

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



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REFLECTIONS

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Letter from the Editor	Mary Ann Jimenez, Ph.D.	2
Reflecting on Forgiveness: Perspectives of Vietnam Veterans	Gary L. Villereal and John Dooley	4
You Can't Be a Good Enough Holocaust Researcher Unless You've Visited Auschwitz	Rachel Lev-Wiesel	12
The Culture of Gangs: A Transformation from Micro Intrapersonal Healing to Macro Social Action	Kristin M. Ferguson	20
A Life Fully Lived: A Narrative Interview with Social Group Worker Ruby Pernell	Janice Andrews	34
A Canadian Anti-Racist Social Work Course: Reflections on a Successful Teaching and Learning Experience	Rosemary Clews, with Renée Sharpe and Bill Toner	50
Coming home: An Israeli-American Kibbutznik Returns to the Galilee	Shoshana Shonfeld-Ringel	56
Sense-making	Paul Abels	62
Call for papers		49

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Mary Ann Jimenez, Ph.D.

How important is it to reflect on the past? Some narratives in this issue recount the authors' efforts to come to terms with painful, traumatic pasts. Others remind us that the past can be liberating, instructive and offer optimistic signposts for current struggles.

Historians mine the past for bits and pieces of human thought and experience to complete a narrative they are constructing in their own minds. Psychotherapists help their clients deconstruct unhelpful versions of their pasts with the hope of refashioning these personal narratives into ones more empowering and optimistic. "Coming to terms with the past," a common cliché, usually means forgetting about it. Yet recollections of things past have been the themes of history, much literature and the bedrock of religions that celebrate lives lived long ago.

Many surveys have suggested that Americans are little interested in their nation's history. Sometimes it seems that our own past, both personally and nationally, is less compelling than the pasts of other places: witness American tourists eagerly scanning the cityscapes of Florence and Rome, the landscapes of Egypt and Turkey, looking for evidence of cultures long buried. Yet few Americans have any interest in exploring the evidence of past events in our own history that have left somber reminders throughout our culture: the legacies of slavery and segregation, or

the removal of American Indian peoples and cultures from their homelands to arid reservations. Other examples of our more felicitous cultural history are barely preserved through dogged efforts of historical preservation societies.

The narratives in this issue serve substantial witness to the burden as well as the source of strength remembering can offer. When a life is woven through with bitter memories of essential experiences, the power of these recollections, whether shared or carried alone, can overwhelm. Gary Villereal and John Dooley's story of the need to first re-embrace, and then shake off the memories of Vietnam are similar to the impact that dark childhood experiences can have on many adults. Ignoring the early pain may not encourage the forgiveness of ourselves and others, that precedes any letting go of bitterness. Bitterness is the default position here; the freedom that comes from real forgiving is a stunning relief and may even be followed by love.

The optimism with which Ruby Pernell lived her experiences allowed her present to be fuller, as it merged with the accretions of her past. She was not hindered by either personal or cultural grievances. What separates a Ruby Pernell from others who use their pasts as a cudgel against the possibilities of the present? The answer to this question may yield fruitful insights for both practice and personal growth. Her

resilience and courage have inspired those who knew her and now through this issue of **Reflections**, she offers others the opportunity to understand how a positive force fashioned herself.

Rachel Lev-Weisel reminds us that life-shaping memories of terror experienced by parents affect children with no direct experience of past atrocities. Such children have double pasts to endure, and hopefully reshape, as they help their parents cope with their traumatic pasts. Victims of political torture, genocidal wars and other evils may find common ground with these adult children who carry their parents' burden at the same time as they try to lighten it.

Kristin Ferguson recounts her work with an adolescent struggling to contend with her own haunted past, peopled with friends who had died in violent homicides. She did not bury these memories, indeed she could not—they were too recent. Instead she confronted them in poetry, the words allowing her to feel in control of the pain accompanying these experiences.

In none of these cases did selective memory, forgetting some things and remembering others, accomplish freedom for those burdened with the sadness of the past. Instead, confronting the memories as valid representations of pain lived through was liberating. The past accompanies all our steps regardless of our attitude towards it. Our attitude towards it can make those steps considerably lighter.



REFLECTING ON FORGIVENESS: PERSPECTIVES OF VIETNAM VETERANS

By Gary L. Villereal, Ph.D., Assistant Dean, College of Health Science & Human Services,
Director-MSSW Program, University of Texas-Pan American Department of Social Work
and John Dooley, M.Ed., Re-Adjustment Counselor, Phoenix Vet Center, Phoenix, AZ

Two Vietnam Veterans, one a university professor and the other a counselor for the Vet Center, reflect on forgiveness with a group of other Vietnam Veterans that meet weekly to develop everyday coping skills to manage aftereffects of their military experiences specifically related to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth..

(Abraham. Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863)

Being part of a Vietnam Veteran's Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) group as a member and facilitator allows me often to receive more help than I give. As an example, forgive the enemy for having killed my friends, not likely now and not likely on my deathbed. Trying to imagine forgiving someone for hurting not only me but others seems unrealistic let alone something I want to do. John, a counselor at the Phoenix Vet Center, was not sure why I held such a strong feeling of importance in not forgiving this effect of war. He could understand not forgetting, but he was not clear as to why I held onto not forgiving.

John and I often had discussions that led to group topics, and this incident was not any different. I had read about a call for papers on the topic of "Forgiveness" and I mentioned to John that a group discussion among Vietnam Veterans would bring a different sense to the meaning of forgiveness. John instantly thought of the Gettysburg Address that is the lead-in for this article because the words spoken so long ago have not been the measure for honoring Vietnam Veterans. But John does honor Veterans in words not unlike Lincoln, "*I hold onto remembering those who served and died rather than to having to forgive for the consequences of war. The Vietnam War holds an important place in history for the country and for those that served.*" The Vet Centers are a direct result of the effects of combat PTSD and the Veterans Administration's efforts to provide services for those who have had to readjust their living and abilities to contend with PTSD. A primary focus of the majority



of Veterans is remembering those who lost their lives on the battlefield. So even today, Lincoln's words ring true for combat Veterans who died and for those who survived.

With such a difference in opinion on forgiving, John and I thought that getting others' opinions would help us out and would make a good group topic. We were not quite sure how to introduce the topic of forgiveness to the members of the weekly skills group, so John asked me to develop a couple of questions in areas that were unclear that would provide a forum to facilitate the group interaction. John agreed that he has observed both a difference and a similarity in how Veterans viewed the following questions but was not sure how the group would interact. The questions were:

- How do you think of the concept of *forgiveness* at this time in your life?
- How do you think of the concept of *forgiveness* when you think back to Vietnam?

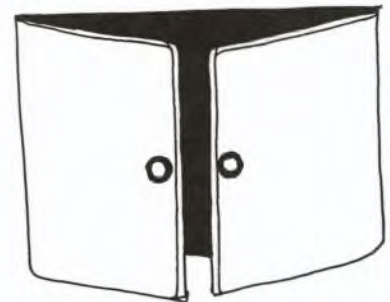
I began to reflect on how I would react to these questions and began to construct answers in anticipation of the group session. John was the primary facilitator of the group, and this paper could not have been developed without his assistance. John has provided services through the Vet Center since 1994. I began attending Vet Center groups in 1983 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and began facilitating groups in 1985. I began attending the groups in Phoenix in 1997, and I had developed a foundation of trust and commonality by the shared experience of having been in the military (5 Jun 68 to 12 Apr 70) and in Vietnam (2 May 69 to 12 Apr 70).

John began the group by introducing our shared interest in discussing forgiveness; I passed out the questions and allowed time for the group members to write out their answers and then to talk about what they wrote. John and I, as co-facilitators, participated fully in the group discussion, as it was an expectation that everyone was to participate and contribute to group activities.

John and I have learned to work as both

facilitators and participants when working with Veterans. This dual role initially appears to be boundary stretching, but the closeness that develops with the Veterans makes the modeling of group work more acceptable to the members. There is also more of a willingness to accept one of their own as a role model and someone to look to for advice and guidance.

This group of Veterans tended to be in an all or nothing conceptual frame, and this held somewhat true for their sense of forgiveness. As the narratives will demonstrate, veterans seem to exhibit either a total sense of forgiveness or a total inability to forgive. This was one dimension that John and I spoke of prior to the group interaction and it validated some of my own feelings. John and I both experienced at different times and in different situations a sense that there was little middle ground on this issue.



Reflecting on their Vietnam experience, these Veterans cited a link between maintaining their anger and honoring those who were killed. For example, how does one forgive enemies that killed a friend and still continue to honor that friend? As I reviewed my own thoughts, it became apparent that in order to get to a place of forgiveness, it was necessary to develop a sense of closure for an important life experience. Apparently, I had not brought closure to this issue myself. A group process is often a catalyst for one's own healing process and John did not disagree.

Group Discussion

The group discussion on forgiveness carried over to two distinct group sessions; 26 and 24 Veterans, respectively, shared

their thoughts, feelings, and concepts of forgiveness. Most of the veterans are Vietnam-era Veterans, either in combat or support roles, and a number have a PTSD diagnosis. The group is primarily a skills group that focuses on effective management of socialization skills necessary in daily living and in family interaction.

A number of related themes emerged not anticipated by either John or me, but even though there were different thoughts and feelings, the group members understood each other's sense of forgiveness. As interrelated as the thoughts may be, different specific experiences create the commonality that binds and connects veterans, and this was evident throughout the group discussion.

Examples of how the group members responded follow and how those responses affected me becomes evident. The first emerging concept related to forgiveness and a sense inner of peace. (Pseudonyms are used throughout this narrative to protect the identity of the participants). "*At this time in my life I feel forgiving is needed for my peace of mind,*" said Ted (a 50-year-old combat veteran who is a bit overweight). "*I believe one must learn to forgive if one ever wants to find a sense of peace in one's life. One must change what he can, accept what he can't, and pray for the wisdom to know the difference,*" said Bill (a mid 50's combat veteran who appears to do nothing physically, and who has been having continuous physical health-related problems). These statements may sound easy, but these Veterans have experienced one-on-one and group counseling from five to ten years. They personally attested to the difficulty of putting their words into practice.

I was then struck with an awakening realization when Bill stated that "*learning to forgive yourself for your own transgression [is necessary] before you can forgive others.*" Before I could even react to Bill, Henry (a 50-year-old combat veteran, is thin and more like an old man in his 70s) stated that "*forgiveness lightens my load, helps me to be forgiven.*" These comments reflected on John's continued efforts to provide group members with a perspective

of taking ownership for how one feels about himself and what I refer to as managing self-feelings. As I have attempted to come to terms with my own experiences, I have taken responsibility for my feelings and I have learned not to expect more of myself than I do of others. But what was becoming evident was this continuing element of not wanting to forgive: is it not to forgive the enemy, or not to forgive myself for my own actions in the war?

