay (2011), all present arguments about the importance of identifying and acknowledging the power imbalance within society and agree that we must work together in order to fight against injustices (Freire, 1990, pp. 3-9). It is this Anti-Oppressive Practice lens that shapes this research. In our roles as social workers, achieving change for the individual is important, but just as important is fighting to make changes to the system.

Fay (2011) talks about the shifting of vision from the traditional “power over” model and transforming it to the anti-oppressive “power with” model. She goes on to discuss how collective action can help people feel empowered and that people gain empowerment through educating, encouraging resistance and developing community and connection (Baines, 2011, p. 74).

Young (1990), talks about the “five faces of oppression” in present day society. Marginalization, one form cited, is seen in many areas of social work practice. It affects both social workers as well as the client that they serve. Young states that this is the “most dangerous form of oppression” (p. 53) as it leads to the exclusion of many and an increase of power for those situated in places of privilege. This powerlessness spills over into decision making areas such as hospitals, family service agencies, and other social agencies, as those with privilege are often the decision makers for large organizations.
Another significant area that is identified by Young is cultural imperialism, where the values of the dominant culture overshadow the values of those with less power. The Canadian health care system is an example of the inequity that exists within the country. Health Canada (2012) notes, for example, that the health care system has not been able to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. According to this agency, “heart disease is 1.5 times higher, Type 2 diabetes is 3 to 5 times higher …tuberculosis infection rates are 8 times higher in Indigenous people. This group of people live on average 7 years less, have an infant mortality rate two to four times higher” (p. 1). With all of this knowledge and understanding, health care cuts continue, and programs that were promoting positive health outcomes are eradicated. Many of the programs that were made redundant directly impacted the health and wellness of the indigenous population.

Other examples of cultural imperialism are seen daily by social workers in areas such as palliative care for families. Some families are given limited options that are, at time, contrary to the values and beliefs of those in the non-dominant culture. Family services also seem to bend to the leanings of the dominant class, disproportionately taking children of minority races into care. Women’s issues are being ignored such as their abduction from the east side of Vancouver according to advocates such as Lea MacKenzie (2013).

Young (1990) talks about the sense of powerlessness felt in the workplace. This stems from the imposition of managerialism and neoliberalism. She explains that when decisions are made within agencies sometimes it is to increase profit or simply to ensure streamline work expectations. This can be to the detriment of the client or the worker as personal growth cannot be measured in the same manner that one can count how many bolts a worker screws in or how
many dressed an employee sews in a day. This sense of powerlessness is addressed again later in this paper.

In spite of the above challenges, a strengths-based approach is also utilized throughout the paper as it encourages empowerment and helps the reader recognize and align with their own competencies. By putting on this lens, focus can be taken from the negative aspects of this work, and social workers can look at how others have persevered and maintained a positive outlook to remain strong and committed to their work. In order to be resilient in this field, workers as well as clients must embrace their strengths and find ways to obtain joy in the lives as well as their work. Mumford and Sanders (2013) discuss the use of a strengths-based approach when working with families. They explain that it enables people to grow, survive and explore their lives in a deep and meaningful way, enabling them to move ahead in a positive and empowered way. They also point out that it helps social workers see the world in a different light, enhancing their creativity to seek resources and opportunities to help their clients as well as critiquing their own work and reflecting on their practice (pp. 157-163).

**Literature Review**

There has been a lot of research done with regard to neoliberalism, burnout, job satisfaction and resilience in social work. This research is attempting to develop a more positive focus and a deeper understanding of what keeps social workers vibrant and alive within the profession, and describe what gives social workers joy.

The study explores the concept of resilience and attempts to give greater insight about how it is viewed by social workers who are recognized by their peers as showing excellence in the field. The initial research question is multifaceted and asks, What factors do social workers whose skills are highly regarded by their peers, identify as most important in maintaining
resilience and joy and in light of the shift from a social democratic to neoliberal workplace agenda, how have they managed?

**Neoliberalism**

Books, articles and dissertations have been written to try to gain greater understanding about neoliberalism. Bains (2006), (2009), (2011), De Tienne, (2012), Ferguson, (2007), Laforest & Phillips (2012), Garrett, (2010), MacKinnon, (2009), and Stark, (2010) look at the changes in social work as a result of neoliberalism. They discuss issues such as cutbacks of time and services, being reactive rather than proactive, lacking the ability to provide preventative support in helping their clients, workers being in isolation rather than included as part of a multi-disciplinary team, loss of voice in the social policy venue, all resulting in the reduced ability to promote social change.

Baines (2011) explains that neoliberalism has created many tensions and debates between agencies, social workers and clients in areas such as service values and social justice. The neoliberalist system encourages globalization, “a process of knitting together economic, political and social systems across nations,” (p. 31) and managerialism, a business based, pro-market approach to the disbursement of resources to its citizens. This new system created an imbalance, an inequity of affordability to access the necessary supports for better living.

Employees in this type of job setting are encouraged to ignore “moral thought and action, encouraging us merely to abide by the rules” (Cree & Davis, 2007, p. 15). Davies (2005) explains that neoliberalism has moved social workers from socially conscious to individual minded, having morality to moralistic and from critics to those seeking and pushing conformity” (p. 12). Dominelli (1999) explains unless we come to the table to address concerns about social justice and equality we cannot fight for the needs of our clients. She points out that social work
cannot take on the changes neoliberalism has forced upon society, instead we have to be strategic and find ways to be included in the dialogue (pp. 15-21).

Many researchers identify challenges such as having to use “prescribed models,” of intervention. Such models impose upon the therapeutic relationship a predetermined number of sessions, predetermined questions, mandatory meeting spaces, mandated time frames per session, timeframes in which charting is to be completed, formats for charting, etc., rather than working along with the client. This results in reduced and fragmented services for the client, and for the workers themselves, reduced employment, job insecurity and the reduction of unionized jobs, especially for women (Bauman, 1994, p. 7). According to Bauman (1994), social workers are being used to make it look like society is doing something to create equity but in fact social workers are being used by organizations to “buffer the comfortable but anxious majority from the excesses of the new poor” (p. 9). Bauman points out that “social workers are not bystander, (or) a dispassionate observer of the human condition, but one who is engaged and invariably positioned on the side of the poor and the dispossessed” (p. 5).

Weinberg (2008) provides an example of the role of “buffer” in discussions of social work ethics. She talks about caseworkers being given a $50.00 monthly stipend which is to be distributed to the most deserving of clients. This responsibility changes the worker/client relationship from a working together situation to one of “power over” and judgment. Baines suggests that we refuse this role and continue to practice prevention, “be proactive and use the holistic strategies that we are already using” (p. 31).

