Introduction to Special Issue I: The Hearts and Minds of Social Work Scientists

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There is a great deal of accumulated wisdom in the poignant narratives that follow. For the most part they are written by individuals who were experienced social work practitioners before becoming researchers, so it is not surprising that they write of both *being* social workers and *doing* social work research. Each narrative is an artful solo in its own right, together raising a powerful chorus about the complications of having multiple identities.

There is a natural rhythm to the narratives presented here. In the opening trio the role of mothers—lost, found, and becoming—is linked to the research experiences of the women writing them. Clute was forced to temporarily suspend reading bereavement literature on parental death to fully experience the loss of her beloved mother, which benefited her research in ways taking a purely cognitive approach would not. Ting set out to study adolescent girls in Hong Kong only to discover that her own deceased mother was "missing" from her memories, which set her on a new path of self-discovery that ultimately linked loose pieces of her professional and personal life. Levin muses over the parallel processes of becoming a mother and birthing a dissertation.

Levin writes, "Introducing a new element disrupts the homeostasis of any system." She was referring to a baby, but the second set of narratives in this issue is evidence that doctoral study and the dissertation process disrupts the homeostasis of one's professional identity as well. While doing research on social work practice, Altman—an experienced and devoted practitioner—began to lose faith in the efficacy of social work practice, a skepticism she initially attributed to the "early labor pains of role transition" but that she continued to struggle with after her transition to life in the academy was complete. Price—with her "clinical eyes newly trained to focus through the lens of research"—encountered skepticism in a community with a long history of being the target of research. She overcame this hurdle by using her practitioner skills to engage the community, only to discover that those accommodations rendered her research inadequately scientific for a dissertation in the academy. Skepticism and uncertainty move from undercurrent to central finding in Keenan's narrative about overcoming difficulties in conducting her field research. Like the parallel processes described by Levin at the end of the narratives on "mothers," Keenan closes this second set of narratives by utilizing the clinical practice concept of parallel process in order to make sense of her community-based research.

If the second set of narratives deals with the discord and accommodations associated with making transitions, the third group reveals something about finding harmony. Bushfield discovered the researcher in her when she began asking practical and practice-based research questions as a hospice social worker, which eventually led her into the academy. She believes that "within every good,

reflective practitioner there is a competent researcher waiting to emerge." Gioia also made a seemingly seamless transition from clinician to researcher during the dissertation process, only to discover in the academy that she had not allocated "time to grieve" her lost life as practitioner, a situation that was unexpectedly remedied by doing community-based research. Anderson-Nathe and Abrams dismiss the divide between researchers and practitioners and argue that we should integrate and honor that "fluid space between these often 'polarized' positions" for the betterment of both practice and research. They illustrate their ideas using compelling examples from their study of young men in a correctional facility. In the elegant closing piece, five British social workers come together to create a group narrative on their experiences of researching social work practice. In doing so they raise the central question for all the narratives housed in this special issue by asking, "Who are we? Are we social workers practicing as researchers or researchers who have been social workers?"

Many of the narratives struggle with variations on that dilemma. What does a "researcher" do when faced with a clinical question? Can the role of social worker be turned on and off? Do you shed your identity as social worker and substitute that of researcher, or does the social worker-researcher require a particular blend of identities that uniquely define our professional selves?

Readers of these narratives will discover numerous connections that interlace the ideas presented here in interesting, dynamic, and perhaps somewhat unexpected ways, while offering insights about who we are. Four intrigued me: the use of the heart, the nature of "science," the bumpy road, and the role of "re."

The Use of the Heart

I don't think it is coincidence that eight out of the ten narratives published here—ones dealing with the intersection of social work practice and research—use metaphors of the "heart." Most notably, Gioia and Clute use it as a central concept, both discovering that some part of their work as researchers required that they empty their "mind" in order to utilize their heart. In Gioia's case this allowed her to return to her practitioner roots; in Clute's it allowed her to experience the substance of the topic she was investigating. It would seem Ting's journey also required jump-starting the heart. The adolescent girls in her study spoke frequently of conversations with their mothers, which caused her to look inward and recognize that something was missing in her own life that needed to be reclaimed.

If we take these ideas together, they may suggest that the heart of the social worker-researcher plays an under-appreciated role in the research process. Hollows and her colleagues note that "at its heart [research is] a puzzle that the researcher is keen to solve." Perhaps if we examined ourselves as practitioners and researchers, we might discover something unique about social worker-researchers. What is the role of our hearts in doing research? How does the heart impact the mind as we ask our questions and collect and interpret our data? Social workers, who must work with both the hearts and minds of their clients, may need to think seriously about a parallel process in this area as well.