As I continued to think about what was just said, a change of direction occurred, which is not unusual in Veteran groups: "*I don't [forgive]- 'til I'm compensated for the incredible way that different U.S. Government agencies have treated society and me in a very discriminatory way,*" stated Andy (an early 50-ish combat veteran who always appears tense and responds often in an angry manner). Even though this was somewhat of a digression, it is a common and a strong feeling among many veterans. Chuck (a recovering alcoholic combat veteran who has been involved with the Vet Center for over a year and is no longer a regular attendee) countered with, "*You address the issue that causes the need for forgiveness with whatever measures you need to, to put it to rest in our own mind.*" He was trying to get the group back on track by getting others to own their feelings and to take measures that resolve issues. While this was going on, I was beginning to get a sense that much of what was coming up was directly related to my not wanting to forgive, and I was beginning to question myself as to what I was wanting to hold onto.

As I was thinking about my own issue, Vince (a heavy set, self-critical veteran) stated, "*I have no problem forgiving someone— more of a problem asking for forgiveness.*" John, reacting to this from our discussion before group that it is necessary to consider the cost for holding on to non-forgiveness, stated, "*If I don't forgive, I rent people space in my head. Life is too short to hold grudges. Why travel heavy when I can travel light?*" But I was not feeling any extra burden for holding onto my

non-forgiveness, nor had I just become comfortable with any sense of a weight. In a summarizing tone, Roger (a tall combat-wounded veteran who has been a long time group member) stated, *"Forgiveness has always been a very important part of my life. To not be able or willing to forgive is, probably, the single largest detriment to one's well being. There can be no healing or peace without the ability to forgive."* This statement reminded me of one of John's earlier comments to me before we began group: to decide to live with an unhealthy issue such as not forgiving to a point of comfort is possible, but what is the peripheral effect that may block other healing processes?

At this point in the group, I became aware of how this topic was generating thoughts and feelings that I had not looked at, and it felt similar to when I first got involved in veterans groups, around 1983. I was doing a lot of self-questioning and contemplating about how I was feeling. As I have often proclaimed, a good group process involves a lot of thinking outside of the group experiences, and I could tell that was going to be happening to me.



As the group members continued to discuss forgiveness, another theme emerged that involved the process of forgiving but not forgetting. This was directly related to how John felt about forgiveness and how he had mentioned the importance of learning from life events. John had stated before the group

session that it was not an issue of forgiving and forgetting, but one of forgiving and learning from the experience and remembering.

Ted was shaking his head back and forth as he stated *"It isn't easy to forget."* And Bill related, *"My concept of forgiveness at this time in my life is to suppress my anger."* Andy digressed by stating, *"I could forgive till I start thinking about how many times I have been denied [benefits]."* Roger got the group back on track with *"I can never forget, but I can and have to forgive."* This sense of importance in learning from what may have to be forgiven was an obvious step beyond what John and I had thought about. If one does not forget, then the lesson is learned. Just as if one forgets something that was forgiven, one might again fall into a similar situation and again have to forgive. This insight, growth, and wisdom clearly came from the ability to learn from past experiences. Forgetting an experience robs one of insight and learning that is necessary to deal with future similar situations. So here again I get directly faced with the juxtaposition of forgiveness and forgetting. I know I would not forget about those who died, but how had I gotten forgiveness so attached to forgetting?

Chuck tried to explain how he had difficulty with forgiving: *"Forgiveness to me is like having that something that came down not ok seem ok in my mind. I have to see this incident on two different planes to explain how I deal with an incident that triggers the need for forgiveness. It's like this physical plane/spiritual plane, my dealing with the incident. I feel that the incident took place on the physical plane and I have a responsibility to act on it to make it right and call the alleged offender on his, her, or their stuff. On the spiritual plane I turn it over to the spirits."* Not as entwined as I had forgiveness and forgetting, but a good example of how it is multi-dimensional and somewhat confusing. As I was beginning to feel more confused by my own realization of forgiveness and forgetting, the group took a change in

direction.

John and I had anticipated a more direct link of forgiveness to having survived a tour of duty in Vietnam. The group comments began to reflect on forgiveness and the process that is required in learning to manage PTSD. Chuck stated, *"Mostly, I forgive myself."* I instantly wondered if I had to also forgive myself since I had not thought of it; I knew right then and there that I had not done it. Bill offered his thoughts: *"In the heat of battle soldiers often act out of fear and/or revenge. I have to forgive the soldiers of all sides of all wars in order to forgive myself."* Just like that, another Veteran had found it necessary to forgive himself, but I had yet to forgive myself and I began to question myself as to whether it was something I needed to do.

"I have learned to forgive myself for surviving in Vietnam." I heard those words come from Henry before I could understand how I was feeling about having to face the thought of having to forgive myself for my actions in Vietnam, and now I was having to forgive myself for having survived Vietnam.

John, clearly in a different place than I was, stated, *"I forgive myself for times I screwed up there or was inadequate."* And Roger immediately stated, *"I have to think that if I were not able to forgive for what has happened to me, I could have no peace or contentment in my life."* I was beginning to feel overwhelmed by all of this self-forgiveness talk without being able to take a break to sort it all out. I just wanted to stop the process and get back to a sense of objectivity and controlled emotions. I had a feeling that I was no longer a facilitator or participant but a recipient of a verbal bombardment that was leaving me vulnerable to having to deal with a long held inner belief that I was not willing to forgive an enemy that had killed my friends. I was struggling with having to forgive myself before I could forgive the enemy, something at this time I knew I did not want to do.

I heard Ted's words, but I was no longer absorbing the meaning, as he said, *"As things happen during war times, they are never easy, but one must have forgiveness*

for others and that makes me feel like a better person." Later, as I thought about it, I had a sense of Ted's own self-appreciation to humanize all war actions.

Forgiveness was then dramatically linked to those who died or had been injured, and it became clear that this was the most difficult area for me to separate, forgive, and forget those who had died; it did not seem possible. John had a much better sense of understanding of this and did not find it difficult to separate. I have found this to be one of the most difficult concepts for me, and this seemed so for many other vets. It appeared in group, that there were those who could make that separation and those who could or would not make that separation. *"I forgive those who put me in harm's way. I forgive Jim Bowers for dying without saying 'goodbye.' I forgive those who avoided their responsibility to our nation"* (Chuck). *"I forgive my buddy for eating my favorite C-ration. I forgive my 60 [an M-60 machine gun] for screwing up. I forgive the mud and rain. I forgive not being able to save my dog"* (Steve, a thin, tough combat veteran relatively new to the Vet Center group). *"Until I went to the Wall [Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall, Washington, D.C.] and a Vietnamese lady stood up and forgave me for what I did to her and her country, I couldn't forgive my enemy or my country"* (Henry). John also offered that *"I forgive my country and leaders for sending me to war. I forgive people who taunted and victimized me. I forgive people who tried to kill me and killed my friends. I forgive people who don't understand or try to understand my issues."* And I was finally able to say that *"forgiving takes an inner strength that only comes from learning to honor and respect those who gave their all, but it does not come easy and I look forward to the time I can separate that forgiving does not mean forgetting."* As I spoke those words, it was evident that there were as many acknowledgements as there were disagreements. Most importantly, it was clear that in such groups there is not the need to agree because there is a real sense

of accepting another's opinion.

"When I returned to the World" [United States]," are words often spoken by all Vietnam Veterans at some time or another, to describe the feeling of having been somewhere indescribable and to express feelings of tension rather than feelings of really being home. John agreed with me that the whole experience of returning from Vietnam mixed up the traditional process previously experienced by returning Veterans. As the topic of returning to the *World* was brought up, anger surfaced and was integrated into the responses. "Back to Nam my area of anger, bitterness, and confusion comes to two areas that don't set ok in my head. One is the political treatment of the involvement; the second is the Country's treatment of the vet on the return. Neither of those was nor [is] ok with me and [they] motivate me to act in the area of calling the government on their bullshit. My main area of confusion is what happened after I came back in the country, bureaucratic abuses and being ostracized from lots of groups" (Chuck). "But I believe that leaders, both military and political, through the magnitude of their decisions must be held to a higher standard. If lust for power or accolades or greed was their motive, they cannot and should not be forgiven. Their fate is in the hands of the higher power" (Bill). "When you are knowledgeable - they [government] don't like it. [We are] treated unjustly for being right" (Andy). Because of these types of experiences, many Veterans originally denied or just did not talk about their Vietnam tour, which became a significant contributor in the development of PTSD.

This sense of anger was not a surprise to John or to me since we have both worked with Veterans for years, and have felt their anger. What was new was the linking of forgiveness to a sense of trust or lack of trust. "If forgiveness becomes a possibility, remorse on the part of the offender may be a prerequisite, and the U.S. government hasn't treated Vietnam Vets straight up yet" (Chuck). "In Vietnam and

Cambodia I learned not to forgive, only to retaliate. I think back, and the concept of forgiveness makes me laugh. You want forgiveness? Be my guest! And kiss my ass.... You want forgiveness, go to a church; you will not find [it] here" (Steve).

As I tried to understand all that had been said, I could hear my own inner voice attempting to find a way to settle and come to terms with what was clearly long-term duress. I remember John suggesting that by creating a different picture of past experiences one could alter one's perspective of an event. John has always presented a foundation whereby he honors negative past events and pays tribute to himself and others as a means of understanding and initiating forgiveness. This became evident as John said, "I count blessings more than curses. Enough suffering happens to comrades already; holding grudges discredits friends who died. I dedicate new peace to fallen Brothers." This same type of ability to forgive was expressed by some of the group members. "I travel lighter today because I have been forgiven and I have forgiven" (Henry). "I feel proud to be a Vietnam combat vet, the most exclusive group a citizen of this country can belong to" (Chuck).

This is not how I felt, nor how others in the group expressed their feelings. "Forgiveness is not an emotion I am familiar with, and is as foreign to me as China" (Steve). I could understand Steve's statement since I was still struggling with separating forgiveness from forgetting, or was I just not aware of what it was like to feel forgiveness? As I was thinking about this lack of sense of forgiveness, Vince supported my thoughts about lacking forgiving awareness: "Nothing to forgive. Nothing to ask forgiveness for. It was my job - it was their job."

As the group moved toward closure, it was clear that forgiveness is a *hot* topic for Veterans and that learning *how* to forgive motivates a number of present actions, but it is also necessary to become aware of just what forgiveness means. I thought of what

John said to the group: "I use energy to help those of us still here" rather than allowing the past experience to use up his energy by dwelling on why events occurred. In closing Henry added, "Forgiveness is a lifelong process" and each person deals with past events differently and at a different pace.

Conclusion

In putting this article together, I am struck by what I was thinking and feeling and the fact that the experience of the Vietnam War has continued to be a focal point for all who served as well as the families over what is now 25 to 30 years. Furthermore, the country continues to use the Vietnam War as a frame of reference for past and current war related actions. With the emergence of PTSD (APA, 1994) as a salient characteristic, the process by which Veterans view forgiveness in their present lives and in their Vietnam experience is unique but not well documented. Vet Centers have been a safe place, one I am glad I found, for many veterans and their families. Utilization of the Vet Centers has consistently increased since their inception and development in 1979 Vietnam Veterans Outreach Programs, Public Law 96-22 by the Veterans Administration. There are 260 Vet Centers, staffed mostly by clinically trained Vietnam Veterans, serving Veterans throughout the country.

