

Introduction to the Special Issue on Families of Origin: Implications for Practice

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Abstract: Our own family histories, including relationships with our grandparents, parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren, have impacted, and continue to impact, our own evolving narratives. Because of all of this, we knew we would get a rich and broad range of narrative submissions. We have decided to allow each story to stand alone, making no attempt at grouping them, simply presenting them in the order we received the manuscripts. The breadth of the stories is great, the depth as well. The authors' stories tell tales that respect their own families of origin and have value to those of us who are being honored to read them.

Keywords: Family of origin, social work practice, adoption, alcoholism, deaf, war, Christian faith, secular Judaism, Holocaust, coming out, queer, child sexual abuse, genocide, Rwanda, death, single parenting

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to edit this special edition of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*. Our combined careers in academia span a number of decades of teaching courses in research, human behavior, policy, and practice, as well as monitoring field experiences, advisement, and interviewing students for admission. It was through those varied experiences that we have had the honor to hear hundreds of students' narratives of their lived experiences, most of which showed a specific focus on their families of origin.

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Manako Yabe's "The Journey of a Real Social Worker" details her evolution in life as a Deaf child in Japan who attended Deaf Schools in Tokyo, Atlanta and London, and later earned an undergraduate degree in Deaf Studies, then an MSW. She credits the support of her parents and the role of faith in her life as being instrumental in her and her brother's (also Deaf) lives. Her story outlines the many stages of her life and the impacts

of being a Deaf person in a hearing world. Readers will see that sometimes the word deaf is capitalized, and sometimes it is not. This reflects the author's recognition that use of the capital D refers to a specific person who identifies as culturally Deaf, while small d refers more generally to deafness or to deaf people who may or may not be associated with the Deaf community. In addition, when referring formally to things like Deaf Studies and the Deaf community, capital D is used.

Katherine Mary Kranz's "Box 62: A Mother-Daughter Search" is the story of growing up in a household heavily impacted by alcohol and the decision to search for her family's history. She primarily focuses on her mother's adoption and ultimately uncovers the adoption records. She identifies "themes of secrecy, shame, and the suppression of emotions" that impacted her lived experience. Her discoveries led her to communicate with her deceased mother via writings she had left behind.

Boniface Odong's "The Trumpet of Hope and Change" is the story of growing up in war-torn Uganda as one of ten children. Their father died when he was still a child and his mother subsequently adopted eight more children, as well as cared for the children of family members. He credits his mother's Christian faith and solid role modeling as being important in his development until she died, also during his childhood. His life changed drastically after his mother's death and the subsequent "miserable existence" that resulted from relatives taking his mother's belongings. The impact of these early life experiences led to his goal of becoming a social worker and bringing hope to the lives of children and

families in similar circumstances.

Steven Granich's "Resolving Family of Origin Issues in Clinical Perspective" addresses the influence of his own family's story in his evolution to clinical practice in social work. He describes it as a relatively healthy, in part formed by secular Judaism, but emotionally distant childhood that centered on stress among his father, mother, and sister. He speaks to the impact of his family dynamics on his early social work career. In part, he attributes international travel, discovering a new spirituality, and becoming a step-father as being instructive in his own personal and professional evolutions.

Kielty Turner's "'Borrowed Light': Reflecting on Learning to be a Social Worker" uses the writings of her deceased mother, a novelist, poet and English professor, to reflect on her own path to social work. This brief, but cogent narrative touches on very personal remembrances and influences her mother had on her life and her road to social work. Turner deals with very personal reflections, including how she "...needed to try to understand and learn to deal with our family," in response to her mother's question, late in her life of why she chose social work.

Kim Lorber's "The Holocaust Among Holocausts: A Child's Lessons Became the Teacher's" details her life as the child of a survivor of the Holocaust. She never knew the stories of her family members, who were victims of the Holocaust, and she discusses how the lived experience of her mother significantly impacted Lorber's own development. She explains that, "It is impossible for me to separate the 'who' of my self from the lessons taught, intentionally or not, at the feet of my mother, and hers, amidst the aching void of relatives who existed in name only." She has taken these lessons into the classroom, sharing them with her students, while paying honor to their stories as well, focusing strongly on the importance of social justice in social work practice.

George Turner's "A Coming Out Narrative: Discovering My Queer Voice, My Social Worker Superpower" is aptly titled. It is both a personal account of coming out and an explication of the "disrupted biography" that informs his story and its impact on his professional practice. He celebrates his

"queer voice" while acknowledging that the doubts and voices, his own and others, from his past lingered for some time. But today he is an "authentic self - a queer male, social worker." He honors the voices of his clients in his own evolution.

Judy D. Berglund's "Pain and Joy in School: Reflections on Becoming a Social Worker" confronts her own childhood sexual victimization, both in school and at home. She attributes the start of her healing to "Leo," the person she worked with through much of her adolescence. Her subsequent position as a school social worker would sometimes bring back those memories. Berglund has been able to take her own lived experience and use it to the advantage of the children she worked with and the BSW students she has taught.

Hadidja Nyirankuye's "Family of Origin: Lessons from Exile" tells us about how families are torn apart in exile. Her story is of fleeing the genocide in Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of an extended family of twenty, including her own four children. As the only person in her family with a college education, she felt compelled to support the family, but her degree and language skills did not allow her any opportunities, which were primarily in medical practice and social work. Upon being granted asylum in the United States, she entered an MSW program with the intention of returning to Rwanda. As that was not achievable, she turned to work with refugees and asylum-seekers in America. She subsequently moved into academia, where her family of origin experiences and passion for refugees led her to develop a course called "Social Work with Immigrants and Refugees," which, will hopefully expand the number of social workers called to do this kind of work.

Nancy Meyer-Adams' "Holding the Hope: A Path to Becoming a Social Work Educator" traces the impact of family losses on her life, through both death and estrangement. She talks about becoming a wife and mother of two as a teenager, and ultimately a single parent, who, because she was a high school dropout, saw limited opportunities for herself. With the support of her children, she earned a GED and subsequently BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. degrees. She now uses the lessons from her own life in teaching social work students.

Pamela A. Viggiani's states in "The Effects of Adoption Throughout the Life Course: A Personal Reflection on Adoption, Work, and Family" that "...familial experiences with adoption profoundly affect both choice of profession and theoretical perspective." Her familial experience began with her family of origin, but because both her father and mother had grown up in homes where there were many people, they carried that importance of family into Viggiani's home life. Her home had a number of temporary members over the years, including a cousin who, because of difficulties in the cousin's family of origin, was ultimately adopted and became the family's fourth child. Using her own lived experiences and the impact adoption had on her throughout her journey, including the adoption of two children into her own nuclear family, her profession has been social work, and her practice has been informed by the importance of human

relationships and the lifespan perspective; she writes, "...adoption so clearly illustrates the complexity of our interwoven lives across a life trajectory."

As the co-editors of this special edition, we want to thank the authors and reviewers of the manuscripts, and the staff of Reflections for the support they have provided. We also thank the many students whose narratives about their families of origin we have had the honor to learn from over our careers in academia.

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