**Burnout**

Research shows that burnout and stress in the workplace are a significant issue in social work. In her 2010 research, Baines sites the goal of the employer as increasing efficiency,
removing waste and error at the cost to the employee of decreased discretion and autonomy, which could potentially lead to loss of health and increased injury (p. 930). Although these factors have contributed to people leaving the profession Baines, Davis & Saini (2009) point out that 63% of social workers experience stress, while 62.5% state that their job affects their family life. 37.5% note that they struggle with depression. Yet even with these statistics, only 17% of social workers would not recommend social work as a career (p. 66). According to Gibbs (2001), “social workers who found their work to have value were likely to find satisfaction in their career” (p. 330).

Additional authors such as Kim, Ji, & Kao (2009), explored health outcomes when social workers experience burnout. Sixty Masters of Social Work students were analyzed by Han, Lee & Lee (2012) to gain more insight into the affects of burnout. The findings showed that strength of personality and emotional development was critical in achieving success in social work. Acker (1999) looked at the affects on burnout of the changing economic system and managed care and showed that older workers are better equipped to cope with such changes. Wermeling (2013) encouraged increased support to help social workers gain success in their careers, while Schudrich et al. (2013) spoke to the challenges of working with children in child welfare settings in the role of direct care. From these different points of view, both of these authors explored why social workers are leaving the profession.

Curtis, Moriarty & Netten (2010) indicate that social workers stayed in the profession for an average of eight years, compared to 15 years for nurses, 25 years for doctors, and 28 years for pharmacists. According to Barford & Whelton (2010), child care workers leave their profession at a rate of 26-41% each year. Lloyd, King & Chenoweth (2002), explain that in their study of 751 social workers, 39% were burned out during the time of his study. Within the same
study it is pointed out that 75% of social workers have experienced burnout at some point in their career. Some of the reasons cited by Lloyd for this burn out are “excess caseload size, role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of recognition, lack of opportunity for advancement, organizational culture” (p. 263). Baines (2011) explains that the emergence of a neoliberal model, one that characterizes efficiency and cost saving and which “social, political and economic life… discourages collective or governmental services, instead encouraging reliance on the private market” (p. 30). There has been copious literature produced about burnout and about the inability for some social workers to cope.

**Job Satisfaction**

Even though many people leave the profession because of burnout, many social workers continue to find satisfaction in their jobs. Jayaratne & Chess (1984) and Egan & Kadushin (2004) present the argument that job satisfaction increases when ethical conflicts are able to be resolved, people have autonomy to do a good job, people are self determining and they feel secure in their jobs.

Job satisfaction in social work has also been studied. It was noted that when there was goodness of fit between supervisor and worker there was increased satisfaction. These findings were seen in an article by Schwartz, et al. (2007), who stress the importance of Hope Theory for social workers. They suggest that social workers with hope are better able to support their clients and communities. The texts by Yukl (2013) and Tsui (2005) provide academic insights into ways that social workers can achieve job satisfaction. Both authors discuss the importance of positive leadership, open dialogue and employee empowerment in the workplace.
Egan and Kadushin (2004) emphasize the importance of the “administrators and supervisors to discuss ethical conflicts over access to services… [and] maximize opportunities to be helpful by involving workers in decisions and problem solving” (p. 294).

Graber and Kilpatrick (2008) talk about the importance of managers recognizing your personal and professional values, knowing what you want from the organization and what you can influence within it, including the values stakeholders as well as a commitment to leadership based on values as the four key elements to value based leadership. Tsui (2005) states, “the most important element in the supervisory relationship is shared meaning” (p. 60). With shared meaning comes the opportunity for improved communication between managers and employees, and an increased understanding of the challenges each face in the workplace. Manion (2004) identified the third and forth pathways to joy at work as being able to attain ones goals and accomplishments; followed by being recognized for a job well done.

**Support and Education**

The final theme that was identified was social work support and education. A lot has been written about the importance of early intervention, which is important in the teaching and mentoring of new social workers. Garrett (2010) posits that teaching awareness in social work education enables the worker to see and understand the big picture (p. 100). When one is able to do this, one is more able to cope and navigate the system.

Gilligan (2004) articulates that our task is to help students understand “what is, what can be and what should be” (p. 101). It is also our role to teach collaboration with other professionals as with neoliberal changed we have to enable our clients to get the supports they need. We can only do this by acknowledging we are not the “only show in town” and working with the other actors (p. 101).
Kinman and Grant (2011) point out that those who are emotionally intelligent are more able to understand, analyze and use emotional knowledge, and are more resilient (p. 270). It is difficult to say whether this can be taught. They go on to state that there is value in reflection and the ability to communicate. With these skills, people are more able to cope and less affected by stress, absolutely skills that would enhance a student to succeed in their career choice.

Collins (2007) explains that training in resilience and positive emotions help students and professionals cope better and enable them to support their clients and each other in a more positive way. Collins suggests that this support can be provided on an individual basis, or collectively in groups such as teams, unions and professional associations (p. 266).

Kearns and McArdel (2011) suggest that teaching new graduate in their first year of training the resilience model rather than the deficits model enables them to manage stress and cope better in their jobs. They suggest that learning through effective supervision, and peer support is more likely to culminate in a positive, healthy social worker (p. 393). No articles were found about joy and social work education. Berzin and O’Connor (2010) asked an important question about responding to the changes in social work today. They looked at schools of social work and how they had responded to the changing world. Goldstein (2006) looks at the need for faculty and researchers to work together. In addition, she emphasizes the need for schools to work closely with agencies and professional organizations. Spolander, Pillen-Sansfacon, Brown & Engelbrecht (2011) look at differences and similarities in education in Canada, England and South Africa. They address the value of standardizing education and practice at an international level. They also talk about the challenges that this ideal poses. As an example of these challenges they point out the tension that exists between post-modernist theory which encourages social workers to work within a local context and modernism which requires a more
international/global focus. Carson (2011) points out that by using reflection, workers are more satisfied and find self affirmation possible. He also emphasizes that formal training and supervision are strong vehicles that can lead to positive change and that this change can lead to greater job satisfaction and retention (p. 271). Baines (2010) points out that in spite of neoliberalism and the changes that are prevalent in society, “the voluntary spirit still flourishes, although often in a new and unexpected way” (p. 930).

According to positive psychology, the hope lens is one that looks at the strengths in people. Snyder, Rand & Sigmond (2003) note that, “hopeful thought reflects the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways” (p.263). When people believe what they do can create positive outcomes, they may try to pursue new goals and accept difficult and uncertain challenges” (Adams, Sigmund, Rand & Pulvers, 2002 pp. 367-377). As the literature was very limited in this area, drawing definitive conclusions is difficult.

**Resilience in Social Work**

According to Klohen’s (1996) definition, “to be resilient is to be able to overcome stressors or withstand negative life events and, not only recover from such experiences and find personal meaning from it” (p. 1069). Authors McMurray (2008), Carson, King & Papatraianou (2011), Gilligan, Kearns and McArdle (2011), and Kinman & Grant (2011) agree that training and self reflection are crucial in order to remain resilient. Within the literature, a strong emphasis on training within education settings as well as within the workplace was discussed. The authors point out that resilience is believed to be enhanced through dialogue, discourse and deeper understanding.
In the article “Social Exclusion and Social Work: Questions for the Future,” Morris, Barnes & Balloch (2009) discuss the fact that decision makers continue to exclude the social work professionals from decision making and policy making. They challenge social workers to “find a means to engage with the policy agenda of (client) social exclusion, as a driver for change” (p. 235).