This group of willing Vietnam Veterans taught me new things about myself and provided a wealth of insight. Several of the Veterans preferred not to be identified but verbally participated and echoed their own sense of forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness was tied to an inner sense of feeling at peace with oneself.
2. Forgiving does not mean forgetting someone who was killed in Vietnam.
3. Forgiving is a catalyst to change an existing perception of a past situation.
4. It may be necessary to forgive oneself for having survived a tour of duty in Vietnam.
5. There is an importance to forgiving

others who died or were injured in Vietnam.

6. Forgiveness relates to people who were unkind to Veterans when they returned to the *World* (United States) after their tour of duty.

7. Forgiveness can be linked to a sense of trust or not having trust.

8. Forgiveness can be a tribute or dedication to self and others as a means of understanding and accepting the Vietnam experience.

9. Many Veterans, including myself, struggle with the process of learning how to forgive.

10. Learning how to forgive can motivate present actions (such as dedication to serve and mentoring others).

As I reflected on the group process, I spoke with John and we both agreed that we had learned things about ourselves. Evidently, Veterans have had to make different adjustments that are not generally experienced by most people. The uniqueness of Veterans is how they express their feelings and thoughts about their experiences and how they make decisions. I have often felt looked upon as being different due to my Vietnam experiences. These experiences and resulting perceptions have set other Veterans and me apart from non-veterans while creating a connection or link to combat effects and our identity as Veterans.

Our uniqueness in being Vietnam Veterans relates to what appears to be a personalized relationship with Vietnam as an entity, something both John and I have talked about and have experienced. The military process of individualization of a tour of duty, often going to Vietnam alone and returning alone, contributed to a sense of isolation and a sense of being connected to Vietnam. This is similar to the feeling of coming of age in a war environment, which is well documented. This rapid and intense war experience created in me a sense of growing old before my developmental time. The early experiences of trauma in a specified and close time frame instilled a way of adapting and coping that is different from the ordinary conceptual process, as evident in how Veterans think

about forgiveness. This was true for me, and when I spoke to John about it, we agreed that it was evident throughout the two group experiences for other Vietnam Veterans.

This overall group experience provides some evidence that Veterans, including myself, have unresolved issues related to the concept of forgiveness. Veterans have had to write their own history in their minds, revisiting and learning to honor while coming to new perspectives on war and the quality of patriotism. This rich chapter in my life as a Vietnam Veteran, was one shared by many other veterans. Yet developing a heroic sense of my Vietnam experience was not supported by society when I returned to the United States. It is evident that I am not the only Vietnam Veteran who carries the war, as well as a myriad of issues related to my Vietnam experience, with me in my everyday thoughts and actions. The group discussion on forgiveness provides a glimpse of a Veteran's self-identity and the shared perceptions about forgiveness and how Veterans interact with each other. This glimpse into my life and the lives of these Veterans generated in John and me a need to revisit our own perceptions of forgiveness.

Writing this paper has caused me to think about how generations of societies have sent young men to war. I had just turned 20 when I left for Vietnam. Societies have seen men return, some of them with wounds, physical and psychological. With past wars, societies have endeavored to heal these wounds with parades, hospitals, ceremonies, counseling, and monuments, all missing with the Vietnam War. The environment created by society during the Vietnam War contributed to creating psychological wounds now being experienced by these once young men who went to war. The confusion I experienced, which is similar to that of other young men, lives on long after the wartime experiences. This paper focused on a group of men who went to war when they were young and who did not return in the same psychological condition. Some have visible combat physical wounds, but all have psychic wounds. The concept of psychological wounds and the process of healing must

include forgiveness.

I have had to face the fact that it is easy to think about an experience and to talk about the feelings of forgiving, but when that experience is connected to the loss and death of someone who touched my life profoundly, forgiveness is not so easy. To give forgiveness for such a loss is a contradiction of feelings that, in my mind, dishonors the fallen soldier.

I would like to conclude by saying that I learned from this group experience and that I can separate forgiveness from forgetting, but that is not the case. I can say that I have thought a lot about those group sessions during the writing of this article. I continue to struggle with the concept that if I forgive, I dishonor those who were killed. Or is it that I feel my forgiveness would indicate that they might have died in vain? I do know that this is an ongoing struggle that we Veterans must go through after surviving and experiencing war.

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YOU CAN'T BE A GOOD ENOUGH HOLOCAUST RESEARCHER UNLESS YOU'VE VISITED AUSCHWITZ

By Rachel Lev-Wiesel, Ph.D., Department of Social Work, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, Israel

Through a journey to Auschwitz with her mother, a Holocaust child survivor, the author came to understand the advantages gained from growing up in the role of a parental child. These advantages include the development of abilities and skills as a result of needing to cope with the aftereffects of the war trauma suffered by her parents. Becoming a therapist was the best way to deal with the secondary traumatization.

Clinical and empirical literature both document the far-reaching effects of the Holocaust on children of survivors. Although survivors' children have not directly experienced the Holocaust, numerous studies suggest that they often suffer secondary trauma as a result of their parents' experiences. These secondary effects include phobias, depression, recurrent imagery, pessimism, and other psychiatric symptomatology (Danieli, 1981; Epstein 1982; Prince, 1988; Sorscher & Cohen, 1995). Alongside evidence in this direction, other studies have highlighted the adaptive responses of survivors' children to their parents' trauma, such as increased creativity, altruism, and the ability to bond with a group.

I have often wondered, as a child of Holocaust survivors who were children during the war, why I myself do not suffer from secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Although I am aware that I functioned as a parental child, I seem not to have developed adverse symptoms.

Recently, I accompanied my mother on a trip to Auschwitz, where at the age of twelve she was separated from her parents. Her parents were sent to the German gas chambers and she remained in the concentration camp. This experience with my mother remembering her childhood, together with memories of my own childhood, brought me to the realization that being raised as a parental child not only might have served my parents' needs, but may have also acted to protect me from developing secondary traumatic stress symptoms.

As both a clinician and a researcher, my main professional focus is the long-term effects of Holocaust traumata on survivors and their children. In this paper, I suggest that there may be therapeutic elements inherent in the role of the parental child that prevent secondary traumatization in children of Holocaust survivors. I will present this idea through reflections on my own past and current memories of my relationship with my mother.

The Parent-Child Relationship in Holocaust Child Survivors' Families

Survivors who were children during the war were forced to endure formidable stress in the absence of adult coping resources. In essence, these survivors were compelled to function as adults while remaining in the bodies of children (Gampel, 1992; Tec, 1993). The memories of child survivors are usually laden with painful scenes involving separation from their parents; abandonment; becoming orphaned; undergoing extreme cold, starvation, and violence; and being physically restrained for long periods of time



(Kestenberg & Kestenberg, 1988; Krell, 1993; Lee, 1988; Moskowitz & Krell, 1990).

Studies examining PTSD symptoms and the adaptation strategies used by Holocaust child survivors suggest that most child survivors still suffer from symptoms of the "survivor syndrome" first coined by Niederland (1964). This syndrome comprises a combination of symptoms, which may differ across individuals. Frequent symptoms include difficulties in maintaining employment and relationships, problems facing new situations, guilt over having survived, bursts of anger, a low frustration threshold, feelings of helplessness, lack of initiative and interest in life, low self esteem, thoughts of being lost, anxiety attacks, and psychosomatic symptoms (Breiner, 1996; Krell, 1993; Kestenberg & Brenner, 1996; Mazor & Mendelson, 1998; Moskowitz & Krell, 1990; Robinson, Rapaport-Bar-Sever, & Rapaport, 1994) from both a personal and a familial perspective (Tauber & Van-Der-Hal, 1996), and a lifelong sense of bereavement (Mazor & Mendelson, 1998).

The effects of the Holocaust on subsequent parenting have been difficult to study because of the diversity of factors contributing to the way one raises children, as well as the broad spectrum of individual survival experiences. Yet according to Brenner (1996), it appears that child survivor parents tend to be very protective of their children in the sense that they attempt to shield them from their own war-related traumas. Frequently, survivor parents maintain the enforced silence regarding their experiences that enabled them to stay alive during the war (Krell, 1979; Titchener, 1967). Others try to spare their children the horrors they experienced by sharing only positive, happy memories (Bar-On, 1994). Despite these protective strategies, the spirit of the "untold stories" is usually transmitted to the second generation, creating an emotional distance between survivors and their children (Bar-On, 1994).

*My mother used to tell me
about her family life prior to the
war, before they arrived in*

*Auschwitz. I didn't want her to tell
me about the concentration camp.
Yet during the night, after my
parents had fallen asleep, I would
turn a flashlight on under my
blanket and read Holocaust
survivors' biographies - books I
borrowed from the public library
without my parents' knowledge.*

Numerous studies indicate that child survivors felt a great need to reclaim their lost childhood. The experience of having been abandoned by their parents is often relived and expressed in a fear of being abandoned by their own children (Kestenberg & Brenner, 1996). Neumann (1993) stated that many children of survivors were brought into the world in order to replace family members who perished, that is, to replace the missing relational objects (Bernstein, 1986). Hence, survivors' children often serve as the requisite compensatory symbol for all they have lost (Batit, 1999; Shafet, 1994).

Child survivors and their children frequently undergo family role reversals. When role reversal occurs, the child acts as the survivors' caretaker (Hass, 1995), attending to the parents' wishes, protecting them from everyday worries, and serving as a mediator between the survivors and the demands of the outside world (Rosenberger, 1973). The role of a parental child, or a child who is entrusted with taking care of his/her parents (Miller, 1992; Winnicot, 1960), appears to continue through adulthood (Batit, 1999).

*I was four years old when we
first traveled by bus to the nearest
city. My mother repeatedly said
that no matter what happened, I
should not let go of her hand.
She held my hand so tight that it
hurt. I was confused. She seemed
to be under great stress. I sensed
that it was not that she was afraid
of losing me, but that she might
get lost herself. She needed me to*

guard her.

