

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Preparing the Next Generation of Helping Professionals

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Abstract: We are excited to announce that our next publication will be the first in a series of Special Issues on Navigating Change. In this current Issue we highlight the important theme of preparing the next generation of helping professionals to be self-reflective, engage in reflexivity, learn to communicate well, and become effective supervisors and educators of the future. Eleven articles are highlighted in which authors' personal and professional experiences reinforce a deep commitment to learning from others, so that expectations, boundaries, and interventions are available to light the way in uncertain and often challenging settings. In so doing, we aim to assist helping professionals to do their best work and to support one another in the process.

Keywords: self-reflection, reflexivity, positionality, trauma-informed practice

We're Excited About Upcoming Special Issues

Last year *Reflections* released a call for a Special Issue entitled "Navigating Change: Reflective Insights for Helping Professionals in Shifting Political Landscapes." Guest Editors **Kenya C. Jones** (Clark Atlanta University), **Anthony T. Estreet** (National Association of Social Workers), and **James T. Freeman** (Johnson C. Smith University) have been busy ushering a very large number of submissions through the review process. We are pleased to tell you that the first of three Special Issues will be published this summer, and we want to thank Guest Editors Jones, Estreet, and Freeman for their hard work in making these Issues a reality.

As a preview, authors responding to "Navigating Change" will highlight how helping professionals have applied their competencies to adapt, advocate, and intervene in response to evolving political challenges. From racial justice and police reform to voting rights and civic engagement, our Guest Editors seek to provide a framework to focus on promoting meaningful dialogue as helping professions address contemporary political issues that affect diverse communities and to examine how both frontline responders and change agents navigate political challenges while remaining passionately committed to social justice.

As always, we are delighted to have **Cathy McElderry** as Section Editor for Teaching and Learning, **Pat Gray** and **Anh Ngo** as Co-Editors of our Practice Section, **Brie Radis** as Section Editor of Practicum Education, and **Tiffany Baffour** and **Kenya Jones** as Co-Editors of the Research Section. Our Section Editors volunteer their valuable time and expertise to the submission and review process. We are so grateful for their commitment and expertise. Thank you!!

We are delighted that Salem State University continues to be the Publisher of *Reflections* under the able leadership of **Beth Massaro**. **Jack Pincelli**, our Lead Copyeditor, continues to amaze us in his attention to detail and his creative thinking; **Kelcey Montimes**, our Salem State University Graduate Assistant, is adding to her education and providing much needed support to

our Copyediting and Publishing Teams; and we cannot say enough about **Justin Snow** whose expertise in e-scholarship contributes to the overall process of publication. Behind-the-scenes are hundreds of volunteers without whom *Reflections* would simply not exist. Those volunteers are our reviewers who are invited by our Section Editors to read manuscripts and provide feedback to authors. Their value cannot be overstated, and it is a joy for us to recognize the incredible gifts they bestow upon *Reflections*.

Preparing the Next Generation

In a recent Editorial Board meeting in which we were once again “checking in,” everyone began sharing the emotions evoked by personal, professional, organizational, and world-wide concerns impacting our lives. We found it a bit challenging to get to the business at hand because there were so many things happening in our respective lives and in the larger global community that required our attention. Since many of us are affiliated with universities, it reinforced how increasingly important it is “to create the space for academics to slow down the academic pace and dedicate time to turn the gaze upon [our]selves to enact academic reflexivity via dialogue with peers” (Daly & Larsen, 2026, p. 69). The opportunity to voice our concerns and reveal our vulnerabilities in places like the one we have co-created is critical to growth and understanding as educators of helping professionals.

As we prepared this editorial, we were touched by how authors in this Issue are sharing their innermost thoughts about how important it is to have instructors and supervisors skilled in preparing future practitioners and researchers for practicing and researching in sensitive and sometimes traumatic situations. There is a feeling of urgency in the articles you are about to read because the pace of our lives requires rapid response in a time when reflection and dialogue among colleagues become rare gifts. As an Editorial Team we marvel at how hard everyone works to make space for Zoom meetings across time zones and busy schedules. In short, we are not surprised that the narratives in this Issue reveal how challenging yet how essential it is to spend quality, reflective time with students, interns, colleagues, instructors, and supervisors.

