CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-HELP GROUP LEADERS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PROFESSIONAL AND FOUNDER STATUSES

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ABSTRACT

A sample of sixty-three self-help group leaders, representative of non-12 step groups listed in the Kansas Self-Help Network, was interviewed in order to provide descriptive information about the characteristics of self-help group leaders and leadership diversification. Twenty-seven percent of the leaders held dual statuses as both experiential peers and professionally trained helpers. Dual status leaders reported "helping others" as a source of satisfaction more frequently than single status leaders. Thirty-three percent of the leaders were founders of their local groups. There was less diversification of leadership in founder-led groups than in successor-led groups, and leadership diversification was negatively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion (a sub-scale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory). The findings add to our knowledge by documenting that professionally trained helpers and experiential peer helpers are frequently one and the same person.

The characteristics of self-help group leaders and the extent to which leadership is diversified within groups are two factors which are important for self-help researchers to describe and understand more fully. Researchers, and others who write about self-help groups, have traditionally categorized leaders as either experiential peers or professionally trained helpers. This dichotomy continues to be used to distinguish between self-help groups, support, and psychotherapy

groups (Kurtz, 1997). However, a study of local chapters of the National Scoliosis Association reported that 20 percent of leaders had dual statuses as experiential peers and as professionally trained helpers (Revenson & Cassel, 1991). Little is known about the generalizability of these findings. If these findings are representative of large numbers of groups, they suggest that current dualistic thinking will need to be altered to accommodate the recognition that many self-help group leaders are both professionally trained helpers and experiential peers. Questions about how frequently leaders hold dual statuses, and whether groups led by dual status leaders differ from groups led by single status leaders were of interest in the present study.

The diversification of leadership responsibilities has been related to Emotional Exhaustion—a component of burnout—and group instability in studies of local chapters of the National Scoliosis Association and Candlelighters (Chesler & Chesney, 1995; Revenson & Cassel, 1991). There is, however, relatively little data from diverse or representative samples of self-help groups regarding diversification of leadership (Meissen, Gleason, & Embree, 1991).

In short, we lack basic, descriptive information about the characteristics of self-help group leaders and leadership diversification, despite the importance of these issues. The present study was intended to contribute to the literature in these areas by providing relevant quantitative and qualitative information from a diverse sample of self-help groups.

PEER "VERSUS" PROFESSIONAL STATUS

With regard to the definition of self-help groups, Kurtz (1997) writes:

> A self-help group is a supportive, educational, usually change-oriented mutual aid group that addresses a single life problem or condition shared by all members . . . Its leadership is indigenous to the group's members; participation and contributions are voluntary—it charges no fees. Professionals rarely have an active role in the group's activities, unless they participate as members. (page 4)

The peer versus professional status of the leader is crucial because it is thought to have important implications for group functioning. Katz (1993) and others argue that professionals may undemocratically impose a problem definition and a hierarchical way of relating onto self-help groups (Steinman & Traunstein, 1976; Toseland & Hacker, 1982). Chesler and Chesney (1995) report that local chapters of Candlelighters groups led by professionals focus more narrowly on support functions than chapters led by peers. Borkman (1990) argues that professionally trained helpers tend to impose a frame of reference which is objective, impersonal, and fragmented. In contrast, experiential helpers tend to bring a subjective, highly personal, and holistic, integrated frame of reference.

The danger of professional co-optation is a common theme because professional involvement with self-help groups is so prevalent (Lotery & Jacobs, 1995). There has been an assumption in this literature that it is rarely the case that self-help group leaders are both professionally trained helpers and experiential peers. Given the importance placed on the professional versus experiential peer status of leaders in the self-help group literature, the present study was intended to collect information about how frequently leaders hold dual statuses as both professionally trained helpers and experiential peers. The present study also assumed that it would be useful to determine whether there were fewer group activities and less diversification of leadership in groups facilitated by dual status versus single status leaders. Differences between dual and single status leaders' motivations and sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction were also of interest.

FOUNDER VERSUS SUCCESSOR STATUS

Studies of local chapters of the National Scoliosis Association and of Candlelighters groups have reported less diversification of leadership in founder-led groups than in successor-led groups (Chesler & Chesney, 1995; Revenson & Cassel, 1991). Consistent with this, Nathanson (1987) reported that Candlelighter groups frequently disbanded when the founder left if the founder was personally responsible for most or all of the group maintenance functions.