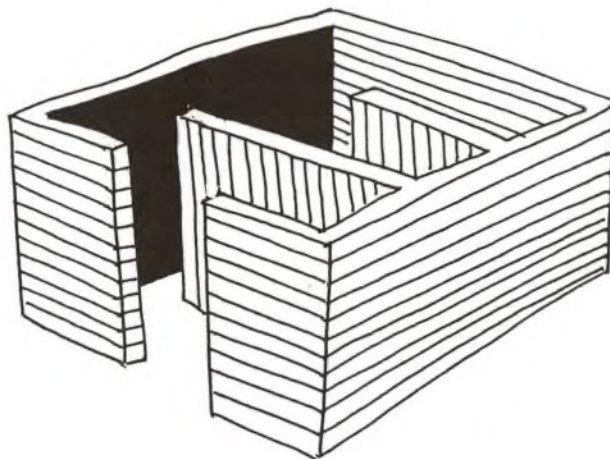
Research investigating the intergenerational transmission of the Holocaust traumata (Baranowsky, Young, Johnson-Gouglas, Williams-Keeler, & McCarrey, 1998; Brown, 1998; Danieli, 1981; Shafet, 1994) indicates that many children of Holocaust child survivors feel committed to protecting and bringing happiness into their parents' lives. This desire to help their parents often comes at the expense of their own needs and wishes. Children of Holocaust survivors frequently perceive their parents as excessively stressed and permanently traumatized by their losses. The children themselves often overly identify with their parents' trauma (Rowland-Klein & Dunlop, 1998). In consequence, many refrain from discussing their own emotional difficulties with their parents. For instance, many of these children never discussed the usual problems encountered in the course of growing up with their parents for fear of overburdening them (Hass, 1995). Rowland-Klein and Dunlop (1998), who examined the phenomenology of intergenerational transmission of trauma, suggested that these children's compliant and solicitous behavior is the result of parental projection of Holocaust-related feelings and anxieties on the child, and the subsequent introjection of these feeling by the child. The parents' expectation that the child be attentive to their suffering and needs frequently forces the child to adopt task-oriented coping strategies, and to employ defense mechanisms of emotional detachment (Rowland-Klein & Dunlop, 1998). These strategies have been found to be effective in coping with stressful life events by earlier researchers (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

My mother said she feared she would faint in a crowd. I imitate the responses of the crowd to such an event. I convince her she would be doing people a favor. At last they would have something to talk about. She should not withhold this joy from them. At a very

early age, I acquired techniques to relieve her depression and anxiety. I used to tease her, tell her funny stories, till she would almost cry from laughter.

The Role of the Parenting Child and Choice of Profession among Adult Children of Survivors

For survivors who were children during the war, childhood was a dangerous period. It was a time when they had no protection from evil, and found themselves in the position of the victim. Brenner (1996) maintains that when the offspring of child survivors reach the age at which they themselves were when they suffered, the survivors' anxiety and worry over their children's safety are intensified.



I would like to suggest that one outgrowth of this anxiety for their children may be a desire on the part of the parents to develop coping strategies in their children that will protect them from over-identification with their own suffering, and from internalization of their own traumatic stress symptoms. To achieve this end, many Holocaust survivors may have unconsciously directed their offspring into the role of the parental child.

When my mother decided she wanted to visit Auschwitz, the place where she had last seen her parents, she insisted that I be the only person to accompany her.

She rationalized this wish by saying it would be to my own benefit: "You can never be a good enough researcher [on the subject of Holocaust survivors] if you haven't actually visited Auschwitz," she said. "Moreover, I know you are strong enough and that it won't shake you." Unconsciously, she instructed me how to respond in this journey. She needed me as a therapist, a friend, and a mother substitute, but not as a daughter.

While this defensive caretaking pattern on the part of the survivors may have enabled their children to develop greater coping skills, the detachment mechanism may have detrimental effects. Research has shown, for instance, that children of survivors are less capable of intimacy with their spouses than their non-survivor counterparts. Survivor children's interactions with their spouses are characterized by a high level of concern and caring; however, this tends to be expressed through task-oriented coping strategies (Mazor & Tal, 1996; Baron, Reznikoff, & Glenwick, 1993) and a low capacity to deal with separation (Wardi, 1994). Nevertheless, the defensive caretaking patterns of the parents, which focus on their own needs, may assist their children as adults to ignore their own vulnerabilities, thus promoting self-sufficiency (Brown, 1998). It might be that the detachment mechanism takes another form among parental children.

Many children of survivors (about 75%) have chosen human service careers such as nursing, medicine, social work, and psychology (Wardi, 1994). Williams (1997) maintains that the gravitation of this population to the helping professions is a response to the inhumanity suffered by their parents and a wish to help other victims of injustice and oppression. Having served as their parents' caretakers, their sensitivity to others' suffering may have been intensified (Last & Klein, 1981).

Shafet (1994) suggested that since children of survivors could never fully

succeed in the role of protector to their parents, they developed a sense of failure about meeting their duty, as well as unresolved psychological conflicts. As a compensatory response, many of these children chose to become therapists, whose object was to heal other people's psychic wounds.

Becoming a professional caretaker may also be a product of the coping skills developed in childhood. The role of the therapist and the role of the parental child role are similar in some respects, although clearly the two roles pertain to different contexts and different developmental periods in the individual.

According to Fromm-Reichman (1960), and Minuchin and Fishman (1981), the role of the therapist includes the following components: (a) skill in controlling highly emotional situations; (b) being able to remain in the position of helper rather than the victim; (c) ability to become involved in a highly intimate but time-limited personal relationship; and (d) ability to focus on others' needs, listen truly, and contain others' feelings.

Hence, working in a human service profession as an adult may be a natural continuation of the earlier parental role enacted by the child. Furthermore, being in the position of the therapist may provide adult former parental children of child survivors a situation in which they can safely interact with another in an intimate but time-limited (which reduces the development of dependent feelings) and self-controlled relationship. In this relationship, they can help others to heal while remaining at an emotional distance.

The Crematorium

I am still unable to believe that I was in Auschwitz with my mother. I would never have gone there of my own accord. It scares me to just think of it. Although, as I mentioned earlier, most of my research and clinical work focuses on child Holocaust survivors, I had always avoided hearing my parents' Holocaust memories. It was too painful. Yet, I had felt obligated to accompany her on this journey. I prayed throughout

that I'd be able to endure it.

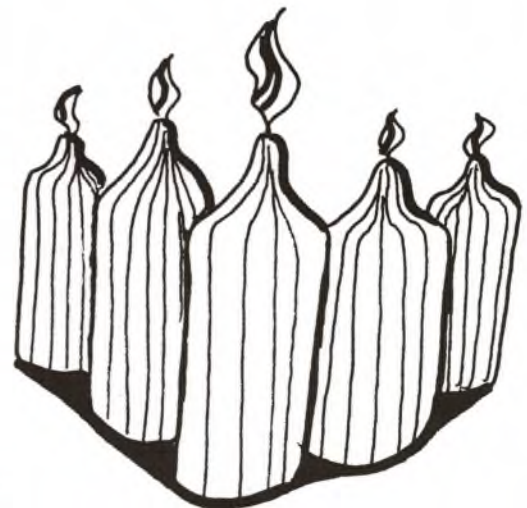
Standing beside my mother in the Crematorium, handing her the memorial candles... She cries as she lights them one by one, saying, "This is for mother, this is for father..." I repeat after her, holding back my tears: "This is for my grandmother, this is for my grandfather"... Twenty candles in all. The last one she lights for all the Jews who were murdered. She cries hard, collapsing onto the dark, sooty wall: "Why did you leave me alone, why didn't you take me with you? I want to be with you. You shouldn't have left me to suffer by myself... Please take me with you..."

I don't know how to respond. It is so difficult to hear my mother cry. She looks so little, as if she's become a girl again. She's forgotten about me - her own child. Part of me is terrified. She is giving me up. My heart longs towards her. How can I help her?

I try to cling to my professional role, asking myself what I should do. I hear a voice inside ordering me to stop thinking about myself and to subdue my anxiety. "I am not the victim here," I tell myself. "I should not be concentrating on my own feelings. This is not the right time to be egocentric. She is the victim. She is in pain. I am her support." I try to hug her. She rejects me, wanting to remain with her lost family. I do not give up, telling her that they can hear her cry. We walk outside, leaving the place as if we are in a hurry. Though we were inside only 15 minutes, it seemed like a lifetime to me. I think few people have visited Auschwitz for such a short time. On our way out, I see a huge box for visitors' contributions. I

loudly say that without the contribution of my family, they wouldn't have this tourist attraction.

I felt relieved that my mother did not want to visit Birkenau, where she was imprisoned after being separated from her parents. The Polish taxi driver suggested showing it to us at least through the car windows. We agreed. He was worried that he might not earn his pay because he didn't have to wait for us at Auschwitz. He didn't even have time to drink a cup of coffee in the restaurant there. Through the car window, my mother identified the confine where she was imprisoned and told me why the Germans spared her life. There was one German soldier who was attracted to her, she said. He started to touch and pet her. This was scary. He sent her to the "life" line. Later, she managed to hide from him with the help of older girls who adopted her as their little sister. They took care of her until the Russians came. I had to hide my tears, forcing myself to talk in a normal tone of voice. I was her therapist. I talked to her as if I was talking to a little girl who had just lost both her parents and her sense of trust. I reminded her of her grandson's words, spoken a day before she left for this journey. He had urged her to remember to come back to the family who loves her, whom he knows she loves too. She asked if I believe in reincarnation. I replied that I do, and that I believe her parents are living in the bodies of others who are close to her. I



reminded her how she always says that her grandson resembles her father both in character and appearance, and that he often says things similar to what her father used to say. She agrees with this, saying that these words of her grandson do remind of her father's last words in the train to Auschwitz: "Remember my child, that whatever happens, we will always be in your heart. We love you. I bless you..." I told her that it seems God did listen to her parents' blessing, and that she signifies their moral victory over the evil of the Germans. She gradually became calmer, saying she had to take this journey to see where her parents were murdered. She had to do this because she knew their last thoughts and concerns were for her well-being.

We took the train to Warsaw in order to catch the next flight back to Israel. It was on the train ride that my mother dared to talk to me in Hebrew in front of non-Jewish foreigners for the first time.

Discussion

I wonder, as I write, whether I am trying to highlight the benefits of becoming my mother's therapist in order to protect myself from the feeling of having been robbed of my own childhood. Am I deceiving myself with the argument that the role of the parental child was unconsciously imposed on me by my parents for my own sake? Am I trying to relieve feelings of anger toward them, which might in turn cause me to feel guilty?

As I doubt, I remember the work of studies indicating that Holocaust survivors perceive their children as being very precious, as a reincarnation of those who were murdered, as the ultimate defeat over the Nazis, and as a symbol of their survival (Danieli, 1981; Krell, 1979; Kestenberg & Brenner, 1996). According to Krell (1979), the fact that survivors shared their memories

of trial and hardship with their children frequently contributed to the development of the latter. Children of survivors often gain wisdom and strength from their parents' demonstration that against incredible odds, they were able to adjust to a new life in a new place and succeed in living fully again.

It is my view that many Holocaust survivors may have made an effort (unconscious or otherwise) to prevent their children from internalizing the long-term psychological effects of their own trauma. This may have taken the form of passing on a defense mechanism of detachment to their children. This defense mechanism may enable the children to keep a certain distance from the pain on the one hand, yet maintain a close relationship with their parents on the other. In families in which togetherness is highly regarded, the best way to achieve this may be through the expectation that the child be mature, independent, and protective—in essence, a parental child.

I can still hardly believe I actually visited Auschwitz. A voice inside me keeps repeating, "Don't worry, you were not there at all. There is no need to be anxious." Although at a cognitive level I know I was there, emotionally, I feel detached. I do pay more attention to my mother's moods, thoughts, nightmares, and reactions to the visit. I try to help her utilize them productively.

In my opinion, the family role of children of survivors may be an active one which centers on taking care of their parents, rather than a passive one centering on their functioning as "memorial candles" to lost love objects as suggested by Wardi (1994). I would like to conclude by proposing that this active role frequently requires the development of therapeutic techniques and coping skills on the part of these children.