Other authors presented various perspectives of resilience. Cote and Nightingale (2011) state that resilience is enhanced by incorporating spirituality into the work that is being done. Collins (2007) wrote about educating social workers and about positive emotions as well as teaching social workers to incorporate optimism and hope into their lives as a form of resilience.

There is more general knowledge about resilience in social work. Kinman and Grant (2012) state that according to Klohen (1996) “resilience is defined as the general capacity for flexible and resourceful adaptation to external and internal stressors” (p. 262). In exploring this topic within the field of social work, many important factors were brought to light. Kinman and Grant (2010) point out that social work “trainees who are more adept at perceiving, appraising and expressing emotion, who are able to understand analyse and utilise emotional knowledge…regulate their emotions effectively appear to be more resilient to stress” (p. 270). Carson, King & Papatraianou (2011) discuss the importance of informal and formal learning in the workplace, noting that balance in one’s life is important in remaining resilient. Resilience is also discussed by Gilligan (2004) and McMurray (2008) giving alternate definitions as well as further insights into this concept from a social work perspective. Gilligan (2004) explains that resilience is a dynamic process which can be strengthened when one works with a client. It is important to enable clients to see themselves as competent, successful, and not allowing their
problems to identify them. McMurray (2008) points out the need for social workers to have a collective optimism, as this impacts clientele positively.

An opportunity for continued research is the evaluation of the relationship between resilience and joy. This information will guide those who are new to the profession, as well as seasoned professionals in formulating strategies to become or remain effective throughout their careers. It will help them endure the changes which social workers will inevitably face. It is the aspiration of this researcher to provide insights and strategies to deal with some of the challenges that neoliberalism poses on the profession and also on our changing world. The aim of this paper is to generate dialogue between educators, students and clinicians on the topic of positives in social work such as resilience and joy.

All of the above articles discussed the challenges that social workers faced because of the stressful nature of the job. Many of them also presented information about the changing nature of society, in the form of neoliberalism, which has resulted in changes to the way the job is performed.

Joy in Social Work

Manion (2004) provides the following definition of joy; “an intensely positive, vivid, and expansive emotion that arises from and internal state or results from an external event or situation... It is a transcendent state of heightened energy and excitement. It may include physiologic reaction, and expressive component and conscious volition... It is a transcendent state of heightened energy and excitement” (p. 263).

Sloan (2011) suggests that joy is an isolated occurrence of extreme positivity (p. 422). She goes on to add that as joy can be caused accidentally its means are unknown. Manion (2004) explains that she found through merging past definitions and those of her research
participants that in general joy was generated through people and relationship (p. 3). Although joy has not been explored in the field of social work directly, some positive attributes of being a social worker are described. For example, Morrison (2007) explains that there are social workers that feel the job is “meaningful and rewarding” (p. 261). Kanter (2004) states that “learning and personal growth (are possible)” (p. 234). Lauria, Clark, Hermann, & Stearns (2001) suggest that social workers appreciate the value of living full lives, they take life seriously and they have a deep empathy with others. They maintain that many clinicians feel it is a “vocation driven by strong personal values and ideals... Social workers feel like they can make a difference” (p. 217). Stocker (2007) says “social workers feel lucky, fortunate and proud to be doing this work.” Rose (2003) points out that 59% of social workers are satisfied with their jobs, and 15% were very satisfied.

A review of the literature revealed that there is no past or present research on joy and its relationship to/in social work. After widening the search using key terms such as, joy in helping professions, joy in the workplace, joy of helping, and joy and jobs, two articles were found. The first article was “Keeping Joy in Technological Education” (Warner, 2003). This article supports the premise that one can find joy in work but it also pointed out that the concept of joy is very abstract and complicated. Warner used Stein’s (2006) dictionary definition of joy: “the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something good or satisfying; keen pleasure”. Manion (2003) gives another definition of joy in her article Joy at Work: Creating a Positive Workplace: “an intensely positive, vivid, and expansive emotion that arises from an internal state or results from and external event or situation… It is a transcendent state of heightened energy” (p. 1). Manion also compiled the definitions of 24 participants and the research from her literature review to create her framework and definition of joy. As the research continued to unfold, the
concept of joy took on different meanings to different authors. Religious definitions within the Bible, the Koran and Buddhist teachings were further noted. All express joy as a positive orientation of the mind and that the heart; faith, hope and love were all connected in the concept. Other researchers such as Miles (2004), citing the German philosopher Kierkegaard, explained that joy is a gift that is greater than happiness, and that it can come from internal or external sources. Miles states that Kierkegaard is not simply talking about the virtue of having joy; he speaks of being joy itself, living, embodying and actively being a joy to others and a joy among others (pp. 221-237).

Research carried out by Issel (2007) provided some additional insight. Although not directly speaking to social work, she identifies retention as an issue in areas of practice. She talks about improved overall work functioning when there is joy in the workplace.

Liley (2013) looks at the importance of supporting social work students early in their training. According to Liley, by teaching resilience one can develop strength throughout their careers. Liley also states that joy is a choice. She encourages students to prepare for placement by researching the practicum host agency, as this preparation lends itself to a positive and joyful practicum experience.

It is important to note that the term happiness was identified as a replacement term for joy by the search engine PSYCHINFO. The researcher did attempt to include this term into the research, but again there is no current data available. All of the sources cited viewed joy and happiness as two separate concepts, and all emphasized that one must make a choice to be joyful in order to attain joy.
Methodology

Design

Nine participants provided their insights into this research. This study used a cross-sectional exploratory design with interviews lasting between 60-90 minutes. Six demographic questions were asked, followed by 10 predetermined semi-structured open ended questions. Four interviews were done face to face, while the other five were done over the phone.

The participants were given an unlimited amount of time to answer questions and provide insights about what they prioritized. The rationale for this approach is that little is known about joy and resilience within the profession. The objective was to see what was understood by the participants about the topics, and how they considered themselves resilient. An attempt was made to see what the participants do to attain and maintain resilience, what they included in their lives to help them return to work day after day. The research also examined how individual social workers find joy in their work.