The same studies reported motivational differences between founders and successors. Successors were more likely to have experienced strong feelings of obligation to assume leadership.

These studies suggested that it would be useful to examine whether there was more diversification of leadership in successor-led versus founder-led groups. The present study addressed this question, as well as the related questions of whether founders differed from successors in their motivations for assuming leadership, and in their sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

In summary, the present study was intended to explore issues related to leaders' statuses as professionals and as founders versus successors. There was interest in determining how frequently leaders held dual statuses as both experiential peers and professionally trained helpers. Also of interest was whether there were differences between dual status and single status leaders in the number of group activities, the extent of leadership diversification, in motivations for assuming leadership, and in sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The present study was also intended to examine whether there were systematic differences between founders and successors regarding the same set of issues, e.g., the number of group activities, and leadership diversification.

METHOD

Procedure

Self-help group leaders recruited into the study were selected from the directory of the Self-Help Network of Kansas. Groups had to meet the following criteria: 1) hold regular meetings; 2) be located in Sedgwick County (the city of Wichita is located in Sedgwick County); 3) provide more than just information or a newsletter; 4) have adult membership; and 5) have formally designated leaders, i.e., this excluded Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and other 12-step groups.

Following Kurtz' definition of a self-help group, leaders had to be unpaid volunteers and to share the common concern of the group members (i.e., they had to have personally experienced the group's focal problem) in order to be included in the study. Professionally trained helpers who were not experiential peers were excluded because groups facilitated by such leaders would have been, by definition, support groups and not self-help groups.

Ninety-one groups in Sedgwick County met these criteria. We were only able to contact the leaders of seventy-two of these groups. Of the nineteen groups we were not able to contact, five were no longer in the Self-Help Network Directory (probably because they were no longer in existence), eight had numbers listed in the directory which were no longer accurate, and six others could not be contacted despite at least five attempts during various times of day or evening. It is likely that these groups were no longer functioning. Not being able to include them may have led to an underestimate of leadership burnout and instability. In terms of problem type, 16 percent of the groups we were unable to contact were concerned with addiction, while none of the groups we were able to contact were concerned with addiction. Sixty-three of the leaders we contacted agreed to participate; nine of the leaders refused, for an overall response rate of 87 percent (63/72).[1] Given these limitations, the leaders interviewed were representative of the non-12 step self-help groups listed in Kansas Network Directory.

Research Participants

The majority of participating group leaders were females (85%), married (69%), with some college education (73%), who worked full or part time (70%). Leaders were fifty-four years of age, on average.

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[1] Of the nine leaders who refused to participate, three said that they had already been interviewed with reference to another group in a study that was conducted prior to this one; the other leaders said they were too busy. If leaders refused to be interviewed we did not try to collect information about their status as professionally trained helpers, or any other variables, and so we do not know if the people who were leading more than one group were more or less likely to be professionally trained helpers.

The types of groups which individuals led primarily related to physical illness (36%, e.g., Neurofibromatosis Support Group) and parenting (21%; e.g., Mom's Care Link). Other types of groups included those for grief and bereavement (6%), divorce (6%), disability (6%), mental illness (5%), sexual issues (5%), and miscellaneous (6%).

Interview Schedule

Face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately two hours, were conducted at the convenience of the group leader by trained graduate and undergraduate students. Students received three hours of training from the project director, which included a review of the entire interview, role playing each question, and a series of practice interviews. All interviews were tape-recorded. In order to maintain consistency across the interviewers, the project director listened to the tape recordings and critiqued students about each interview. In this way, the methods used to ask all questions, especially the open-ended and related probes, were standardized. The interview instruments of most relevance to the present report were the following:

Factors Associated With Becoming a Leader

Leaders were asked to identify the factors that led them to become the leader of their groups. Leaders' responses were coded by a team of two interviewers. The interviewers developed six coding categories and their rate of inter-coder reliability was .70, as measured by Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960). All disagreements between the two coders were easily resolved after brief discussion between the coders. Table 1 lists the categories used to code leaders' answers.

Other information that was coded included leaders' discussions of their status as professionals, whether they were founders or successors, and their previous leadership experiences in their group, as well as in other voluntary organizations. Information about leaders' educational achievement and job title, if employed, was also collected.