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THE CULTURE OF GANGS: A TRANSFORMATION FROM MICRO INTRAPERSONAL HEALING TO MACRO SOCIAL ACTION

By Kristin M. Ferguson, M.S.W.

This narrative describes the events which contributed to the transformation of both a client—from a rebellious, defiant youth to becoming an empowered, socially active youth advocate—and a therapist—from an insecure and judgmental clinician to adopting the role of student of her client J.J.¹ Working as a social worker with urban gang youth over a period of nine months, the author applied techniques from cognitive-behavioral therapy and the empowerment practice model to develop a treatment framework. She discusses the therapeutic process in sequential order, interweaving J.J.'s personal narratives and responses with interpretations of their contextual meanings.

In June of 1997, I found myself sitting face to face with J.J., a fifteen-year-old, White, bilingual female, who had referred herself to my agency after admission to a local hospital for a suicide attempt. In my hand, I held her blank chart and in my heart were pangs of incompetence and a deep confusion at her "self-referred" status. Judging from her blank stares, nonverbal body language, occasional head-nods, and monosyllabic responses, one might assume that she was under medical or psychiatric order to receive treatment. The air was thick with mutual expectations, my fears of countertransference as I recalled my own rebellious youth days, and my personal insecurities in working with gang youth, a population I had yet to encounter in a professional setting.

My initial individual treatment sessions with J.J. were silent, linear battles in which my strings of questions lingered heavily in the air. I recall waiting anxiously for her answers; however, I often settled for a slight head-nod or a blank stare. I continued to propose new questions—aimed at acquiring the same information that she was so intent upon guarding—yet it seemed that my questions often descended into the deep linguistic and cultural abyss that separated us both personally and professionally.

As a resident of an urban neighborhood from 1996 to 1998 that received extensive

national publicity from the media and filmmakers, as well as increased funding at the state level to combat urban gangs, I was used to the metaphorical association of my neighborhood with gangs. However, the press, the stereotypes, and my education did little to prepare me for working in a professional treatment setting with active and marginal gang members and their families, with ex-gang members seeking social and economic reinsertion, and with victims of gang violence and their grieving loved ones.

Over the course of nine months from 1997 to 1998, I was working as a bilingual clinical social worker with the Hispanic Behavioral Health Program, a subdivision of an urban community mental health agency located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood, created to administer culturally and linguistically sensitive mental and physical health services to the surrounding Latino community. This case study illustrates the intricate relationships among gang members and their surrounding familial, community, and societal systems.

In response to J.J.'s initial treatment goals - elimination of suicidal ideation and reduction of depressive episodes - I utilized cognitive-behavioral therapy and the empowerment practice model, each with their respective intervention techniques, throughout the course of treatment. As individual treatment progressed and J.J. began to

express an interest in applying her own skills on a community level, I combined several techniques from the empowerment practice model to increase power and voice for J.J. and other gang youth within their surrounding community system. The synthesis of these two conceptual models not only influenced J.J. on an individual level, providing her with the intrapersonal skills and tools to challenge some of the surrounding societal systems, but also impacted her urban community at large. Through consciousness-raising and capacity-building strategies, J.J. joined with other urban youth and succeeded in identifying positive, marketable attributes of gang youth. She then channeled these qualities into a community-based initiative to increase opportunities for the insertion of gang youth into the dominant culture's economic sector as well as to encourage their overall social inclusion.

Surrogate Family, Support Systems, and Social Structures: Gangs Fulfilling Personal, Familial, Academic, and Social Voids for Youth

The gang subculture is largely an urban phenomenon that is often characterized as a social group that shares common values, standards of behavior, and attitudes that are typically different from those of the larger society (Scheidlinger, 1994). J.J.'s experience was no different. In her city, gang membership crossed all ethnic, generational, and class boundaries and invited many poor, lonely, marginalized, social outcasts as well as immigrant youth to consider gangs as a surrogate family and a place to fit in for the first time in a social group. The expanding gang subculture in this porous urban setting began to permeate the intrinsic social norms of the dominant culture, especially with respect to youth, who, regardless of gang membership, were choosing to dress in gang colors, listen to gang music, decorate their bodies with tattooed gang graffiti, and practice to perfection gang hand signals. During the two-year period in which I resided in a community within this city, I witnessed youth gangs spreading rapidly to many smaller communities and suburban

sections bordering the city as well as making their way into elementary and middle schools and community recreation centers.



I was familiar with gang-related literature that provides insight into the motivating factors behind society's youth seeking the comfort, protection, and refuge that street gangs offer to them, instead of acculturating to the norms and values of the dominant culture. For instance, due to feelings of alienation from school and other school-related activities, compounded with poor educational systems and limited job opportunities characteristic of numerous inner cities, some youth seek out gangs as an alternative to attending school (Curry & Spergel, 1992). In addition, many inner-city youth who are involved in gangs come from families burdened by economic, psychological, and cultural conflicts. As a result of growing up in disorganized family environments, many urban youth turn to gangs as a surrogate family to satisfy their basic needs, needs that immediate families, communities, and society at large have been unable to fulfill (Belitz & Valdez, 1994). To these youth, gangs may offer affection, understanding, loyalty, status, a sense of belonging, and emotional and physical protection (Clark, 1992). J.J.'s motives were consistent with these viewpoints. With an absent mother battling a history of cocaine addiction and a father incarcerated since J.J.'s birth, she was drawn to the company and security of an urban youth gang by age twelve.

**“Just Like This One”:
Creative Initial Contracting**
After two sessions of J.J.'s tile counting

on the floor of my office and head-nods to my questions from the psychosocial history intake form, I realized the significance of initial contracting. At the end of the second session, I asked J.J. to exchange chairs - and roles - with me: "We don't seem to be connecting. Maybe you'd like to be the therapist for a while so that I can learn from you how I should be acting, you know, the kinds of questions I should be asking." J.J. looked up at me with an incredulous expression and offered a quick smile. If nothing else, I thought, I have sparked her interest. Taking the lead, I initiated the first movement. I stood up and offered her my chair, which she accepted, and I took a seat in the chair she had occupied. J.J.'s next move confirmed to me that she was enjoying her newly assigned role: she sat down and began to spin around several times in the cushioned, swivel chair with a broad grin, which I interpreted as an invitation to continue with the improvised role play.



I proceeded to act out for J.J. the behavior I had observed during the present and previous sessions. I crossed my arms, maintained a general frown and focused my gaze on the floor, occasionally glancing out the office window, at the clock on the wall, and at the door, yet avoiding all eye contact with J.J. I noticed that she had stopped spinning to observe my actions; she was smiling. "How would you feel if you had to spend an hour a week with me as your client?" I asked her. She laughed but didn't answer. "What would you say to me as my therapist?" "I'd probably ask why you don't

like coming to therapy," J.J. responded. I felt that J.J.'s initial hesitation to establish rapport arose due to the considerable amount of control that she experienced outside the confines of my office, which she was fearful of losing, or giving up, during our sessions. Hence, I continued with "I don't like coming to therapy because I don't like anyone bossing me around or telling me what to do." She listened. I then asked her, "Could that maybe be why you don't seem so happy to be here?" J.J. responded, "Maybe . . . Yeah." "You know," I said, "I don't think I would like anyone telling me what to do with my life either. The idea here is to work together to sort out some of the things in your life that are bothering you and to try to find solutions to them. And there are areas where I'll need a lot of your help, like in getting to know you better."

With J.J.'s need for control in mind, I proposed she remain in the therapist chair and role and offer her rules for our sessions, including acceptable language, themes of discussion, and frequency and duration of meetings. "How do you think our sessions should be run?" I asked. "Just like this one," she answered with a wide grin, turning from side to side in her swivel chair.

Through performing a dramatic version of a reverse role play—reinforced by J.J.'s smiles and laughter—I gleaned insight into some of J.J.'s initial fears, relinquishing her control and precipitately discussing painful themes, which were hindering my initial attempts at establishing rapport. Recognizing that establishing rapport with J.J. was paramount to effective intervention with gang members, I weaved this essential element into our therapeutic relationship and aimed to assist her in maintaining and strengthening that which she was most adamant about renouncing during the course of treatment: her control.

"They're the Only Real Family I've Got": J.J. Recounts her Story

After entering J.J.'s circle of confidence, I set out to encourage her to share her pressing concerns. "What made you decide to refer yourself for therapy?" I asked her.

"I don't know. My family . . . my friends . . . they were worried about me." My educational background in systems theory as well as supervision by the director of the Adolescent Department, who was also faithful to the systems model, prompted me to target my first questions around J.J. in the context of her surrounding "groups."

I asked J.J. to tell me about her family. "Which mom should I tell you about," J.J. inquired, "the one that had me or the ones that raised me?" "Which one do you want to tell me about?" I asked her. "My real mom," she began, "is more like my friend, well, now at least. But I never really had a mom growing up." J.J. was the only child of Ms. R., a single, low-income, working-class parent balancing two jobs and weekly outpatient cocaine treatment group meetings. She was a recovering cocaine addict who had been clean and stable for the three years prior to J.J.'s suicide attempt. During this three-year period, the local Department of Social Services had returned full legal custody of her daughter to Ms. R., contingent upon her assistance and treatment progress in a court-ordered, cocaine rehabilitation outpatient program.

While I listened to J.J. discuss the extent of her relationship with her biological mother over the previous three years, I recognized the prolonged physical and emotional absence of her mother during the first fifteen years of J.J.'s life and wondered who or what other system(s) had been filling this void. I felt perplexed and frustrated with the systems model and questioned the fundamental value of incorporating Ms. R. fully into her daughter's treatment plan when, in reality, J.J. did not view her biological mother in that role. As I grappled with a definition of "family" within which J.J. operated, I began to contemplate the ability of parallel, non-biological, familial systems to adequately compensate for the biological family when the latter appears dysfunctional or, in J.J.'s case, severely limited.

"Tell me about the moms that raised you," I asked during one session. J.J. spoke indifferently of the multiple, biological, extended family members, who shared the

collective familial responsibility of providing for her basic needs in her mother's frequent and often extended spurts of absence from her birth to age twelve. "My mom always dropped me off at my aunts' or her friends' houses; sometimes I didn't even know them." J.J. commented. "It just depended on which city we were living in at the time and who she knew there. What I most remember is being dropped off at a new address and my mom would say, 'I'm going out for a while.'" J.J. paused and laughed, "Yeah and sometimes she was gone for months." She added, "Sometimes I wondered if my mom would ever come back." Then, when J.J. was eleven, her most memorable childhood fear was confirmed. "My mom dropped me off at my aunt's house for a 'visit' and never came back for me. For the next three years, my aunt had legal custody of me. The only thing that I can thank her for is the house on the streets where I met my gang."

"What about your dad, J.J.? Where was he during your childhood?" I asked. She



laughed, "Oh, I can sum up our relationship in three words." "What are they?" I eagerly inquired. "Don't know 'im," she responded. J.J. added, "My dad has been in jail for selling crack since I was born." "How did that make you feel," I asked, "growing up without a father?" "I never really felt sad because my gang was the one family that always stuck with me no matter what. Actually, I was kind of lucky," she revealed, "because there were always guys in my gang that looked out for me like a dad."

