

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Recognizing & Valuing Our Peer Reviewers

Darlyne Bailey, Monica Leisey, F. Ellen Netting, and Kelly McNally Koney

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 27 number 2 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. We follow this update with our collective thoughts about how important it is to recognize the value of our incredible reviewers whose behind-the-scenes, time-consuming work is critical to the journal's success. We are excited to introduce seven engaging articles in which the authors evoke a wide range of emotions and three poetry submissions that illustrate how creatively diverse the concept of poetry can be. The interface of personal and professional selves is interwoven throughout this issue as authors share their insights about how to prepare the next generation of helping professionals to embrace alternative forms of meaning-making, often in the face of traumatic life events. We hope readers will be as delighted as we are with the creativity and imagery emerging within the pages of this issue!

Keywords: alternative methods, justice, peer review, trauma, violence

We begin by thanking so many people who continue to make the publication of *Reflections* possible, particularly recognizing the dedicated work of our committed reviewers who make a peer-reviewed journal possible. Finally, we provide a brief overview of the articles in this issue and their interconnected themes.

Appreciation to the Dedicated People Who Make *Reflections* Possible

We have so many people to thank, and we are grateful every day for their dedication to *Reflections*. Special appreciation goes to Sarah Valek, who has served as our Graduate Assistant and managed the publication process for two years. This summer she has taken over the copyediting function following the graduation of Jack A. Pincelli, our Copyeditor of two years. We offer our deepest appreciation to Jack, as well as Assistant Copyeditors, Madeleine Buhrow and Karla Seese.

We are excited to welcome Reinhild F. Boehme, newly appointed as Publisher for *Reflections*! Reinhild is Assistant College Lecturer in Social Work at Cleveland State University and a clinical fellow at OhioGuidestone's Institute of Family and Community Impact. Reinhild is an expert in trauma-informed care and community-based mental health and has substantial experience in clinical practice with diverse populations and the supervision of multi-disciplinary staff. A true "pracademic," Reinhild is skilled at negotiating and navigating two cultural identities and is passionate about amplifying the voices and lived experiences of migrant and immigrant people. She brings commitment to narrative writing and multi-disciplinary work to her new role, and we look forward to working with her.

A special thanks goes to our Section Editors who continue to volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. We are indebted to Arlene Reilly-Sandoval (Teaching and Learning), Beth Lewis (Field Education), and Jon Christopher Hall (Practice).

Many thanks to Associate Editor Monica Leisey who has been serving as interim Section Editor of Research until we were able to recruit a new editor for this Section.

We are pleased to introduce D. Crystal Coles, who has graciously agreed to join us as Section Editor for Research. Crystal is Assistant Professor, Morgan State University School of Social Work. Her research focuses on child welfare and the intersection of the African-American/Black diaspora through the lens of health disparities in rural and urban communities. Crystal worked for more than 15 years as a child welfare social worker, practicing predominantly in the areas of foster care and health. In addition to work in the foster care system, she has experience in medical social work; counseling and crisis services; as well as organizational and community intervention services. Indeed, she brings a wealth of research, practice, and academic experience to her new role. Welcome Crystal!

Guest Editors & Special Issues

As this issue goes to press, we look forward to two upcoming issues on “The Impact of COVID 19 on Preparing Future Helping Professionals and on Practicing with Individuals, Groups, and Communities” guest edited by Katherine Selber and Lynn Levy. Katherine and Lynn were pleased to receive multiple manuscripts in response to their call, and readers will find their Special Issues extremely helpful as authors convey their deepest concerns and creative approaches in facing professional and personal challenges during the pandemic.

As we noted in V27 number 1, there are several forthcoming Special Issues on racial injustice, systemic racism, and anti-racism practices. Priscilla Gibson is the lead Guest Editor for a Special Issue entitled “Black Racial Injustice: Personal Reflections to Change Strategies.” Patricia Gray is lead Guest Editor on “Practicing While Black,” and Tiffany Baffour and Shonda Lawrence are guest editing “A Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism *Within* Social Work Programs.”

The Significance of Peer Review

The peer review process is a long-standing tradition of evaluating scientific, academic, and professional work by others in the same or related fields. The concept of peer review dates back to ancient Greece, and over the centuries reviewers have come to play an increasingly important role in determining the quality and credibility of scholarly writing. In their book on how to conduct effective peer reviews, Barczak and Griffin (2021) identify three functions of the peer review process: 1) improving the quality of manuscripts with potential for publication, 2) helping editors select manuscripts that will be most helpful/useful for the journal’s readership, and 3) filtering out manuscripts that are not ready for publication. In the event of a submission that is not ready for publication, we firmly believe that this is a developmental opportunity for reviewers and editors to offer constructive feedback that may help authors reimagine their manuscripts.