Activities of the Group and Leadership Diversification

A list of thirteen typical group maintenance activities was developed based on Revenson and Cassel's (1991) research, as well as pilot interviews with self-help group leaders. These tasks were: running group meetings, arranging for a room in which to hold meetings, arranging programs for meetings, notifying people of meetings, providing refreshments, collecting membership dues, paying group bills, keeping membership lists, answering letters and phone calls to the group, putting out a newsletter, organizing community education or advocacy related programs, maintaining contact with or having a list of appropriate service providers (like physicians), and maintaining a library of information for members.

Table 1. Individuals' Motivations for Becoming Leaders of
Self-Help Groups (*N* = 63)

Coding Categories	Percent of Leaders
1. Feeling a need, or enjoying helping, or teaching others	56
2. Feeling obligated to assume leadership	44
3. Previous responsibility within the local chapter	21
4. Feeling or having the desire to help oneself	14
5. Prior leadership experience in other voluntary organization	6
6. Need to pay back to the group	3

Note: Leaders were free to cite as many factors as they wished, therefore total exceeds 100.

Leaders were given a list of these activities and first asked to place a checkmark "beside each task that applies to your group" (total = "a"). Then, leaders were asked to indicate which of these tasks "you are personally responsible for" (total = "b"). Leadership diversification was calculated by the following formula: 100 – b/a. The lower the proportion of leadership tasks for which the leader was responsible, the higher the leadership diversification score.

Leaders Satisfactions and Dissatisfactions

Leaders were asked to identify some examples of experiences that were satisfying or rewarding to them. A team of two coders developed seven categories that are presented below. The coders' reliability, as measured by Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960), was .73. All differences were resolved without difficulty after brief discussion between the coders. The categories, along with the percent of leaders who mentioned each source was: 1) helping others—89 percent; 2) being helped—64 percent; 3) making friends—52 percent; 4) sharing—38 percent; 5) being appreciated—33 percent; and 6) being in control—3 percent. All sixty-three leaders mentioned at least one source and they totaled more than 100 because leaders were free to mention as many different sources of satisfaction as they wished.

Leaders' satisfaction was also measured by a single 5-point, Likert-type item which ranged from "not satisfied at all" (coded as a 1) to "completely satisfied" (coded as a 5).

Leaders were also asked to give some specific examples of things that were frustrating, or costly to them in their relationships with group members. A team of two coders developed six categories, listed in Table 2. The coders achieved a

Table 2. Categories Used to Code Leaders' Sources of Frustration
($N = 63$)

Coding Categories	Percent of Leaders
1. Organizational problems within the group	75
2. Problems associated with helping or being helped	40
3. Frustration with people or organizations within local community	29
4. Strain on personal or career relationships	19
5. Inter-organizational problems within the self-help group— between local, state, or national levels	5
6. Experiencing difficulties related to focal problem outside the group	5

Note: Leaders were free to cite as many factors as they wished, therefore total exceeds 100.

Cohen's Kappa reliability of .68 (Cohen, 1960), and all differences were re-solved without difficulty after brief discussion between the coders.

Burnout Subscale

Leaders were asked to answer the nine-item sub-scale from the Maslach Burn-out Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) that measured Emotional Exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion concerns feelings of being overextended and exhausted, e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work." The scale scores ranged from "0" to 54."

RESULTS

In terms of leaders' statuses, 27 percent were dual status leaders, and held pro-fessional positions in roles as nurses ($n = 5$) or a doctor (a psychiatrist whose work involved alternate healing methods and who led a group for "workaholics"), social workers ($n = 5$), educators ($n = 3$), or other professionals (a vocational rehabilitation counselor, a school psychologist, and a marketing de-veloper). Three leaders had professional training, but were not categorized as dual status because we judged that their professional training was not relevant to their role as group leader. One case involved a Certified Public Accountant who was leading a Home Teaching Parents group. A second case involved an assis-tant dean of a local college who was leading a group for parents of children with severe illnesses. The third case involved a lawyer who was leading a Head Injury Association.

Thirty-three percent of leaders were the founders of their local chapter, eight of whom were professionals. Leaders had been in their positions for four-and-a-half years, on average. The average number of group maintenance activities was ten. The most frequent group maintenance activities—i.e., 80 percent or more of the group leaders reported that their group engaged in these activities—were: running group meetings, notifying people of meetings, arranging programs, answering letters and calls, keeping membership lists, arranging the room, maintaining contact with professionals, and keeping a library of information.

With regard to leadership diversification, 35 percent of the leaders ($n = 22$) reported that they assumed responsibility for all of the group activities: i.e., they had a leadership diversification score of "0." Leadership diversification scores ranged from: 0 to .91. The mean leadership diversification score was $M = .24$, which means that, on average, leaders took responsibility for approximately three-quarters of the maintenance tasks carried out by their group.