Sampling

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. The sample population was generated by using a combination of the criterion/purposive approach and the snowball approach. Social Workers who were registered with the BC College of Social Work (RSW’s), who had been practicing in the field for over 15 years, and who were current members of the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) were eligible for inclusion. A letter was sent to two randomly selected members of the BCASW, asking for assistance in finding suitable candidates. These two individuals identified other social workers that they felt fit the outlined criteria. Two candidates were thus found, and agreed to participate in the study. These
candidates were asked in turn to identify further potential candidates, and five social workers joined the study. During this snowball sampling process, participants were asked to provide information about outstanding, diverse individuals currently practicing within the field. The goal for participant involvement was diversity in the field, with some participants coming from the health sector, some from a background of family and children services, some from mental health and finally some from the private sector, with a clinical counselling background. The identified individuals were emailed recruitment letters (Appendix A) along with the researcher’s proposal. Those who agreed to participate were emailed a Recruitment document with a letter of consent attached (Appendix B). After written consent was received, the interviews were scheduled. Immediately prior to the actual interview, verbal consent was further sought from each participant. Social work colleagues who were interested in this research also provided the names of individuals that they felt fit the criterion. The new subjects were emailed the recruitment letters and asked for their participation. Four additional individuals were recruited using this method.

There were three persons wanting to participate from the Family Services sector, but because they did not meet the criteria for the study they were not interviewed. None of them were registered with the BC College of Social Work, one person did not possess a social work degree; in fact had a Master’s of Psychology degree, and one did not meet the 15 year minimal employment criteria.

**Participants**

The nine participants ranged in age from 40 to 56 years old, and the median age was 46.9 years. There were two males and seven females in the study. The subjects had been practicing
in the field for at least 15 years; the clinician with the longest career in the profession had been practicing for 28 years and was still working as a casual employee. There was some ethnic diversity in the participant population. Six people self identified as Caucasian with ancestry from the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands, one self-identified as being from the Philippines, another identified as Indo-Canadian and a final participant identified as having First Nations ancestry. The education level of the participants also varied with six participants having a Master’s degree in Social Work and three currently practicing with a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work.

The employment of the participants varied in type as well as setting. Seven participants were working full time, one was working as a casual and one was working three-quarter time in their job. Their jobs included acute care hospital social work, mental health social work, private practice with children, palliative care social work, emergency room social work, and social work management. When describing themselves, eight of the nine participants explained that within their family of origin they saw one or both of their parents as natural helpers within the community. Their parents belonged to organized community helping programs or helped out within a faith based group. One participant disclosed that her family needed the help of others, resulting in her strong desire to help, to give back.

Seven participants identified that they were social workers as it aligned with their beliefs and values, values that were taught to them through formal religious organizations. Three of these individuals still practice their faith through organized religion while four continued to embrace the values but refrain from attending organized services.
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in SW</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Indo-Canadian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>BSW</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>MSW</td>
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<td>MSW</td>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>BSW</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>¾T</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>FT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Approval from the research ethics board at the University of the Fraser Valley was obtained on March 15, 2013 (Appendix C). The researcher then contacted the initial interviewee by e-mail. The researcher conducted interviews with interested participant at their earliest convenience. A letter of consent was provided to them prior to the interview. Initial demographic information was obtained at the beginning of the meeting, and then predetermined questions were asked of the participants (Appendix D).

Past trauma, burnout, moral distress and current clinical challenges were identified as possible emotional triggers and there was concern that some participants would feel stressed and overwhelmed by this topic. In fact, during the research process, a great deal of emotion was expressed. None of the participants however felt that they needed to stop, withdraw or seek help from a professional upon completion.

Four of the participants were interviewed in person, at private locations chosen by the participant. The other five interviews were completed by telephone. The nine interviews were completed over a two month timeframe. All nine interviews were audio taped, with scribing as a secondary source of data collection. Upon completion, the data was transcribed from the audiotape immediately after the interview.

There was no time limit given to the participants. Upon conclusion the participants were assured that their identity, privacy and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the reporting of this research. Each participant’s narrative was given a coded number. During the retelling of their narrative for this research, the participant became identified with this number when specific references are made to them.
Data Analysis

Once the first five interviews were completed, the data was collated and sorted into emerging themes. Considerable reflection was done for several weeks about the information collected. Themes evolved and were evaluated as new interview subjects were found. An additional question was added for clarification during the second interview: Was each participant using the words “joy” and “happiness” interchangeably, and did these two words mean the same thing to the participant? The other nine questions were not revised. The participants were encouraged to answer the ten semi-structured questions as openly and honestly as possible, with the researcher only interjecting to ask the questions, and to ask for clarity.

The initial analysis was completed by using an inductive approach to the answers given by the participants. The questions were open-ended to provide opportunity for the participant to provide various responses and reflections on specific area. Comparison of the data was done throughout the process, to gain greater insight into the topics of joy and resilience. Themes began to emerge out of key words. It is important to note that all of the data was assessed and reviewed and the information was then collated based on initial themes. Once the interviews were completed, the information was synthesised and compared to the research literature.

Ethical Considerations

The participants’ right to confidentiality was recognized and honoured. The researcher ensured that the participants were aware of the process of analysis and the writing of results, and agreed to provide the participants with a copy of the paper prior to its completion to ensure accuracy and provide an opportunity for the participant to withdraw their information from the final document should they choose to. Upon completion of the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to debrief with the interviewer. They all indicated that they had not
thought about social work in these terms and that they felt there were many questions left to be answered. They also said that they felt they understood themselves in a deeper way as social workers. Although they stated that this was an emotional topic for them, they felt empowered by the topic itself. None of the participants anticipated any need for further debriefing and none of them felt any harm was done.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are many limitations to this study. It would have been beneficial to have increased the number of respondents involved in the study. Nine diverse individuals were simply not enough to provide a representative sample the views of social workers. The fact that these individuals have worked in the field for more than 15 years is not common, according to the research. That these individuals are identified as outstanding by their peers again shows that they are unique and their abilities recognized as superior in the field of social work. All of these individuals are registered members of the provincial College and Association, and this contributes to their unique status. The participant sample number was limited due to a limited recruitment period.

There was also a limitation in terms of the geography of the participants, as seven out of ten were from one very small and select area in British Columbia. The research would have benefited if a larger sample population was accessed from a wider geographic region across Canada.

As this is new research, more questions and perhaps different questions may have provided greater insight into the topic. Increased knowledge about what questions to ask would have been beneficial.
Findings

Themes that emerged in the interviews were consistent with the themes found within the literature. Additional themes were identified by the participants during the interview process.

Joy

The nine participants were asked three specific questions about their perception of joy in life, work and in the overall practice of social work. After the second interview, an additional question emerged and was asked of all of the participants. The additional question was, are joy and happiness the same thing? This question was added as the initial participants were using the term interchangeably.

When analyzing the responses, only one person felt that joy and happiness were in fact the same thing. This participant was unable to see a clear distinction between the concepts and stated that one could not find joy without finding happiness. The other eight participants felt that this was not the case. One participant said that “joy was felt more deeply than happiness.” Another participant stated that “joy was a physical emotion that was felt to your core.” He did not believe the same was true of happiness. A third participant stated that “joy exceeds happiness and that it is upon a higher plane when considering the degree of the emotion.”

Three of the participants identified joy as being brief and fleeting stating that it was a moment in time. One participant explained that the moment cannot be replicated and that it was often unanticipated. It was noted to be “a fabulous instance.”