So how do we prepare the next generation of helping professionals?

Just as AI is a rapidly growing tool that enhances our ability to access information and put larger amounts of data on speed dial, it is even more important to prepare the next generation of helping professionals to engage in reflexivity and critical thinking about their own positionality. Reflexivity in practice “examines the habitual ways of seeing the world and the norms of thought and behavior acquired from authoritative sources and taken for granted. It ... consists of a constant process of interrogation whereby we reconstruct shared meanings with others” (Gorli et al., 2015, p. 1351).

Daley and Laren (2026) invite us to consider those assumptions we take for granted and as instructors and supervisors to encourage others “to practice what we preach” (p. 70) by becoming more reflexive in our lives. Reflexivity is both a practice method (i.e., reflective practice) and a qualitative research method (e.g., autoethnography) that requires “a conscious

use of one's own self-awareness to shape meaning about others; it refers to the ways [helping professionals] are affected by their personal processes and emotions" (Herland, 2022, p. 665).

Practitioners and researchers in the helping professions are often encouraged to engage in reflexive journaling that documents their emotions and biases, to jot down notes, to keep audio diaries, and to document contextual information. The process of writing or recording helps to capture one's emotional responses and thoughts, as well as secure a trail of memories to which one can return. Narrative writing is considered a valuable tool to use in teaching students how to engage in critical reflexivity about racism (Yan et al., 2002), to focus on intergroup conflict and violence (Hagai & Bilali, 2025) and to deepen their scholarly writing beyond traditional attempts to sound objective in reporting research results (Morrow & Kettle, 2024). Helping professionals across roles and settings experience so much in their daily lives that capturing even a fragment of what they learn could fill the pages of *Reflections* over and over again.

Yet, even with the growth of qualitative research methods and the number of journals that publish qualitative research, narrative writing about "our own use of reflexivity as academic practitioners evokes a fear of 'who will publish it' given research criticisms of lack of generalizability and objectivity" (Akingbola & Blunt, 2023, p. 466). Another reason for hesitancy to share narrative writing and expressions of creativity in published work is fear in revealing one's own "experiences, vulnerabilities, and biases" (Karcher et al., 2024, p. 3). Published research articles can make it sound like each step led to another with a paragraph about limitations tacked on at the end, but there is less said about what didn't work and the missteps an author encountered in the process.

Narrative writing is not meant to be generalizable; authors do not have to apologize for being imperfect. In fact, authors reveal those very experiences, vulnerabilities, and biases that Karcher and colleagues (2024) identify because it is through reading about that learning process that the reader will learn as well.

There is never enough time to fully reflect in a world that is constantly changing and in which we are simultaneously bombarded from multiple devices with what is happening minute by minute. But that just makes it more imperative that helping professionals across roles and settings find ways to think deeply, to truly listen to others, to encourage the sharing of lived experiences, to get in touch with what it means to cultivate one's emotional wisdom.

Reflections offers a publishing platform for the reflexive helping professional in the community and in the classroom. We welcome as the narrator the author, the poet, the photographer, and the artist to critically reflect upon their personal and professional lives. We thank our authors who strive to examine their own deeply held assumptions and to use their insights to inspire others to discern and act on their values and learn from their interactions. We thank our authors for putting themselves "out there" by sharing their discomfort and vulnerabilities as well as their "aha" moments in the hope that others may learn from their stories. We look forward to hearing from readers, and we are deeply grateful to those of you who join us in valuing this Journal!!

Highlights of This Issue

In this Issue we are pleased to feature 11 articles that highlight the important theme of preparing the next generation of helping professionals to be self-reflective, engage in reflexivity, learn to communicate well, and become effective supervisors and educators of the future. Authors' personal and professional experiences reinforce a deep commitment to learning from others, so that expectations, boundaries, and interventions are available to light the way in uncertain and often challenging settings in which helping professionals strive to do their best work.