The Nature of Science

Of course, the historic divide between heart (the seat of passion and emotion) and mind (the place of logic and reason) is problematic for those of us trained in universities that use "hard" science models to study questions rooted in our social nature. Concerns over what constitutes proper science are raised in several narratives. Clute

was taught that good scientific writing is something different from what she does (yet she delivers a self-reflexive narrative so powerful it moves me to tears every time I read it). Ting realized she had to get close to the adolescent girls she studied and abandon what she had learned about proper scientific relationships. Anderson-Nathe and Abrams blend roles in ways that Hollows and her colleagues might find unscientific (based, in part, on their amusing report of a researcher who listened to her subject with great restraint only to tear after him and offer helpful intervention the moment her "researcher" role ended). Bushfield apologizes a bit for her earliest research projects as not being as sophisticated as her current work; nonetheless, it appears this early practice-based research had a profoundly beneficial effect in its applied setting.

Most provocative of all is the journey that Price reports. She designed a study, entered the community, listened to the "residual hurt" that had been inflicted by researchers before her, drew on her practitioner self, and helped engage the community in ways that seem to result in real and beneficial change. Back at the academy, however, her work was denigrated as lacking fidelity and being merely evaluation research. She decided to do a dissertation with secondary data that would withstand the "rigor" required by her university home. She raises important questions about this choice, noting that "while striving for rigor in social work research, we have adopted the medical model's 'gold standard' of the randomized-controlled trial as the hallmark method" but argues that a more "fluid approach" to intervention might be something to embrace rather than apologize for. Price, like the other authors, employs the metaphor of the heart to make sense of the false disconnect between good practice and good research. She writes, "But there is also a heart and a soul to engaging individuals, families and communities in an empowered, participatory

research process that stands apart from these scientific principles based in a laboratory."

One has to question the proper role of science in and for social work. It is troubling when clearly talented younger scholars like Clute and Price run into a "gold standard" favored by the academy that seems to fly in the face of what they know (in their hearts) to be their best or most rewarding work—work that has value in people's real lives. Social work, perhaps more than other professions, should resist endorsing scientific models that drive a wedge between researchers and practitioners and between research and practice within an individual. Defining "science" in ways that exclude real world applied work, that doesn't engage and empower individuals and communities, that results in leaving communities skeptical about researchers, that falsely dichotomizes subjective and objective, and that requires picking between the heart or mind of social work practitioners just can't be right for us.

The Bumpy Road

Anderson-Nathe and Abrams introduce their narrative with the metaphor of a road trip and invite us along for the ride. They aptly point out, however, that the destination is sometimes far less important than the process of moving toward it. There may be no more pervasive theme in this collection of narratives than the idea that as we journey through life—as person, practitioner, and researcher—the process itself has much to teach us. There is nothing static about process; it is always dynamic. Along the way, they encounter bumps that help them (and us) grow from the experience. As you read this volume, you will encounter emotional ups and downs; learn about losing and finding, birth and death, teaching and mentoring. Among other things, you will hear about the values of building trust, maintaining faith, suffering loss, and embracing accomplishments.

One way or another, all of these stories are about change. Hollows et al. note that "a commitment to social work values entails a commitment to action." This observation speaks to who we are as social workers. Clute writes, "Human experience does not hold still for detached analysis. Human experience is dynamic. It dawned on me that so is my research process!" We must embrace this dynamic nature of our research if we are to stay true to our professional values. Social workers must be ready to study the messy world where change, flexibility, growth, and context matter. It is a world in which the process of traveling with our clients, constituents, or consumers is often at least as important as the final destination. Studies divorced from this context may garner accolades in the academy but are likely to produce "knowledge" of little relevance to social work practitioners. We social worker-researchers ought to embrace the bumpy ride.

The Role of "Re"

Finally, take note of the role of "re" in the narratives that follow. You will stumble upon the little prefix—with its powerful directive to return—with surprising regularity. These writers talk about re-visiting, re-working, re-membering, re-thinking, re-positioning, and re-viving, while re-flecting on re-search. Perhaps we should return to our practitioner roots, as these authors have, during our journey as researchers in order to stay connected to the human experiences which are the lifeblood of the profession. After all, we chose to be social workers—applied, rather than "pure" and "objective," social scientists.

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