Two participants felt that joy was contentment, being at peace. One went on to say that joy was the “sweet spot” in life, pure pleasure. Another equated it with laughter, and the sensation that it was light and uplifting.
Seven of nine individuals felt that joy was felt when connecting with other people and indicated that joy was connected with the work that they do with their clients. Comments such as “I get joy connecting with people, helping them get what they need,” and “supporting people, contributing positively to their lives give me joy”. One participant spoke of joy as the ability to connect with someone very different than yourself and having the capacity to relate and be empathic. This participant went on to say that joy was found in being able to connect at an individual level as well as connecting with the collective; helping a group of disempowered people by lending a voice and participating in the fight.

Being good at the job and having expertise in the work was also identified as a component of joy for six participants. Another participant identified this sense of competence in a positive way, stating that “it provided them with fulfilment.”

Five of the participants identified working through challenges as being a contributor to the joy that they feel in the job. One person spoke about feeling like a detective and finding joy when they solve the puzzle. Another spoke about being joyful as they never knew what their day would look like, so every day was a new and different challenge and excitement.

Six people explained that they felt joy in being good at the work that they do, stating that advocacy gave them joy in their job. Four participants felt that empowering their clients gave them joy. One stated that this joy was felt when challenging the system, and at times creating change.

It was interesting to note that the definition of joy for all participants was different, but that there were many common themes throughout the interviews. Many of the participants spoke to the fact that joy is fleeting, and others identified the spark that occurred. Still others felt joy
was deeper than happiness. The idea that joy was a physical emotion was also described. Even though these themes were identified, joy was as individual as a fingerprint to each person asked.

All nine participants stated that they could not continue doing the work if the job did not give them joy, and that their resilience comes from these joyful moments. They revealed that the small joys received from their clients, their colleagues and within themselves provided them enough satisfaction to keep going.

**Resilience**

All nine participants spoke about resilience as overcoming obstacles and moving forward in spite of challenges. Although they saw the overall component of resilience in the same way, they saw the individual pieces of it in very different ways. Four participants spoke to the need for self-awareness when looking at resistance. One individual spoke about the serenity prayer, stating that there is real wisdom and value in understanding the difference between the things we can change and the things we cannot. Balance was also identified by four participants as being important when trying to achieve resilience. Strength was a key component identified by three subjects in the interview. The participants used the following words to describe their ideas about strength: bouncing back within a reasonable timeframe, not being defeated, being able to move on even without support, and recovering from challenges.

Some people spoke of being healthy, and remaining healthy during difficult times as an integral part of remaining resilient. Others discussed the importance of challenging our own beliefs and not wavering from the goal as their key components to resilience. All participants spoke about reflection as a tool that aids them and helps make them resilient.

Two of the participants felt that people are inherently resilient and that resilience is on a continuum, noting we tap into our resilience reserve to deal with challenges. They believed that
everyone is somewhere on the resilient spectrum, some being more able to cope than others. The participants described some of the traits that were needed to be resilient, including problem solving skills, positivity, forward thinking, the ability to navigate the system, the ability to overcome obstacles, creativity, and belief in one’s self.

Hope was also identified as a characteristic that enabled the interviewees to remain resilient. Seven of the nine participants said that they were hopeful that a more positive system would evolve soon. They felt that policy continues to change and that someone in a position of power could on day be willing to make this shift.

All nine participants talked about resilience as overcoming challenges, moving forward, and not getting stuck. Six of the nine participants discussed getting beyond the barriers of management intervention and moving forward to provide the client with the services that they need. Two of the others spoke about moving the client forward and moving the agency forward in spite of the obstacles that the client was facing. The final participant, participant eight, spoke of challenges to their belief system and having to “stay the course.” This subject also spoke of the need to have faith in the world view and belief in systems willingness do the right thing. When the participants spoke of resilience in social work, they all spoke of recognizing the client’s resilience and helping the client get to where they need to be in spite of their stories. The common and maybe core belief presented by this group of social workers was that everyone has some resilience, and working with clients to help them find their resilience is a huge piece of social work. These nine participants have not only remained resilient in their social work role but continue to engage, and be thoughtful about their careers and the overall profession. The participants have linked their resilience to the overall joy that they share while working in the profession.
Neoliberalism

Eight of the nine participants spoke of shifts in the workplace that affected the way they do the things do. The subject who had been practicing for the fewest years seemed to view social work in a slightly different way, stating that in her opinion she did not see a shift as a result of the neoliberal model. It is unclear as to why this is so. There is the possibility that while she was beginning her career in 1998 the shift had already taken place and so she had never experienced a time when there were social democratic values in place. Perhaps her education base reflected and addressed these changes and so she was prepared for a different model. It might also be the result of personal experience, or other factors. The following table looks at the shifts in services, both positive and negative, that the other eight participants identified in their years of practice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining core values.</td>
<td>How many resources currently exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting existing services.</td>
<td>Collective work toward a client’s good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to do best work.</td>
<td>People responsible for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer options for clients.</td>
<td>Fiscal responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout for social workers.</td>
<td>Solid relationships built.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding positive role models &amp; mentors.</td>
<td>Building on strengths within families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying grounded.</td>
<td>Pragmatic resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful work environment.</td>
<td>Colleague alliances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients &amp; staff getting lost in the system.</td>
<td>Self-determination model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System’s ineffectiveness.</td>
<td>Ensuring goodness of fit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling clients to surmount the system.</td>
<td>Responsibility for own role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced resources.</td>
<td>Left the agency to pursue personal goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling deflated and unable to help.</td>
<td>Able to practice within personal beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disempowered groups get less.</td>
<td>Responsibility of the individual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Loss of resources.
Lack of choice.

Total ownership of life.
Enabling people to find their own strengths.
Insight with own work.
Being able to help clients in different ways.
Creativity.
Decreased dependence.
Helping change mindsets.

Eight of the participants have seen a shift in the way they do their jobs and feel they can attribute it to the shift from social democracy to neoliberalism.

The research participants were consistent and stated that social workers also experience a loss of their professional vision due to cutbacks of time and services. They often feel they can no longer do their best work and provide adequate, deep, and meaningful change in their work at this time. Social workers are being put in the position of “being mean” (participant five) rather than of being a helper. This tension saps the morale of practitioners. Social workers have to take on a reactive rather than a proactive, preventative role, again leading to moral distress.

Another tension is found because social workers’ roles are being minimized in government decisions, resulting in the reduced ability to promote social change and address inequities as programs are being reduced or eliminated. The participants spoke to their concern that social workers are finding themselves using prescriptive models rather than working along with the client. Many of the participants spoke to the challenge that social workers face in that they are forced to meet the needs of the corporate agenda, providing information based on
outcomes and cost, rather than looking at the immeasurable goals of connection, trust, and relationship.