When a reviewer is invited to assess a submission, it is important to read through the entire manuscript while keeping in mind the journal’s criteria for evaluation. To facilitate this process, over the last three years we have revised the *Reflections* review criteria, streamlined our review

form, and placed those criteria in our instructions for authors so that reviewers and authors alike know what is expected in a *Reflections* submission. We believe that there must be transparency so that authors know what we are looking for, and we ask reviewers to rate each criterion as well as write comments to explicate the reasons for their ratings.

Refereed journals ask a lot of reviewers who are anonymous volunteers, working behind-the-scenes to evaluate manuscripts. Barczak and Griffin (2021) identify just how much we are asking when we invite someone to peer review. They present five R's that characterize the review process: roles, responsibilities, responses, reactions, and respect (p. 30); for authors, reviewers perform the *roles* of critics and coaches, providing feedback and suggesting ways to strengthen manuscripts. For us as the editorial team, reviewers serve as trusted advisors, and for readers, reviewers play the role of gatekeeper, providing expertise and offering advice. Reviewers' *responsibilities* to authors are to spend time and effort to make the manuscript the best it can be, to respond in a timely manner, and to maintain confidentiality. Reviewers help us as editors to craft a fair decision just as they help us assure that interesting, relevant knowledge is created for a professional readership. In regard to *responses*, reviewers demonstrate completeness of consideration, identify strengths and weaknesses, provide actionable advice, and ask for necessary changes. In terms of *reactions*, reviewers are asked to use a professional tone, to be constructive (never destructive), teach developmentally without being condescending, be kind, show empathy, and refrain from gratifying their own egos. Finally, reviewers are asked to be *respectful*, which is at the heart of being author-centric. To us, this means framing one's review with sensitivity, after reading—and re-reading, if necessary—to best understand the author's perspective, honoring the fact that this manuscript is a product of someone's intellectual and emotional hard work.

Several years ago, editors and former editors of a number of well-established journals wrote a collaborative editorial about what editors value and what authors find helpful about the peer review process. One editor noted that even though reviewers are anonymous, the journals for which they review are not (Robbins et al., 2015). Thus, a journal's reputation is only as strong as its reviewers. If reviewers and editors treat authors with respect and encouragement, then *Reflections* will be seen as a journal that is respectful and encouraging.

The Importance of Recognizing Our Reviewers

In our previous editorial, we emphasized the importance of the peer review process and shared that several months ago we sent an "opt in" request to all our registered reviewers in order to update our reviewer list. Their responses led us to confer with our Section and then current Guest Editors (i.e., the Editorial Board) to solicit their thoughts about how to better recognize reviewers to ensure that *Reflections* acknowledges all who have contributed to the review process of each issue and recognizes them collectively once a year.

We agreed that having a listing of reviewers who are recognized in these ways is a public declaration of their valuable work. For reviewers who hold academic positions, as many of our reviewers do, their name in a list of reviewers provides documentation of professional service. Moving forward, these reviewers will be acknowledged as members of the Annual Narrative Review Board (ANRB). This membership recognizes reviewers who have contributed their

talents and time to providing high quality reviews for at least two manuscripts for each volume.

Highlights of This Issue

In this issue, the authors evoke a wide range of emotions through words and images in seven engaging narratives and in three poetry submissions that illustrate how creatively diverse the concept of poetry can be. In addition, two of the narrative articles have poetry embedded within them as well, and one narrative features an original painting.

The interface of personal and professional selves is interwoven throughout this issue, along with the importance of meaning-making in the face of traumatic life events. The first two reflections bring this interface to a crescendo as two authors reveal their innermost insights when grief over losing family members breaks through professional defenses. In “The Sister’s Box,” Wilson writes about working with women with early-stage breast cancer and unintentionally buying into “the medicalisation of emotion” (p. 12), in which deeply-held feelings are repressed. Having lost a sister at a young age, Wilson reflects about the bounded caring that can occur when being professional legitimately intersects with emotional work, leading to opening a box of painful memories about a beloved sibling. Next is Richard-Allerdyce’s poem in which a trained poetry therapist strives “to access the livingness of each present moment” (p. 20) as a daughter caring for her mother with dementia. Using poetry as a means to “find peace in the regularities of language” (p. 22), Richard-Allerdyce compares a poem’s linguistic flow to listening to music that lifts the “listener beyond the surface of events” (p. 22) and becomes a form of self-care in the face of anticipatory grief. Both Wilson and Richard-Allerdyce reveal insights into how the interface of personal and professional development is a continual process of becoming.

Immediately following are two contributions that address the trauma of having experienced violence. Sutton reflects on the “pedagogy of vulnerability” in which the intimacy of personal experience from “generations of familial trauma” (p. 23) is shared. The author comes face-to-face with memories like “old ghosts” and is repeatedly rebirthed into a “survivor-turned-thriver” (p. 24). Having designed a course on anti-violence, Sutton emphasizes the importance of the “lived curriculum” (p. 26) in which every student’s experiences are valid sources of knowledge. Next is Oba’s narrative which offers a unique opportunity to learn about the experiences of a female co-facilitator of a Canadian-based Partner Assault Response group composed of men who have perpetrated intimate violence. Embedded in patriarchal systems laced with the dynamics of power and gender, Oba offers insights into how facilitators and participants interact and learn from their intense interactions. Both Sutton and Oba teach about violence but in different arenas with different participants—Sutton in the classroom and Oba in groups of persons who have engaged in violent acts.

