

Dr. Ruth Clifford Engs Presentations, Publications & Research Data Collection

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Research topics by Dr. Engs have included the exploration of hypotheses concerning the determinants of behaviors such as student drinking patterns; models that have examine the etiology of cycles of prohibition and temperance movements, origins of western European drinking cultures (attitudes and behaviors concerning alcohol) from antiquity, eugenics, Progressive Era, and other social reform movements with moral overtones-Clean Living Movements; biographies of health and social reformers including Upton Sinclair; and oral histories of elderly monks. This collection is found at IUScholarWorks:

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CONTROVERSIES IN THE ADDICTION FIELD:

Ugly American Politics of Alcohol and Drugs Use, Education, Treatment, and Public Policies

Professor Ruth C. Engs
Applied Health Science
Indiana University,
Bloomington, IN

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ABSTRACT

In the United States today, conflicting philosophies are found concerning the use of alcohol and recreational drugs, alcohol and drug education, the treatment of alcoholism and drug dependency, and public policies concerning these issues. As editor of a publication to air both sides of these controversies, I found hostility to the idea of publishing a book presenting different opinions. In several cases a potential author considered their point of view as the ONLY correct educational or treatment philosophy. They suggested that opposing viewpoints were dangerous and should not be given a forum and they certainly would not be under the same cover with anyone who had a different opinion. There is a great divisive divide today in the addictions field and one way to solve it and to gain insight is to air all sides of the issues in a forthcoming book called, *Controversies in the Addiction Field*.

Today I'm going to relate the experience I had in organizing a book on the different viewpoints concerning alcohol consumption and addictive behaviors in the United States. It has been a rather harrowing journey as it has been fraught with political controversy. As a researcher

and educator who has investigated drinking patterns for almost twenty years, I have become deeply concerned over increased polarization between different factions in our field during the past decade in the United States and to a minor extent in Canada. I am concerned that this hostility has not only led to disharmony and discord but has, even more importantly, profoundly prevented workable solutions towards alcohol and other drug abuse problems in North America.

As part of this accelerating conflict, conferences and publications have been forthcoming with only ONE side of a particular issue being presented, usually as the sole way to solve a problem. The conferences have focused on “clear messages” of abstinence from all substances in all educational programming. Individuals with dissenting viewpoints have not been encouraged or even invited to partake of these forums. Consequently previous publications and conferences have all been one sided.

Therefore, as a scholar I felt that the airing of conflicting ideas, in one book, could be a step towards mutual understanding and acceptance and a vehicle to help bridge the divide between differing points of views and philosophies. Thus the purpose of the forthcoming publication , *Controversies in the Addiction Field*, for which I am editor, was to get under one cover differing opinions concerning various controversial issues and to discuss these differences in a scholarly manner based upon the research results.

The mark of a scholar, and of a scholarly publication, is to tolerant of differing viewpoints and to assure that all sides have an open forum for presentation. As neutral editor for this book, I have strived for completely fair and scholarly representation of all sides of each issue presented. In this light I would like to mention that in two of the sections I have either previously co-authored, or have been closely involved professionally, with the authors writing on all sides of the issue. Also I should mention that as editor, in the process of putting this book together, I have discovered that this new work itself is considered controversial by some.

This book addresses only a few of the controversial issues found in the addiction field. In soliciting authors for the volume, noted researchers and scholars, known for a particular viewpoint, were contacted. Because of time commitments some were not able to contribute but

readily offered names of colleagues. A few, for political reasons and personal philosophies, which will further discussed below, declined the invitation. In a few sections, where researchers could not be found, nationally known advocates for a particular issue were asked to participate. Also, some emerging scholars and academicians were asked to contribute so that there would be a mixture of seasoned authors and new emerging talent in the field. In some cases authors on each side of an issue used the same research data and related literature. Depending upon their interpretations they often came to different conclusions. It needs to be mentioned that neither the editor nor the writers have been remunerated in any way for this publication as it is considered service to the field.

In two sections, namely the "Nature of Alcoholism and Drug Addictions" and the "Effectiveness of School Based Education," because of the multifaceted nature of the area, more than two authors were obtained to gather a spectrum of viewpoints. In other subject areas, ideally it would have been more interesting to have multi-authors but this was not feasible because of page constraints or non-availability of potential writers at this time.

Is such a publication concerning controversies in the addictions field even needed? After talking with a variety of potential authors throughout North America, I found that most encouraged the concept and welcomed an opportunity to discuss their point of view and research in an open forum. However, some were hostile towards its whole idea.

Sadly, I talked with some potential authors who did not agree with, or believe, in the concept of open forum and debate. Some had punitive attitudes towards individuals or groups who had opinions or values different from their own. Some were even hostile to the concept of the book. I am distressed by the attitudes of these individuals, all of whom are very well known in their area of specialties. I regret that they declined to participate in this publication and would like to list some of their reasons as they appear to be symptomatic of the deep fissions characteristic of the alcohol/drug field today, particularly in the United States. The reasons as follows are:

- 1) There is only ONE correct point of view or only one right way to solve the problem and the individual was appalled that anyone could have a different viewpoint;
- 2) ACA (American Council on Alcoholism sponsor of the publication) as an organization receives funding from individuals associated with the beverage industry; or
- 3) ACA receives funding from the treatment industry and they would not want to be associated with anything even remotely connected with the alcohol beverage or treatment industry;
- 4) When given the name of certain authors who had agreed to write chapters, some of the potential writers felt that these authors should not be given a forum because of their "dangerous", "non-academic," or "out of date" viewpoints and did not wish to be presented in the same book with them.

I was amazed by these attitudes. Certainly in academia all attitudes and ideas are welcome to be discussed in an open forum. Individuals with different research results, values, agendas, or monetary affiliations are encouraged to discuss their point of view. I was concerned that some of these individuals apparently did not believe in the concept of open forum where a variety of individuals with various opinions could freely entertain their professional opinion concerning a controversial issue. I was deeply disturbed by these values as, in my opinion, they contribute to increased division and hostility rather than efforts to look for compromise and workable solutions to solve the problems in our field.

Since I was concerned with increased polarization of factions within the addictions field, I felt that a book which discussed current controversial issues could serve as an open forum for differing viewpoints under one cover thereby helping to bridge the gap between the differences. Since this philosophy was compatible with the American Council on Alcoholism (ACA), I approached them with the idea for the book and they agreed to become the host sponsoring organization, as is required by the publisher for this type of service oriented text. I then discussed with Kendall-Hunt, the publisher, who had published some of my textbooks the possibility of

undertaking a book focused upon various controversies in the addiction field and they agreed it was a worthy project.

In summary, as a society we cannot afford to think uni- dimensionally or dichotomize the field because all the issues discussed in the book are extremely complex. In all probability there is no simplistic solution or one answer to any of the problems or issues discussed; there are various shades of gray. No issue is really black or white. Perhaps after enough time and effort we may find that there are numerous etiologies for alcoholism and other addictions and a variety of potentially successful prevention, education, treatment, and public policy solutions. However, we must begin to start by listening to each other. We must start to work together by openly discussing our differences if we are to successfully solve the alcohol and other drug abuse problems in our culture today.

REFERENCES

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