In my efforts to have J.J. define her family according to the systems perspective, I had ignored a broader definition of family and thus failed to recognize that J.J. was a

product not only of her biological family's formation but also of her gang family. I had myopically concentrated my initial questions relating to "family" around biological "mother" and "father," and therefore received a narrow definition of the principal familial influences in her childhood and adolescence. At that point in our therapeutic relationship, I recognized the need for a new tactic in acquiring information about J.J.'s unique family structure and social support system. Recalling the improvised role play that had set the stage for establishing rapport, in which J.J. was in charge of defining key terms in our relationship, I settled for an approach that encouraged her to define the concept of "family." A crucial turning point in the information-gathering phase of our relationship occurred when I directly asked her, "J.J., to you, who is your real family?" My inquiry, however, was not novel to J.J., yet rather something that she had thoroughly conceptualized. With a new liveliness in her tone and manner, not yet seen in the treatment process, J.J. responded, "My family for me has always been my gang. They're the only real family I've got."

Competing Values: Part I

J.J. was the product of an array of multiple group memberships. I considered the interaction of these groups in J.J.'s life and their possible influences in the formation of her value system and cultural and spiritual beliefs as well as recognized their potential to trigger intrapersonal value and cultural conflicts for J.J. Thus, during the third month of therapy, I focused one session on identifying similarities and differences among individual, familial, and peer value systems. After compiling a list of her own values, those of her mother, and those that she considered her peer gang members held, J.J. remarked, "I relate more to the values from my gang than to the values of my mom and my teachers. My mom always says, 'J.J., you have to be independent,' or 'You have to think more about yourself.' And my teachers say things like, 'J.J., think about your future.'" However, according to J.J., the value

system shared by her mother and teachers was in direct conflict with her own beliefs. "In my gang we think about and protect each other first." She added, "It's pretty easy for people with money to think about their futures but for us down here, we have to think about survival."

As it turns out, my approach, aimed to help J.J. identify and evaluate her personal values, shed light upon my own values as well, and the potential conflicts that could arise due to our competing values. As J.J. began to explore the origins of her own value system, I realized that I, too, shared many of the values held by society at large and pondered how this would influence my interventions. My past experiences had taught me that as practitioners, we must sort out and assess our own value systems prior to assisting clients in analyzing their own. I feel that this value assessment activity had a dual impact on our relationship. With respect to J.J., she was beginning to understand how she had adopted certain values and how these beliefs influenced her thoughts, feelings, and actions. On the other hand, through sensitizing myself to my personal values (namely individualism, independence, and strict adherence to the work ethic to create future opportunities), I was able to view J.J. and her actions in the context of her own belief system as separate from my own. I saw her not as a rebellious youth, deviating from the dominant society's value system, but rather as a product of a parallel value system, shaped by the different environments and multiple group memberships within which she operated, just as my personal association with multiple groups had influenced and shaped my own values.

I also recognized that as a result of her gang membership, J.J. had acquired certain cultural values that served as protective factors for her during her childhood as well as while I worked with her in treatment. For example, during one individual session, J.J. attributed being alive at the time to the belief in interdependence and collectivism shared by her gang. "My gang is the reason why I'm still alive today," J.J. commented. "They have always looked out for me when I was

down and protected me when I was pegged." She elaborated on this worldview, stating that "life is like a cycle; you look out for and protect your friends and they do the same for you." According to J.J., "being covered" had helped her cope in times of adversity, stress, separation, and loss of loved ones. Through her stories, I sensed that in J.J.'s most intimately trying times, her gang had been the social and familial pillars that had supported her through her distress.

J.J. illustrated an additional cultural value that she attributed to her gang membership through the following anecdote: "One day I remember waking up tired from crying so much for everyone that I'd lost . . . people I knew that had died." She added that her gang helped her to realize that she had to stop grieving the multiple losses she had encountered in her life and move on, as well as to stop blaming herself for not having done something to prevent these losses. "They helped me see that I have to live for today," J.J. remarked. "They said I should live in the moment or I'd go crazy." As a result, J.J. tried to stay focused on the present and how she could lead the best possible life based on her surrounding circumstances. Her reflection shed light for me upon a common theme that many of J.J.'s stories shared: the loss of loved ones, whether physically, through death, or emotionally, through her family's history of drug abuse and incarceration. I discovered the importance of another cultural value, the ability to stay present oriented, in contributing to her resilient nature amidst the chaos of street life.

Spirituality constituted another cultural value that J.J. felt she had acquired from her gang membership. "I think I'm a pretty spiritual person," she remarked. "For me it's more than just believing in God or going to church. It's knowing that you can count on someone, that they'll be there for you. J.J. disclosed that she was raised as a Catholic, although she stated, "My mom's an atheist because she thinks that there can't possibly be a God with so many people suffering in the world." J.J., in effect, credited her gang, composed predominantly of Mexicans, for

instilling in her Catholic spiritual beliefs. During one treatment session, J.J. shared with me that she had become pregnant during the previous year. "My mom said I had to have an abortion because I was too young to be a mother and couldn't give anything to a child." J.J., however, adhered to her pro-life beliefs and organized a potential support system for her and her child, relying primarily on her gang, who offered to assist her with the child-rearing responsibilities. "They all told me to have it," she revealed. "They said that they would all take turns watching him so I could work and go to school." (Six months into her pregnancy, however, J.J. had a miscarriage and thus never succeeded in putting her plan into effect.)

I was surprised by, and a little envious of, J.J.'s ability to elaborate a working definition of spirituality, a value that she largely attributed to her gang membership. Also, as I had no prior experience with gang teens regarding their spiritual beliefs, I did not anticipate the need to take this component into consideration nor the importance of operationalizing her definition — "It's knowing that you can count on someone, that they'll be there for you" — when choosing appropriate intervention strategies.

Related to J.J.'s views about spirituality were her attitudes toward health services as well as help-seeking behavior. She grew up without access to health care due to the unavailability of adequate medical care for uninsured youth in the inner city. "One time when I was little," J.J. recalled, "my uncle had to set my broken finger with Popsicle sticks and wrapped it with tape because there was no money for the doctor." J.J. remembered as well that "I started using different herbal medicines that my gang would give me instead of going to the doctor." She joked, "I would consult with a *curandero* in the community before standing in line at the health clinic if I were real sick. At least a *curandero* wouldn't care whether or not I had insurance!"

As a result of the stories that she told, I sensed I was on the road to achieving a more holistic understanding of J.J. — her

childhood, her acquired value system, her formal and informal supports, and the protective factors which had, until that point, functioned effectively in her life. Growing up myself amidst privilege in a two-parent family with economic stability, educational opportunities, and health insurance, I was oblivious to the alternate networks of formal and informal support systems that J.J. had utilized in her life. With her as my guide, I began to peel away the layers of my own belief system, feeling progressively more comfortable with our conflicting value systems. Eventually, I was able to recognize both J.J. and myself as that which we were in reality: people shaped by our own values and experiences.

Competing Values: Part II

Having acquired much of her personal value system from her gang membership, J.J. encountered several interpersonal and societal conflicts with surrounding systems. According to J.J., "Many people often don't act but have to react to all of the madness that goes on around them." Conversely, industrial societies tend to hold the belief that individuals are both in control of their own actions as well as responsible for their actions: moralism (Tropman, 1989). J.J. recalled a particular instance, stating: "One time we were all standing on the corner on a street near my house and these pigs come up and tell us to leave, that we can't even stand on a sidewalk. I hate it. We aren't even doing anything and the cops have already written us off. It's not fair. I've seen pigs take guys away just for their colors."

I was familiar with similar complaints by youth in my neighborhood and sensed that J.J., too, was frustrated by the hostile attitude of law enforcement officers towards inner-city youth. In J.J.'s case, her transient childhood and a life on the streets had taught her as well that there are many outside factors, oppressive conditions placed upon youth by outside systems, that can influence and affect a person and his or her actions. Society's adherence to moralism, on the other hand, could potentially categorize her as a rebellious youth, and as J.J. referred to

it, "accuse us before we've even committed a crime." I believe J.J. felt a sense of powerlessness when interacting with some authority systems. I also entertained the thought that often times her actions were reactions to the surrounding oppressive conditions or societal ignorance about and fear of urban gang youth at the community level. The presence of biases regarding urban gang youth could have contributed to institutionalized prejudice and discrimination, two themes that surfaced in many of J.J.'s complaints regarding treatment of urban youth by authority.

Additionally, J.J. felt that there was an overall negative stereotype about youth and gangs that permeated the educational system. "One year at school," she disclosed, "I had a friend who banged so much in class that the teachers just wrote him off. They kept passing him up all these grades so they wouldn't have to have him again the next year. He was older than me and didn't even know how to read. They didn't care, though. I think they just wanted to get rid of him." I sensed that this indifference towards gang youth within the school system disillusioned J.J. as well, reinforcing her views that some authority figures pre-judge many urban youth and categorize them as deviants, without taking the time to confirm the validity of their assumptions.

As a therapist with a commitment to social equity and full inclusion of all youth in society, I felt my principal role during this phase of J.J.'s angry venting and confusion was to empathetically reflect her thoughts and feelings back to her, while sharing my own feelings as to the personal and collective damage caused by social injustices, stereotypes, ignorance, and fear. I aimed to externalize these unfortunate situations and reframe them as ordinary occurrences when two or more cultures with conflicting value systems reside in the same physical space; no one culture is either right or wrong, or better or worse, yet simply different. My confirmation seemed to encourage her to continue along with her treatment goals and not deter in the face of social adversity.

On a personal level, J.J. served as a

catalyst for me to reflect upon the social injustices in her community, which was also my community. Living in the community where I was practicing helped me to identify more intimately with J.J.'s worldview. Yet I recognized that mere reflection would not change the present conditions around us. Rather, active participation in challenging the dominant system's views regarding gang youth and commitment to helping them to develop personal resources were needed to increase power for these inner city youth. I sensed an opportunity, both as a community resident and as a social worker, to empower local youth to become protagonists in creating their futures, not reactionists in dealing with surrounding conditions. I began to entertain broader macro interventions that would give youth a voice as well as the interpersonal skills and tools to open doors to their social inclusion. However, acknowledging the need to work according to J.J.'s pace and agenda, I mentally filed her vented injustices along with my own ideas, hoping to later readdress them with a commitment to social action once J.J. was ready.

The Back-Seat Approach: Increasing Mutual Comfort Level with Dimensions of Difference on the Road to Achieving Treatment Goals

With respect to the multiple dimensions of difference in personal values and cultural beliefs that existed between J.J. and myself, I felt that we were different on more realms than we were similar. We came from distinct geographical backgrounds and upbringings with different family structures and family norms; we held vastly diverse value systems and cultural practices; and we differed in age, socioeconomic status, and life experiences. However, the essence of what we did share was the commitment towards accomplishing J.J.'s treatment goals: eliminating suicidal ideation and understanding her depression to be able to identify its symptoms and decrease their negative effects on her life. To set these goals, I encouraged J.J. to define her own belief system, to determine which cultural values she considered were most influential in her life, to utilize the

language with which she was most comfortable, and to identify the pressing concerns on which she wanted to focus (Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999). In other words, I invited J.J. to create the lens through which we would view her treatment process. It was taking the back seat and allowing J.J. to drive the car that not only guided me in choosing appropriate treatment interventions but also created opportunity for my own personal and professional development.