Continuing the theme of addressing the trauma of violence, Beech writes a poem that is inspired by those research activists seen as “weavers of truth” (p. 44). In the process, Beech honors those “foremothers of research and activism” (p. 44) who have come before and whose stories form a tapestry of insight into lived experiences that have long been subjugated. Beech’s poem opens the doorway to two narratives designed to bring forth the voices of participants who have faced traumatizing experiences. Morton and seven colleagues collaborate in their narrative about using an action research approach with women in Ireland who have faced Adverse Childhood

Experiences (ACEs) including domestic violence, poverty, and substance use. These eight authors provide their own insights into how their research influenced their personal and professional growth and how they came to believe in using ACE routine enquiry which provided an opportunity to use a new tool for opening dialogue. Next is Dell's article that focuses on the use of Photovoice to explore safety and safe coping mechanisms for participants experiencing traumatic stress and substance use. As participants prepared to share their photos, COVID-19 interfered with original plans to bring everyone together and to engage the community in sharing what had been learned. In reimagining how to conduct a virtual event, Dell reflects on the value of using Photovoice to engage participants in every aspect of an alternative planning process.

The next three contributions continue the theme of trauma, systematized in the form of economic injustice and poverty, social injustice and racism, and dominant epistemologies. Wilfong and Cirino form a faculty-student team to write about how content on poverty and economic justice needs to be highlighted in social work curriculum, that "without an open discussion about the reality of income inequality, systemic racism, and cycle of poverty, change will not happen" (p. 75). The authors reflect on how their early lives influenced their perspectives and call social work professionals to take the dialogue and turn it into action, advocating for structural and political change. Smith, Aguilar, and Tomczak collaborate on a narrative in which social work faculty members pushed the boundaries of "comfort" in figuring out how to write a letter denouncing the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Three faculty members reveal their innermost feelings and emotional responses to the process that ensued, leading one to be accused of committing microaggressions and another wanting to distance from the letter as much as possible. They conclude that "there is no end to anti-oppression work" (p. 85) and this insightful, candid narrative reveals how difficult it is to truly hear one another even when the same words are spoken. Finally, Irving's satirical poem concludes this trilogy of reflections. This poem pushes schools of social work to hear alternative voices and to question the meaning of what constitutes evidence and one-best-way thinking. Together, these three contributions reinforce the importance of continual dialogue and diverse perspectives in educational institutions that prepare professional social workers to advocate for change.

We trust that you will find this issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights that will be useful to educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

References

Barczak, G., & Griffin, A. (2021). *How to conduct an effective peer review*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.

Robbins, S. P., Fogel, S. J., Bush-Armendariz, N., Wachter, K., McLaughlin, H., & Pomeroy, E. C. (2015). From the editor—writing a good peer review to improve scholarship: What editors value and authors find helpful. *Journal of Social Work Education, 51*(2), 199–206.

About the Authors: Darlyne Bailey, PhD, LISW is Editor-in-Chief, *Reflections*; Professor and Dean Emeritus and Director, Social Justice Initiative, Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, Bryn Mawr, PA (dbailey01@brynmawr.edu); Monica Leisey,

PhD is Associate Editor, *Reflections* and Associate Professor, Salem State University, School of Social Work, Salem, MA (mleisey@salemstate.edu); F. Ellen Netting, PhD is Associate Editor, *Reflections* and Professor Emerita, Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Social Work, Richmond, VA (enetting@vcu.edu); Kelly McNally Koney, MSSA is Assistant Editor, *Reflections* (kmkoney@msn.com).

With Gratitude...

We would like to recognize and thank the reviewers who contributed their time and invaluable assistance to *Reflections* V27(2):

Mari L. Alschuler, Monit Cheung, James Angelo Forte, Charles Garvin, Annette Grape, Stephen Granich, Geoffrey Leonard Greif, Mark Hager, Michele Hanna, Jenny L. Jones, Carol L. Langer, Lynn Levy, Sara Moore, Tawana Ford Sabbath, Cathryne L. Schmitz, Johanna Slivinske, Belinda Davis Smith, William Patrick Sullivan, Lara Vanderhoof, Bryan Warde, Jordan Wilfong

We deeply appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors.

Supporting *Reflections*

Ways to contribute to the publishing of *Reflections*:

- \$\$ (any amount) — FRIEND OF *REFLECTIONS*
- \$250 or more — FRIEND FOR LIFE
- \$1000 or more — A THOUSAND THANKS

Please visit: <https://www.csuohio.edu/class/reflections/friends-reflections>. Thank You!!