With regard to Emotional Exhaustion, leaders' scores can be evaluated with reference to national norms reported by Maslach and Jackson (1986). Eight percent were in the high range (above 26), 49 percent were in the moderate range (17 to 26), and 63 percent were in the low range (0 to 16). The average score was: $M = 13.14$. Emotional exhaustion was negatively correlated with leadership diversification: $r (60) = -.25$, p < .05.

Single and Dual Status Leaders

Chi-square tests for differences between single status and dual status leaders in terms of the four most frequently mentioned motivations for becoming a leader which are listed in Table 1 (all of which were coded dichotomously)—e.g., feeling a need to help others—were not significant.

In order to determine whether there were differences between single status and dual status leaders regarding the extent of leadership diversification and the total number of group maintenance activities in which groups engaged, two t-tests were calculated. Neither t-test was significant.

With regard to differences between single and dual status leaders in level of satisfaction, and in the frequency with which they identified each of the five most frequently mentioned sources of satisfaction (i.e., helping others, being helped, making friends, sharing, and being appreciated), an omnibus MANOVA was carried out. A multiple analysis of variance, or MANOVA procedure, is a conservative alternative to calculating five different *t*-tests of correlated dependent variables, because it reduces the likelihood of getting a significant finding as a result of conducting multiple *t*-tests. There was a significant multivariate F for sources of satisfaction: $F(6,56) = 2.98$, $p < .01$. The Univariate F's indicated that: 1) dual status leaders reported "helping others" as a source of satisfaction more frequently than single status leaders—$M = 4.17$ versus $M = 2.73$, respec-

tively: $F(1,61) = 4.52$, $p < .05$; and 2) single status leaders were more satisfied, in terms of the single-item measure, than dual status leaders—$M = 4.36$ versus $M = 3.76$, respectively: $F(1,61) = 6.32$, $p < .01$.

A MANOVA analysis was also carried out in order to determine if there were differences between single and dual status leaders with regard to Emotional Exhaustion and the four most frequently cited sources of dissatisfaction listed in Table 2, i.e., inability to help, organizational problems, community frustrations, and family problems. The multivariate F for sources of dissatisfaction was not significant: $F(5,54) = .36$, n.s.

Another purpose of this study was to explore, in a qualitative way, the nature of the experiences of dual status leaders. The following two quotes, concerning sources of satisfaction, articulate satisfactions in "helping others" which professionally trained leaders cited. The first quote is from a widowed social worker who was facilitating a group for widows who was able to help simply by being herself:

> . . . when I first visited the group my husband had been dead for approx 3 weeks and I was 40 years old. I just needed to be around someone who had experienced that same loss and I walked into the group and was introduced to people that it had been 2 or 3 years since their spouse had died and they were still surviving. They were still living and I think seeing that is something that is very satisfying to me now is when someone new comes to visit our group and hopefully will join and continue to come. They see me at almost 3 years and see a little bit of hope . . . it gives them a sense of, hey, she did it, maybe I can too.

A second quote, from a social worker who was leading a group for sexually abused women, articulated her judgment that she was able to help, as well, by self-disclosing. In this case, the leader disclosed that she had sexually abused herself:

> . . . it's hard to know how much to share. How much feelings to share when you are the leader. It's hard to know how much to be vulnerable to allow yourself to be in this kind of situation, because they kind of count on me to keep things moving. I guess it's me who is probably feeling that if I let my vulnerability show they won't feel as though I'm in control, or that this is a safe place to whatever. I also know that I'm risking the trust by maybe not sharing as much of myself. In all of the group counseling classes I've had it's like they say "don't talk . . . don't let any personal things out" . . . but I do let things out. . . . When we open ourselves up to other people that helps us connect better with other people. That's another thing, you don't want them to get too dependent, it is a self-help group. It's working, so I'm not going to question it.

Self-disclosure was a source of satisfaction for both leaders because it enabled them to connect with the members of the group and gain their trust. The second

leader explicitly compared—albeit elliptically—the theory, norms, and expectations of the professional helping role she had learned with those of the self-help leader's role. This leader was saying that the norms of the professional role were that the leader should be in control and not vulnerable in order to create a safe place for members, allowing them to become dependent on her. Such a view is consistent with Katz's criticism that professionals can impose a hierarchical way of relating onto self-help groups, i.e., the leader is the one providing the help and not in need of help her or himself. This way of relating is consistent with a "fee for service" model (Medvene, 1984).