All of the participants concurred with the idea that neoliberalism’s aim is to reduce cost, and it relies on a continual quality improvement framework. It is seen to be doing this by streamlining employment, thereby creating a job setting in which security is a continual issue. This results in an environment of tension, job dissatisfaction and demoralization for those working in many agencies. It was interesting to note that both participant six and Baines (2006) align when talking about the positions of “meanness” that social workers are now placed in. Social work is a helping profession with a clearly outlined code of ethics. Remaining true to the values agreed upon in the Code and upholding these values was noted as integral for social workers.

**Job Satisfaction**

Participants emphasized that support from colleagues, managers, and team members largely influenced whether or not a social worker was able to find success in the job. One participant stated that her role as mentor gave her great job satisfaction. Another stated that by opening her own agency she has achieved tremendous job satisfaction. For all nine participants, they feel very satisfied when they feel they have connected with their client and helped the client reach either a goal, obtain new knowledge or change the system to enable others to access services.

Other elements related to job satisfaction were identified by some of the group members, such as hope, balance, education, and family of origin contribution in career choice. However, at this time, these areas of research will be left for future study.
Working Relationships

The participants shared the importance of collegial alliances and debriefing with colleagues in contributing to resilience and joy in the work. Seven of the nine participants identified this as a priority. One interviewee stated that one of the strengths that they identified within themselves was the ability to build relationships. He went on to say that this strength is imperative, as “one could not do as good a job or stay in the job without aligning with those within their discipline and coworkers in other professions.”

Another participant stated that she did not believe she could have influence within her team if she did not have the skill set to collaborate. This person felt strongly that working in conjunction with others enabled social workers to do the best job possible, and that joy was gained when the job was well done.

Managerial collaboration was also addressed. None of the nine social worker participants felt, at the time of the interview, that the management within their agency was looking at the best interest of the clients being serviced. Participant six felt that her Clinical Practice Leader provided her with positive mentoring and the ability to debrief, but her manager, who was the ultimate decision maker, did not do the same. She also indicated that she felt that the overall agency management was not supportive or helpful. Many of the participants explained that the model of their employment had changed and that they were now being managed within a system of financial constraints rather than a system that supported excellence in work.

Overcoming Challenges

Four of the six participants talked about getting beyond the barriers of management and change, and moving forward to provide the client with the services that they need. The other two spoke about moving the client forward and moving the agency forward in spite of the obstacles
that the client was facing. They spoke of recognizing the client’s resilience and helping the client get to where they need to be in spite of challenging circumstances/situations.

Table 3 outlines the skills that participants identified as contributing to their resilience.

**Table 3**


<table>
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<th>Participant #</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Team player</td>
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<td>Self-reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to maintain balance</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks help</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forward thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active listener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past experiences</td>
<td>X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models positive behaviour</td>
<td>X  X  X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to learn</td>
<td>X  X  X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
When one looks at the chart, it is clear that positive client relationships and being a team player were high on the list. The resounding theme that was presented by all nine social workers was their commitment to the client’s overall wellbeing. During the interviews seven participants explained that in spite of the significant societal changes they felt they are facing in practice, they continue to build on the strengths of the individual and of the family. One participant shared that they now think more creatively about how they will help their clients. Another stated that they focus on empowering the client. Another shared, when having to choose to align with the needs of the agency or the needs of the clients, they always choose the clients. Further, one participant stated that they give information to the client, such as terminology that helps the client gain access to services and power. The participant who did not feel the change in social work and society stated that they have always been committed to the client and helped the client by educating them about services, costs, and by providing them with education and strategies that they can utilize to attain success. All of the participants stated that this was a core value in social work, which they try to attain.

When reviewing this theme, it is important to look at the reasons why social workers work so hard at helping their clients obtain the things that they need, in spite of the challenges that are posed within these economic time. The participants spoke of moments of joy in this process. As previously stated, one participant called it the “sweet spot,” when they are successful helping the client navigate the system and meet their needs.
Burnout

All nine participants spoke briefly about people who have left the profession, expressing that this discourages them and causes them sadness. At these times during the interviews, the researcher noted a physical shift in the body language of the participant. This was a very subjective observation, but one that warranted mentioning. The topic of burnout was not explored in any depth as the participants were eager to discuss the positive aspects of the job. They all stopped themselves at one point during the interview expressing, “I want to look at the good not the challenges”, or “I came to do this interview to look at the strengths in the profession, I want to stay focused on providing positive feedback.” It is interesting to note that only one person addressed burnout directly. She saw it as the result of the shift to neoliberalism. She stated that everything changes, and she is hopeful that things will change again, to bring about a more positive atmosphere in which to live and work.

Change

All of the participants identified changes in social work as a theme, including the newest social worker who participated in this research. Participant five stated that “lesson number one in health care, is learn to accept and embrace change”. This person went on to say that she now approaches change in a way that enables her to find the sameness. She gave the example of charting, stating “it’s all the same, just different headings. And now I just adjust my headings, not my content.” An interesting insight was shared by participant three, that change is constant and if one just pushes through the change something better may be around the corner.

Table 4 lists the ways participants identified for adapting to change with resilience.
### Table 4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering the big picture</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aligning with likeminded people</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Remaining hopeful</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining social work values through advocacy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining social work values through resistance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining social work values through disengaging from a situation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Being self-aware</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering clients</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining an optimistic outlook</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding the joy and</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
The participants’ information provided insight into how they work to maintain their core values as well as the upholding the Social Work Code of Ethics in the face of change. Hope was also identified as crucial when looking at change. The commitment that the participants consistently expressed about their job clearly demonstrates their belief in hope for the future.

**Support and Education**

The participants provided knowledge about their experiences as they became social workers. Three of the participants with the fewest years of experience explained that they received training about self-care, but that they did not get grounded in the positive attributes of being a social worker. Participant six states that she felt like she was thrown into an unmanageable situation when she started practicing, which is why her goal is to help mentor new employees. Participant two’s experience was being told by a professor in a lecture that to remain in social work, one would probably have to leave the profession for a while and then return. None of the participants felt that they were adequately prepared for the practice changes that they had experienced when they entered the field. All of them stated that they felt, if information about joy, resilience and overall coping strategies had been taught to them, they would have been better trained to deal with the difficult times.

The participants provided some “nuggets of wisdom” that has been with them from their training or early in their practice. They disclosed that they still honor them today.
Table 5

“Words of Wisdom” That We Can All Use in Practice.

| Enjoy your job.” |
| Enjoy the work.” |
| “Less is more when you are working with someone.” |
| “Go step by step when working with clients. Don’t overwhelm them.” |
| “Take five minutes and ask someone ‘How are you?’ today.” |
| “You’ll probably have to leave the profession, because it may overwhelm you. But, you will come back to it.” |
| “Hospital social workers, this is my message to you, know who you are. Know your role and be able to articulate it.” – Dr. Dave Freeman |
| “Don’t ignore relationship.” |
| “The serenity prayer. Be clear about what you can and cannot change.” |
| “Remember boundaries.” |
| “We all make mistakes in relationships.” |
| “We can make painful and significant damage to those around us.” |
| “Keep things in perspective.” |
| “We are not perfect.” |
“Do your best, so that at the end of the day you can leave with your head high.”