Growth for me, as a practitioner as well as a person, occurred when I found myself feeling comfortable with the ambiguity and difference between the two cultures that surrounded me. I remember during the initial sessions pondering how I could possibly relate to some of J.J.'s experiences, judging from the magnitude of our differences and our initial language barrier. In my attempts to share and renegotiate the power within our working relationship, I was forced to acknowledge and evaluate my own professional and personal limitations. By assuming the role of "served/student" (MacNeil & Krensky, 1996), I encouraged J.J. to guide me through her world, exploring her culture and beliefs and using her vocabulary. This was a difficult yet powerful experience for me as I began to question, challenge, and reevaluate my personal beliefs regarding street gangs.

I recall originally arriving to that city equipped with ambitious, idealistic dreams to assist gang youth in renouncing their membership and in becoming integrated into the community. Yet I remember, too, feeling overwhelmed with the first step due to my ignorance and fear of urban youth gangs. Because I, a social worker within the dominant culture, held the common view that gang membership was dysfunctional, I believed that my paramount goal as a clinical therapist with urban youth would be to encourage them to exit gangs and integrate into the dominant culture. However, by working with J.J. and other gang youth, I began to conceive the role of gangs in many urban youth's lives as filling a psychosocial void where membership in biological family systems and society's formal institutions had

in fact, been dysfunctional. My therapeutic relationship with J.J. taught me the importance of sharing in her present reality, that is, not imposing my agenda upon her by insisting that she reconsider her gang involvement but rather encouraging her to define the immediate presenting concerns as well as to identify the surrounding societal systems in which many of her intrapersonal conflicts were deeply rooted.

A Harmonious Micro-Macro Duo: A Synthesis of Conceptual Treatment Models

The basis for our therapeutic alliance was the compatibility that J.J. and I shared regarding certain personality traits. For instance, we both valued respect of all persons as the cornerstone in relationships, we both were open and direct with our communication styles (once we had overcome our initial linguistic hurdles), and we both were motivated, hard-working individuals. I feel that the congruity of our qualities enhanced our relationship and contributed to a sense of mutual commitment to and investment in J.J.'s treatment plan.

Strengthening Intrapersonal Skills: Cognitive-Behavioral Model

In response to J.J.'s first treatment goal—eliminating suicidal ideation—I adopted the cognitive-behavioral model as my guiding framework. Through encouraging her to relive her suicide attempt cognitively and emotionally, I recognized that J.J. was able to identify possible intrapersonal motives: "I remember thinking that I was all alone," and "I felt like if I were gone, no one would notice." Subsequently, I explored what she would consider doing in the future in the face of sadness or loneliness. "Now," J.J. revealed, "I would probably call someone to talk to, like my friends or Ms. B. [a colleague at J.J.'s peer-counseling job]." I aimed to help J.J. examine her cognitive responses and identify possible thought distortions that prompted her to consider suicide as a viable solution. I then focused on replacing ineffective coping mechanisms with new, healthy strategies that incorporated J.J.'s

strengths, skills and informal resources (Beck, 1995). Hence, we were ready to embark upon J.J.'s second treatment goal: reducing depressive episodes.

During the fourth month of treatment, J.J. was able to partialize her other overriding concern, depression, into specific problematic behaviors on which she wanted to work during treatment sessions. "A lot of times, I just feel really sad and start crying," she disclosed in an individual session. When I asked her to identify the different thoughts that go through her mind when she starts to cry, J.J. revealed, "Like that my life is crazy. I mean, I am only sixteen and I know so many people who have died already. In the streets there're no rules." She continued, "There are drive-by shootings and innocent people die. And like my aunt, too, she didn't deserve to die."

At that point, I desperately searched for a personal emotional connection to relate to the intensity of J.J.'s past. I had never experienced the sudden death of friends or loved ones, nor violent homicides, while J.J., in her teens, had already dealt with several. Due to the vast difference between our personal experiences, I feared emitting spontaneous sympathetic reactions instead of premeditated empathic responses. Attempting to reframe the losses in the context of J.J. and the importance of relationships to her, I continued, "Sometimes, too, when death is so sudden or unexpected, it makes us sad that we were never able to say good-bye, or to tell these people how we really feel. "Yeah," J.J. paused and added, "I never even got to say anything to N. [her friend who had died in a gang shoot-out in her neighborhood]." Taking into consideration J.J.'s spiritual beliefs, I asked her, "Do you think there's a way in which you could still tell him how you feel?" "Like how?" she asked. "Well, you've told me before that you like to write poetry and songs. How about like that?" I replied.

The following session, J.J. brought in a poem that she had written to share with me, dedicated to the youth she knew who had lost their lives in the inner city. I sensed that her new coping strategy also gave her the

opportunity to regain a sense of control of painful memories when earlier she had felt helpless and was unable to control them. J.J. responded well to this technique, stating, "It makes me feel in control of my thoughts, not that my thoughts are controlling me."

Regarding a second problematic behavior that J.J. had identified as contributing to her depression, she revealed, "I think I get most depressed when I'm bored . . . when I'm all alone and there's nothing to do." J.J.'s interest in community service, reflected in the part-time position she held as a peer counselor at a local agency in the community, led me to consider another cognitive-behavioral intervention in response to this presenting concern: the creation of a weekly activity chart. I aimed to tailor the homework assignments to those activities that emphasized her strengths—helping others—as well as utilized her skills—networking abilities and experience with urban youth (Butler, 1997; Brage, 1995; Startup & Edmonds, 1994). Some of J.J.'s specific homework assignments included: identifying the types of volunteer activities and populations with whom she enjoyed working, performing a community assessment as to the agencies available in her neighborhood, contacting directors to set up informal interviews, and volunteering in the selected agency during her free time. According to J.J., "Being busy and helping others is the best form of therapy for me."

Towards the end of the fifth month of treatment, I presented J.J. with a resume template during an individual session to compile all of her community service activities and create a personal resume. She filled out the personal information questionnaire and we put together her resume during the following session. Based on J.J.'s success with her own resume as well as her interest in utilizing this skill to help create opportunities for other youth, I began to entertain incorporating intervention strategies from a different theoretical framework, the empowerment practice model, into the course of treatment.

At this point in the therapeutic process, I sensed that the specific cognitive-behavioral

techniques practiced during our sessions gave J.J. the coping strategies and practical skills to set out alone, with confidence, on the path to micro intrapersonal healing. Accordingly, on a self-evaluation form, J.J. reported that she had successfully achieved her two treatment goals: eliminating suicidal ideation and reducing depressive symptoms. Furthermore, J.J. was able to continuously reinforce her intrapersonal progress by applying her new skills at the community level. Through her job as a peer counselor, J.J. taught certain cognitive-behavioral techniques to other youth who encountered similar intrapersonal problems and felt isolated and hopeless battling the larger systems alone. Despite her progress, I was wary of terminating treatment as I recognized that the continual presence of community and societal obstacles—limited vocational opportunities, institutionalized discrimination, and social exclusion of gang youth—along her path might deter J.J. in her progress or even defeat her efforts in the long run.

Enhancing Social Inclusion: Empowerment Practice Model

Recent empowerment practice literature confirmed my belief that on a macro level, J.J.'s intrapersonal coping strategies may do little to challenge the existing power levels or change the larger societal context within which she interacted, an inner-city environment with limited financial, educational, and social opportunities for high-risk, gang youth (Fong, Spickard, & Ewalt, 1995; Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999; Nessel, 1988). Indeed, my recent professional experience with urban gang youth has shown me that modeling advocacy techniques that teach youth to be active agents in renegotiating power can produce positive, sustainable outcomes at the community level.

With respect to choosing an appropriate intervention technique under the empowerment practice model, I invited J.J. to identify the most fitting strategy. "Do you remember a while back," I began during one session, "when you told me about a couple of instances in which you had witnessed

different forms of injustice in your community? Well, the fact that you were so upset by these incidents shows me that you are very committed to justice when it comes to youth . . . treating all people with respect regardless of their age, or race, or even their gang colors." I continued, "J.J., what do you think it would take to end some of the injustices that you have observed in your community so that gang youth can gain the respect of authority and not be taken advantage of?" Based on her personal experiences as well as community work with high-risk urban youth, J.J. was able to identify a collective concern that many gang youth share in the inner city—the lack of economic opportunities due to society's tainted lens through which gang members are perceived.

As a means of weaving together the multiple actors in her life to assess our potential allies, J.J. and I composed her own personal ecomap (Congress, 1997). This activity helped J.J. to recognize both the individuals as well as the systems that had served as reliable supports for her throughout her life. Attempting to utilize her operational definition of spirituality, I added, "Now let's see who is going to be on our side . . . who we are going to be able to count on from here on." "I think Ms. B. would want to help," J.J. replied.

Utilizing her own informal network base, J.J. discussed her ideas from our session with Ms. B. Together, they researched within the agency where J.J. worked as a peer counselor and found out about a gang mentoring program that her agency ran in several satellite locations throughout the city. J.J. brought the name of the program director, a former gang member whom she knew, to the following session. I assisted J.J. in calling him to request an informational interview to investigate both the nature of the program as well as potential volunteer opportunities for her involvement.

J.J.'s excitement was tangible as I met her in the hall of my agency before our next session. "Guess what?" she smiled, "[The program director] liked my resume!" She proceeded to recount the events that

ultimately led up to her accepting a volunteer position with the program's job counselor. "I'm going to help them do their resumes," she said. "It'll be really cool if they get a job!"

J.J. successfully identified a resource that she possessed and located a program that could benefit from such a service. She was able to incorporate one of her strengths, investment in and experience with high-risk youth, into learning a new skill, creating resumes for gang members entering the work force, that was consistent with her treatment goal, enhancing economic/employment opportunities for gang youth. In addition, J.J.'s skill-building intervention technique addressed the effects of powerlessness on multiple levels: on an intrapersonal level—through increasing her self-esteem by helping others as well as on a community level—through assisting gang-members in becoming competent and respected participants in the job market, thus increasing their power (Gutiérrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995). Furthermore, J.J.'s efforts served to complement the dominant society's normative structure, not detract from it (Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999). By equipping gang youth with the tools to become gainfully employed, I believe they will experience increased access to economic opportunity, which will, in turn, lessen the potential to be in conflict with law enforcement (and the dominant culture). Also, measures that seek to integrate gang members equitably into society's normative structure may result in a distancing from, or ultimate relinquishing of, gang membership.

Building Bridges Between the Dominant Culture and Gang Subculture: Some Lessons Learned

To work effectively with gang youth and their existing culture without losing sight of the client's treatment goals amidst the surrounding ambiguity and newness, I offer several guidelines based on the lessons I have learned from my experiences working with youth gang members. It is important to recognize that practitioners need not agree with the norms of the urban gang subculture.