This second dual status leader explicitly articulated, albeit briefly, an alternative self-help model of appropriate leader behavior whereby she created an atmosphere in which members were helped as a consequence of the risky disclosures she made. According to this model, it was functional for her to show vulnerability because it kept the members from getting too dependent on her. As she said: "it is a self-help group." She might have finished her thought by saying: ". . . and not a psychotherapy group."

A quote from the leader of a group named "Positive Approach Lupus," who was an experiential peer without professional training (single status leader), articulated a collective kind of satisfaction.

> The biggest thing is probably seeing a change in attitude. I've dealt with people who have wanted to commit suicide, people who are very depressed. They don't see they can live through what they are going through at that moment. But then these people who you go and support, the biggest reward is to see them turn around and helping someone else and to get them to change their whole attitude and once you see this positive come out and they are strong enough to help someone else, that is one of the biggest rewards. They were at the pit. They were at the bottom and they kept looking for someone to bring them out and that is what I did, we brought them out. I can give lots of examples of those.

When she says ". . . we brought them out of it," this leader is referring to what Klass and Shinners (1982-83) define as the communal aspects of helping in self-help groups. By "communal" Klass and Shinners refer to a process whereby everyone in the group is encouraged and given a chance to share their common experiences.

With regard to sources of dissatisfaction, the following quote about "denial" gives insight into a professional's frustrations over the "inability to help." This quote is from a social worker who was leading a group for Alzheimer's caregivers:

> . . . Well, I guess the most frustrating thing is if you feel you cannot help them. If you feel they come to the meetings and they are still in a denial pattern . . . We have a lady right now whose mother has been placed in our lighter care Alzheimer's unit which is a new unit. She can't take the roaming

around of the other residents into her mother's room . . . And she will not come to the meetings and I think that it is because I don't think that she wants to hear that it is normal . . .

A second quote is from a nurse who was leading a group for caregivers of people with Parkinson's disease:

One of the things that is frustrating to me is because I have greater under-standing of their problem than they have and when I try to give them pro-grams that increase their understanding, many of them do not seem to assimi-late this material.

A professional perspective was likely implicit in the frustrations expressed by the leader of the Parkinson's disease group. From a professional perspective this nurse may have interpreted her efforts as a failure because the members were not learning or accepting the information which was presented to them. It would be appropriate to evaluate a professionally initiated educational intervention using this criterion, and from this perspective the leader and the intervention might be viewed as a failure. A "sharing and caring" self-help perspective represents an alternative, more emphatically focused point of view. In self-help groups partici-pants are expected to talk about coping techniques which have, or have not, worked for them and express their concern for others (Medvene, 1990). From this perspective, the group, and the leader, are successful if members feel under-stood and accepted.

A sample of a frustration experienced by a peer helper (single status) is from the leader of a Post Polio Support Group:

That's the worst thing . . . people become depressed when they come to be up-lifted at the support group and that the people get to talking about what they've done in the meetings prior to now . . . apparently a lot of them felt they were depressed.

This leader was frustrated because one of the group's goals—to "uplift" par-ticipants—was not being accomplished. Providing support was identified as a goal by all of the leaders we interviewed, and this evaluative criterion is one that would apply to all self-help groups.

Founders and Successors

Chi-square tests were used to examine differences between founders and suc-cessors in terms of the three most frequently mentioned motivations for becom-ing a leader. One was omitted—"previous responsibilities within the local group"—because it could not be applied to founders. Founders were less likely to be motivated by feelings of obligation than successors (45% versus 81%, re-spectively): *Chi-square* (1,61) = 7.29, *p* < .01.

T-tests were calculated to determine if there were differences between groups led by founders versus successors in terms of leadership diversification and the total number of group maintenance tasks. Only one test was significant, and it indicated that there was more diversification in groups led by successors (M = .29) than in groups led by founders (M = .15): $t(42,21) = 1.98$, $p < .05$.