“It’s not a sin to be poor.”

“We’re not going to make it all better. Poverty, homelessness… but you can make a difference.”

“Seldom, in life, do you only have one chance. Go back and make it better.”

“Recognize that your job is a job, not your identity.”

“Find balance and remember self care.”

“The best qualities of hurtful and challenging situations is that they have giving me insight and wisdom. I have been created a better person because of my struggles.”

One participant did not receive any words of wisdom, and perceived everyone as being too busy. She sought out her own supports and learned that “it’s okay to feel and be vulnerable.” Her words of wisdom: “Bring your own brand of social work, to the clients that you work with.”

Education and training are at the grassroots of social work. Throughout the changing times, social work has emphasized the value of its training model, ensuring that when workers go into the field they are confident and competent. This training was noted as successful and meaningful to those who have participated in this research. Participants expressed that it may be beneficial to include teaching about the positive attributes of being a social worker, such as joy and resilience, in academia.
**Future Directions**

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

The interviews provided clear and definitive insight into the topic of joy and resilience in social work. The participants involved were passionate, dedicated practitioners who indeed had many useful strategies to maintain their joy and resilience in the field. These practitioners were connected with their various work teams, some solely within the social work profession while others worked within a multidisciplinary team model. They all felt some connection to the clients and the clients’ families that they served. Many practitioners explained that they engaged in practice areas in which they experienced goodness of fit for themselves and areas which allowed them to stretch their knowledge and skills. They felt they were able to do a good job and could see and feel the joy in their work. They were also able to recognize that their role was important in the lives of the people that they served.

In this research, participants shared concrete examples of strategies useful for survival as a professional social worker in these difficult times. The results provide a compass to guide those who are new to the field, as well as seasoned veterans, toward a more joyful practice of social work.

Education, both formal and informal, seemed to be a key component that fosters resilience. Both past and present research illuminated the need for early social work training which includes strategies to maintain resilience. Teaching students about self-care and about the positive attributes within the field will help frame their job in a more positive light. It will make them aware of the challenges but also help them to recognize their successes and embrace those moments of joy in their work. The participants also supported the premise that resilience training for social workers be incorporated throughout one’s career.
Both past and present research shows that positive, inclusive leadership for social workers enhances longevity and joy in the field. Engaging in leadership discussions and decisions, having autonomy when working with clients and being able to align with the clients to help foster positive outcomes are some ways to develop this. It is important that social workers in leadership positions as well as managers who work with social workers recognize the importance of an inclusive management style, a style that engages and encourages workers to think outside the box and come up with creative workable solution that achieve positive outcome and challenge the inequities within the system.

The importance of being aware of and prepared for change was noted throughout the research. As social work is a profession which is constantly dealing with change, understanding and learning coping strategies is of paramount importance in remaining successful and positive in the field. As noted in the literature and by participants, social workers who are adaptable are more likely to remain resilient and joyful in the field. Some of the participants shared that, even though change is constant, hope was also a constant for them. The hope was to enhance their client’s quality of life as well as hope for positive system changes.

It is important for a professional social worker to recognize and understand social policy. Without this grounding it is difficult to promote discussion or engage in social activism to create change. It is also important to be aware and prepared as policies change, and for social workers to participate formally in discussions that drive policy changes. At this time in Canada, a neoliberalist model is governing social work policy development. Neoliberalism focuses on globalization, managerialism and a business framework. The research participants explained that social workers must now work more creatively to help their clients overcome the many barriers and challenges posed by neoliberalism in order to make a difference in the lives of their clients.
They stated that by working together in a positive way with peers, colleagues and clients, social workers can still ultimately find joy in their work.

**Conclusion**

The objective of this research was to explore the interconnection, or lack thereof, of joy and resilience within the practice of social work. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of what keeps social workers vibrant and alive within the profession. Throughout the research process, the participants provided insights into the attributes of resilience and how it leads to joy, and sustainability in the profession. The results of this research were complex, and in some ways unexpected. This research demonstrated that joy is subjective – what is joy for one person may not be viewed in the same way by another. Everyone must find his/her own way towards what they see as joy. That being said, all of the participants said that without joy, whatever it was, they would be unable to do their job as a social worker. The participants in this study expressed that there was a clear connection between joy and resilience. There was also a link made between joy and job satisfaction, perhaps a new piece of knowledge within the profession.

The importance of training and education to help understand the various dimensions of social work was highlighted in this study. Some of the participants felt that teaching and learning joy, resilience and the positive attributes of social work was equally as important as teaching and learning Anti-Oppressive Practice, Strengths Theory, and Neoliberalism.

This research further demonstrated that social workers get joy from many things, including: being engaged in policy discussion and decision making, feeling like they are being heard, having the ability to make change, working collaboratively within the team, spending less time with paper and more time with people, and being able to count on managerial support and understanding. When looking at the current research on neoliberalism, many of the above
mentioned ways of attaining joy for social workers are being eradicated as a result of this economic model. Social workers are finding it more and more difficult to find the joy in their work.

This research was consistent with previous literature, in emphasizing the importance of client-centred work. Every one of the participants pointed out that one of their greatest joys is doing positive work with their clients. “Helping clients” was what put the joy in their step and what sustained them in their work. This engagement is the reason why most social workers enter the field, and it can never be minimized or downplayed. It was noted as strongly connected with the moments in time when participants experienced joy and felt that “sweet spot.” The instant that enabled them to understand why they do what they do is perhaps what Maslow (Martin & Jommis, 2007, p. 1) described as “self-actualization”.

This research identified many new potential themes that can be explored in the future, including family background as a factor in career choice, social work commitment to client success, hope, and life balance. These themes were unexpected and provide much food for thought. It is the hope, however, that the findings of this research are the beginnings of a greater understanding about how social workers can continue to be resilient and find joy in the work that they do.
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doi:10.1080/03643107.2012.693057


Dear Fellow Social Worker,

My name is Meryl Smith and I am currently working toward a Masters degree in Social Work at the University of the Fraser Valley. For my research project, I will be conducting a study designed to gain a clearer understanding of resilience and joy in the social work profession. You have been identified by your peers, as someone who has the quality of resilience and you are seen as joyful in your work. I am hopeful that you could provide me with insight into how you maintain your positive spirit when times are so challenging in our profession. I am looking for participants who have been in the field for at least 15 years. My goal is to interview 6-10 participants. The interviews will be done privately at your convenience during the months of February and March. You will be asked nine open ended questions and your answers will be tape recorded to ensure the data accuracy.