The first four articles reveal an array of experiences in which practitioners face traumatic situations. These authors reinforce how important supervisors are in creating a supportive culture. All four articles focus on very different population groups, but they are consistent in explaining how critical it is to have adequate training and supervision for helping professionals that face trauma in their work and personal lives.

Jackson-Nevels, Erickson, and Lewis take the reader into a Veterans Administration hospital in which students are assigned to patients in the Burn Unit and the Traumatic Brain Injury Unit. Given the potential for experiencing vicarious traumatization as students witness pain and suffering, the authors offer ways in which supervisors can support student resilience.

Dotson provides us with a very personal perspective about how paraprofessionals are often faced with challenging situations for which they may not be adequately prepared. This author focuses on how adequate training and supervision is absolutely critical in preparing for work with Black and Brown men who have sex with men (BMSM).

Wallace engages the reader in a narrative that reveals the conflicting views about whether it is appropriate to disclose one's traumatic experience in childhood. Suggesting educators and practicum instructors consider creating a culture of self-disclosure in professional education programs is combined with a very personal experience about when the author self-disclosed.

Jaffe provides a very different type of trauma intervention in describing being part of a Psychotrauma Unit's Animal-Assisted Crisis Response. Telling the story of a young mother's death and a police officer's emotional response, Jaffe reveals how the presence of a therapy dog became the support for the officers as they coped with a tragedy.

Although *Reflections* does not publish the results of research studies, we encourage authors to share what was learned about themselves and others in the process of conducting their research. The next four articles do a beautiful job of taking us into the reflexive process.

Myers' qualitative study focuses on communication between older Black women and their physicians, encounters too often fraught with systemic racism and lack of cultural competence. Citing the wisdom gained from narrative types of research, Myers brings forth the stories of participants who offer insight into how health care professionals need to hear the voices of their patients.

Valentich takes the reader into Canada, where she reflects on what becomes a case study of a friend's death through Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID). This in-depth analysis of the very human interpersonal realities, combined with the organizational and policy issues surrounding assisted dying, reveal the work that needs to be done in examining the many issues raised in the dying process.

Pope and Hossain's data come from in-depth interviews conducted as part of an oral history project in which auto-ethnographic writing assists in questioning dominant ways of thinking. Responding to incorporating greater reflexivity into aging studies, the authors are intentional in recognizing the differences in their own positionality as different cultures influence how they co-construct their assumptions.

Thurber reflects on an historical study of her great-grandfather, a controversial Rabbi in the 1940s. As a Jewish social worker in a time when there is a great deal of conflict in the world, Thurber takes us on a journey through the archives and how the process of doing this research influenced thinking about what it means to be Jewish and to more fully understand the contemporary world in light of one's own cultural history.

The last three articles in this Issue are written by authors whose personal experiences as students and educators reveal the need to reform social work education. Particularly in a time when diversity, equity, and inclusion are being scrubbed from curricula, these authors advocate for the importance of cultural competency in the educational process.

Gwynn writes from the perspective of a Black male in a social work doctoral program, asking that mentorship programs be available to first-generational Black men so that social isolation is addressed. Focusing on the challenges of having a double minority status requires intentional community support.

Park's article is revealing and humble in making a request from the readership for any suggestions readers can provide. Addressing a number of assumptions and expectations about students and their perspectives, Park reveals unexpected reactions and viewpoints encountered in teaching about racism.

Hamm writes about a journey into becoming an equity professional within higher education, explaining that social work as a career often leads to a number of potential experiences beyond the classroom. Committed to how the values of social work as a profession meld with the creation of diversity, equity and inclusion work, Hamm ends with a call for research in this area.

The articles in this Issue reveal the importance of self-reflection, reflexivity, and communication in the lives of students, practitioners, and service users across settings and around the world. We trust you will find this Issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights that will be useful to multiple professions, educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

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With Gratitude...

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We appreciate your commitment to *Reflections* and its authors!!