Two separate MANOVA analyses were carried out to determine if there were differences between founders and successors with regard to level of satisfaction and the five most frequently mentioned sources of satisfaction and Emotional Exhaustion and the four most frequently mentioned sources of dissatisfaction. Neither of the multivariate *F*'s was significant: $F(6,56) = 1.30$, n.s., and $F(5,54) = 1.73$, n.s., respectively.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to our understanding of self-help groups by documenting that professionally trained helpers and peer helpers are frequently one and the same person. This finding illustrates an important synergy between professionally trained helpers and self-helpers: professionals have contributed to the growth of self-help groups by organizing them and leading them as full participants. This result goes beyond previous research which has identified areas of collaboration between self-helpers and professionals, including the roles of professionals as organizers, consultants, and linkers to necessary resources (Kurtz, 1997), as well as participants in "shared leadership" arrangements (Chesler & Chesney, 1995).

The findings here of no difference in the burnout levels experienced by dual status and single status leaders are consistent with Revenson and Cassel's (1991) finding that "connected professionals" had comparatively low levels of burnout. Like these "connected professionals," the dual status professionals here did not experience more Emotional Exhaustion than leaders who were experiential peers. The influence of the medical settings in which Candlelighter groups functioned is one plausible explanation for the differences between the findings here and those reported by Chesler (Chesler & Chesney, 1995). In hospitals it is likely that the support group model determines the scope of group activities, rather than a leader's experiential perspective—assuming that some of the leaders in Chesler's studies were dual status. Future studies of self-help group leaders should collect information about the settings in which groups function and the constraints they impose.

The qualitative findings here provide insight into the satisfactions and frustrations experienced by dual status leaders. A plausible interpretation of the statements made by dual status leaders is that they evaluated their self-help experiences by using their professional training and experiences as a comparative standard. One plausible explanation of the finding that single status helpers had higher levels of satisfaction is that dual status professionals evaluated their

self-help groups as if they were professionally developed interventions. In terms of satisfactions, two of the leaders—both social workers—reported being able to help people through self-disclosing. It is likely that self-disclosure was salient to them because they were discouraged from disclosing to clients in their professional role, yet found it vital to their success as self-help group leaders.

Assuming that dual status professionals brought dual perspectives to their roles as leaders, probing their experiences in future research promises to be very informative. Purposive samples of dual status leaders would be a way to explore the diversity among professionals, with respect to the ways in which their training complements and/or conflicts with self-help processes. Additionally, such studies could increase understanding of experiential and professional perspectives (Borkman, 1990), and help in training professionals who lack an experiential base to work with self-help groups.

Founders and Successors

The finding that there was more diversification of leadership in groups led by successors confirms anecdotal reports that founders assume too much responsibility for meeting group needs. Additionally, the negative correlation between burnout and leadership diversification is consistent with anecdotes of founders leaving because of burnout. And, the findings here replicate reports of successors feeling obligated to assume leadership (Revenson & Cassel, 1991).

There are several ways to interpret these findings. One plausible interpretation assumes an organizational perspective, articulated by Katz (1965), that self-help groups, like other organizations, go through developmental stages and tend to become more bureaucratized. Increased diversification of leadership responsibilities over time would be consistent with some aspects of this point of view. A second, not inconsistent interpretation, is that there are personality differences between founders and successors. Founders of self-help groups may be considered social entrepreneurs, and like entrepreneurs in other domains they may tend to be charismatic leaders. Charismatic leaders may sometimes need to transition themselves out for the good of the organization, when (and if) the organization develops to the point where many members, not just the leader, take responsibility for maintaining the group. In his case study of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Weed (1993) described an extreme example involving a highly charismatic founder who needed to be removed from her leadership position for the good of the organization.

Given these perspectives, it seems reasonable to accept findings of less diversification of leadership among founders than successors as normative for self-help groups, just as they appear to be normative for many other types of organizations (Gersick, Davis, Hampton, & Lansberg, 1997). Future research that focuses on transitions in self-help groups from founder to successor could be

helpful in identifying problems in succession, and in generating some ideas for how it might be managed effectively.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation of the study is that leaders were the only source of information regarding leadership diversification. Future studies ought to include information from group members, as well as leaders.

The findings here must be regarded as preliminary for several reasons, including the relatively small sample size. Larger sample sizes would yield larger numbers of groups organized around specific problems (e.g., sexual abuse) so that relationships between problem types and leadership issues could be assessed more reliably. More importantly, some of the future studies ought to involve samples that are not drawn from the databases of Self-Help Clearinghouses or Networks. It is possible that samples drawn from these sources will contain unusually high proportions of dual status leaders. Future research should include studies which draw their samples from local chapters of national Self-Help organizations. Such samples would help us to evaluate the generalizability of the findings reported here.

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