I am hopeful that this study will be engaging and interesting and that the interviewees will feel comfortable during our time together. It will encourage the social work interviewee to talk about the joys of social work and how they see themselves. It is possible that you may experience anxiety and discomfort when thinking about your work experiences. You should be aware that the researcher is experienced in this area as well and will be available to discuss any emotional discomfort you may experience while participating. If you desire, you can also be referred to the employee and family assistance program, where you can speak with a psychologist at no cost to yourself. You may also stop participating in the study at any time.

The information that you provide will be kept confidential and your identity anonymous. The data collected will be kept for five years, It will be used in this research paper and may be use for further analysis, and for presentation at conferences. After five years the tape will be permanently destroyed.

The results of the study will be made available to you prior to the submission of this research paper. Should you choose, I will email the results to you. This will ensure accuracy and transparency. This study has been submitted and approved by the University of Fraser Valley.
Ethics Review Board.

Should you have any questions about this study, I would be happy to provide with clarification. You can contact me at Meryl.Smith@ufv.ca. Should you need additional information you may contact the Acting AVP of Research and Graduate Studies, Dr Adrienne Chan at, Adrienne.Chan@ufv.ca or 604-504-7441.

Thank you for your help and support,
Sincerely

Meryl Smith
Appendix B

University of the Fraser Valley
33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC V2S 7M8

Date: January 31, 2013

Letter of Consent

Resilience and Joy in Social Work

Researcher: Meryl Smith (Meryl.smith@ufv.ca; 604-412-6350)
Research Supervisor Dr Leah Douglas (Leah.douglas@ufv.ca; 604-504-7441 ext 4292)

Purpose/Objective of the Study

My name is Meryl Smith and I am currently working toward a Masters degree in Social Work at the University of the Fraser Valley. For my research project, I will be conducting a study designed to gain a clearer understanding of resilience and joy in the social work profession.

The objective of this research is to understand resilience and joy in the social work. Resilience and joy will be defined by the social worker participants. They must be registered member of a professional social work body having practiced for at least 15 years and be identified by their peers a excellent in the field. For this study, I will be interviewing 6-10 social workers who meet these criteria. The findings of this research will be disseminated in a major research paper and may be used in conferences of talks to further social work knowledge in this area.

I request your participation in this project. Your agreement to participate in this study will not be disclosed to other co-workers or members of the social work profession. Your confidentiality will be maintained.

Procedures involved in the Research

Upon agreement to participate in an interview with the researcher, a mutually agreed upon private space will be determined. The interview will consist of a short series of demographic questions and then 8 predetermined open ended questions will be asked by me, Meryl Smith. There may be time when clarification is required by either you or myself and this can be requested throughout the interview. The interviews will be audio taped, with your permission. These tapes will only be reviewed by me, Meryl Smith. Notes will be taken if permission for audio tape is declined. The reason for the audio tape is to review the ideas, thoughts and themes generated during our interview in order to complete the research project. The interview should take approximately one and one half hours.
No information or records that disclose your identity will be published, nor will any information or records that disclose your identity be removed or released without your consent unless required by law. You will be assigned a unique study number as a subject in this study. Only this number will be used on any research-related information, including personal data and research data collected about you during the course of study, so that your identity (i.e., your name or any other information that could identify you) as subject in the study will be kept confidential. Information that directly discloses your identity will remain only with the Principal Investigator; Meryl Smith. The list that matches your name to the unique identifier will be kept in a secure location for a year after the study is completed. After this time the information will be shredded and the tapes erased.

**Agreement and Understanding for Participants**

As a subject, you should understand the purpose of this research project is to better understand resilience and joy in social work. Participating in this project, you will be asked about your feelings and your experiences regarding resilient and joyful times as a social worker. It is possible that you may experience anxiety and discomfort when thinking about your work experiences. You should be aware that the researcher is experienced in this area as well and will be available to discuss any emotional discomfort you may experience while participating. You do not have to answer any of the questions if at any time you feel uncomfortable. If after participating in the study you should choose to withdraw your information, the data that you provide will be withdrawn and destroyed.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of the Fraser Valley Human Research Ethics Board.

**Potential Benefits of this Study**

There are benefits for participating in this research study. Firstly, your own awareness about your resilience joy and satisfaction may be revealed. Secondly, we will provide other social workers valuable insights into the positive attributes of the social work profession.

**Questions**

Any questions regarding the research may be discussed prior to the commencement of the interview. Any questions about the overall research project can be directed it to myself, the researcher: Meryl Smith at 604-412-6350 or Meryl.Smith@ufv.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Leah Douglas at UFV 604-504-7441 or Leah.Douglas@ufv.ca.

Any concerns about this study may be raised with Mr Brad Whittaker, Director, Research Services & Industry Liaison at UFV (604-557-4044; Brad.Whittaker@ufv.ca).
Resilience and Joy in Social Work

Consent to Participate

- I have read and understood the participant information consent form and am consenting to participate in the study resilience and joy in social work.
- I have had sufficient time to consider the information provided and to ask for advice if necessary.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had satisfactory responses to my questions.
- I understand that all of the information collected will be kept confidential and that the results will only be used for research study objectives pertaining to the MSW program or conference presentations.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am completely free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that I am not waiving any of my legal rights as a result of signing this consent form.
- I have read the form and freely consent to participate in the study.
- I have been told that I will receive a dated and signed copy of this form.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions regarding my involvement in the study, and have received any additional details.

_____ I agree to an audio taped interview   _____ I do not agree to an audio taped interview

NAME________________________________________________________ DATE____________________________

SIGNATURE__________________________________________________

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.
Appendix C

Contact Person: Meryl Smith
Department: Social Work
Protocol #: 546

Co-investigators: Adrienne Chan; Leah Douglas

Title of Project: Resilience and Joy in Social Work

Sponsoring/Funding Agency: None

Institution(s) where research will be carried out: University Of The Fraser Valley; British Columbia Association Of Social Workers

Review Date: 21-Feb-13
Approval Date: 15-Mar-13
Approval Term: 15-Mar-13 - 14-Mar-14

Certification: The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board and the procedures were found to be in compliance with accepted guidelines for ethical research.

Kathy Keiver, Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

NOTE: This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above noted term, provided there is no change in the procedures or criteria given.

If the project will go beyond the approval term noted above, an extension of approval must be requested.
Appendix D

Questions asked of the participants.

1. In a social work context, what qualities does a person have when they are described as resilient?

2. According to the research, there has been a shift in service structure in society, from a social democratic model in which society takes care of those who need help, to that of a neoliberal system in which the individual is encouraged to take care of themselves. What have you seen in your practice?

3. Change is constant. When you are working within an environment of change how do you continue to remain true to your core values and remain resilient?

4. What skills have contributed to your resilience?

5. From your social work lens, define joy.

6. Can you tell me about the joys you experience when working in your social work job?

7. What relationship do you see between joy and job satisfaction?

8. What words of wisdom about resilience were you given as a new or rookie social worker that adhered with you throughout your social work career?

9. What single aspect of social work gives you the greatest joy, puts that smile on your face and makes you glad that you do what you do?

10. Is there anything more that you would like to add or discuss?