However, in order to view the youth's worlds through their own lenses, I have learned through this case to work with gang youth in their own contexts and to accept their values and their norms with empathy and an open mind. In reflecting upon the course of the therapeutic process, I realize that both J.J. and I were partners throughout this mutual experience of personal growth and commitment to social change. I have gleaned the following lessons from our therapeutic relationship, focusing on both general practice as well as the practice relating to the special case of urban gang youth:

1. As practitioners, we should strive to adopt "multiculturalism" as the predominant guiding framework throughout the therapeutic process, rather than as an isolated intervention strategy. Success in multicultural therapeutic relationships depends largely on the practitioner's ability to increase his or her acceptance of, and comfort with, the multiple existing differences in value systems, spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices. These differences between the client and practitioner can be a window of opportunity for cross-cultural sharing and growth as well.

2. It is essential for practitioners to explore the relationship between clients and all relevant familial, peer, and social actors and to incorporate these persons and environments into the therapeutic process, as well as in efforts to effect macro social change. In working with urban youth gangs, we should conceptualize gang members within their surrounding systems of nuclear and extended family, gang family, community, and society. By excluding any one of these environments from the therapeutic process, we risk adopting a myopic approach that fails to recognize the intricate relationships among the client, the biological family, the gang family, and the community.

3. It is crucial to acknowledge that gang members often operate within their own culture, which may be in direct conflict with society's dominant culture. We should seek to view the gang culture as

a separate and unique social group, composed of its own value system, cultural and behavioral practices, and linguistic forms of expression. Gang members' definitions of values, cultural and spiritual beliefs, and language should be the prism through which we view the therapeutic process.

4. Acquiring a deeper understanding of the culture of gangs through research, literature reviews, and participatory methods is key to enhancing the therapeutic alliance with gang youth. We should aim to inform ourselves regarding the culture of gangs and its related value system, behavioral practices, and vocabulary. The methods are numerous yet ultimately depend upon the practitioner's time, preferred style of learning, and level of comfort with urban youth and gangs.

5. Many urban youth turn to gangs for a multitude of reasons and, through gang membership, succeed in fulfilling their personal, social, and economic needs. We should explore the motives of youth clients seeking gang membership. What are gangs offering that formal and informal social systems and other environmental supports are failing to provide? We should also investigate the benefits from youth's association with gangs as well as the development of positive intra- and interpersonal characteristics that have resulted from gang membership. These acquired qualities may have compensated for the breakdown in formal supports—family, school, community—and their inability to meet gang members' basic needs.

6. Many gang youth are unwilling to surrender their membership, especially if it has served as a vehicle for acquiring status, developing identities, and/or satisfying their basic needs. Equally important, some gang youth may believe that they are unable to give up their membership, feeling that their lives will be in danger if they attempt to exit the gang. In working with all gang-involved youth, we should keep both our client's and our own personal safety in the forefront of all our interventions as well as be attuned to the negative implications and issues of

legality with respect to gang involvement. Throughout the therapeutic process, we should strive to share in the present reality of gang youth and encourage them to define their presenting concerns. Treatment goals cannot be forced; they must be proposed and embraced by our clients. However, establishing a therapeutic alliance with gang youth may enable us to assist them in exiting gangs and assimilating with the normative structure of the dominant society.

7. Gang-involved youth can be significant resources for the social work profession, serving as pivotal links between the urban youth gang subculture and society's dominant culture. We should consider efforts to engage perimeter gang members to empower other members through capacity-building techniques and to refocus their positive interpersonal skills into activities that enhance the established norms of society's dominant culture. To ensure the sustainability of our efforts, it is key to incorporate community and institutional allies to reinforce the gang members' interventions at the community level.

8. Finally, successful intervention with gang members on an individual level may instill healthy coping mechanisms in gang youth yet do little to challenge and change the oppressive systems which often serve to perpetuate their intra- and interpersonal conflicts and struggles. Practitioners should consider utilizing a synthesis of different micro and macro frameworks to equip gang youth with the tools to become pro-active agents, not reactive entities, in gaining mastery over their surrounding conditions. A colleague of mine once asked the leaders of three feared gangs in his urban community, "If you could change one thing about your current situation, what would it be?" In unison, the three answered, without hesitation, "I'd have a job." With the common demand identified as increased economic opportunities, practitioners should target macro interventions aimed at delivering community-based solutions to meet this need.

Youth such as J.J., who have acquired positive interpersonal characteristics through gang membership, need to be in the forefront with practitioners in advocating for increased opportunities for gang-involved youth. Ironically, youth who spend the most time in gangs are often given the least opportunity to talk. It is crucial that changes in the community and/or social systems and allocation of resources within inner cities involve opening the door to economic, educational, and recreational opportunities for these youth instead of the door to correctional facilities, community oppression, and overall social exclusion.

In conclusion, this particular therapeutic relationship—a mutual learning process—shaped me both as a person and as a practitioner. As a person, I learned to acknowledge and reassess the preconceived notions and biases regarding gang youth that I had carried with me for a long time. As a practitioner, I took a horizontal step, out of the micro practice box, to recognize the impact of surrounding systems on clients' behaviors, and to target interventions at the community and societal levels. Acquiring this macro perspective has subsequently helped me to function more effectively in my work with street children and youth within their urban communities, both in this country and abroad.

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¹J.J. is a pseudonym for the client who assisted me throughout her treatment to compile this narrative. J.J.'s name and her mother's name have been changed and her language and communication styles have been re-written to respect her anonymity.

Author Note

This narrative consists of a synthesis of my work with J.J. and various other members from her gang as well as other local gang members from June of 1997 to February of 1998. I would like to thank J.J. and all of the other clients, individuals, and colleagues who have contributed to this narrative as well as inspired me submit it on behalf of urban youth gangs in order to enhance their voice and presence in current gang literature.

A LIFE FULLY LIVED: A NARRATIVE INTERVIEW WITH SOCIAL GROUP WORKER RUBY PERNELL

By Janice Andrews, Ph.D., Professor, College of St. Catherine/University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

Ruby Pernell was a major contributor to social group work knowledge, values, and skills for over fifty years. She published and presented widely on group work, social development, policy, youth, and international understanding. She was one of the founders of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups. She died on February 4, 2001, and will be deeply missed by all.



Introduction

Ruby Pernell was Grace Longwell Coyle Professor Emeritus at Case Western Reserve University, where she was on the faculty from 1968 to 1983. For over fifty years, Pernell was a leader in social group work. A second generation group worker who studied under Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland, Pernell was published widely and presented papers on the group work method. She was drawn to social group work as a young woman active in the YWCA and camping. She received her B.S. (1939) and her M.S. (1944) from the University of Pittsburgh and her Ph.D. (1959) from the University of London, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Pernell, after working for four years as the Program Coordinator at the Soho Community House in Pittsburgh, was the first African American to be hired as a faculty member at the University of Minnesota. From 1948 to 1963, she was a member of the School of Social Work at Minnesota where she taught group work and supervised group work interns.

She had extensive international work experience in Germany where she taught group work to youth leaders and in India where she was the Social Welfare Attaché at the United States Embassy in New Delhi for five years. Additionally, she served as a consultant on various international associations, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Association of Schools of Social Work Jamaica, and federal agencies working on international issues.

After India, Pernell became the Grace Longwell Coyle Chair in Social Work at Case Western Reserve University, where she stayed until she retired in 1983. While at Case Western, she was active with the Council on Social Work Education, National Association of Social Workers, International Association of Schools of Social Work, National Federation of Settlements, Ohio Department of Public Welfare, YWCA of East Cleveland, and Camp Fire Girls of Greater Cleveland.

She continued to provide leadership in

social group work, particularly in her home state of Ohio, where she was active with the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG) and sat, as well, on the international board of AASWG. After retiring from full-time teaching, she worked as a volunteer in a hospice program. She continued to conduct workshops on social group work that were highly received by participants.

I interviewed Pernell on two occasions. The first interview occurred in New York City on June 14, 1999; the second, in Minneapolis on September 27, 1999. As Pernell reflected on her life, she emphasized that she "really is a very private person." She added that, in her view, she did not "initiate things"; good things "happened" to her.

Jan: You received your BS in 1939. Are there some things that you could tell me about your early life? Did you grow up in Pittsburgh?

Ruby: Yes, I grew up in Pittsburgh. Actually, I was born in Birmingham, Alabama, but I left there; I really didn't like it, so I left when I was three weeks old! My family moved to Pittsburgh. So that's where I grew up, where I went to school. I went up the street to a grade school, a little bit further to junior high, and a little bit further on the same track to senior high, and a little bit further on the same track to the University of Pittsburgh.

Jan: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Ruby: Yes, I was fourth of five.

Jan: Were the others on that same track?

Ruby: No, except for my oldest brother and my oldest sister, we weren't close together in age. In other words, one would be out of school when the next one got there. So, we sort of moved in different circles of friends. Now my brother started college because my mother's great ambition

was that he should be a lawyer, but he was interested in printing. So he became a printer and was in that business for the rest of his life.



Jan: So when you went to the University of Pittsburgh, it was an unusual thing in your family. Are you the only one who graduated from college?

Ruby: Yes.

Jan: Can you remember what the message was that this was attainable for you? In the 1930's not a lot of women were going to college.

Ruby: Oh, I don't think that it was a matter of gender; nor do I think it was a matter of race. It was a matter of money. That was the impression I had. When I started the University of Pittsburgh, the tuition was \$300 a year, if you can believe that, \$150 a semester. I think I started school with \$35, because I could pay it off over the semester. My father gave me that to start with.

Jan: So, your parents helped you as much as they could. What did you major in?

Ruby: Biology. That's why I have the BS.

Jan: What did you think that you were going to do with that?

Ruby: Well, my initial purpose was that I thought that maybe at some point I might be a doctor.

Jan: What did you do with that biology degree?

Ruby: Nothing. (It was useful in camp.) There wasn't anything to do with it. For one thing, most of the people that I went to college with, the people that I went around with, mainly colored (or were we called Negro then?), were in education because that was what you could get a job in, and only if you went south. I was not in education, I was not in anything that was going to lead me to anything else. But, I had a great time because I had all those credits that they were using for education courses, I could use for minoring in fine arts, German, and psychology. So, I think actually that I got quite a good liberal arts education ending up with nothing of particular sale value.

Jan: What did you do before you went to get your MSW?

Ruby: Nothing in particular. These were still the depression years; there weren't many jobs. I did a lot of volunteer work and worked part-time as a cashier at a theatre and ballroom.

Jan: When did you start your MSW? Was that in 1942?

Ruby: Yes.

Jan: Do you remember what motivated you to go into social work?

Ruby: Yes. I did a paper once on my background. When I went into the foreign service, I had a number of appointments around Washington, and I went to see this one person who said, "Where did they find you?" I don't think it was a kind remark, but I just took it literally. I told her they found me chairing a meeting at the National Conference of Social Welfare. But, at any rate, I did this paper and I said that if somebody

had asked that in terms of social work, where did they find me, I would say at the YWCA, because I had a straight line relationship with the YWCA all the way to the present because I started out like some people start out being Girl Scouts or Camp-fire girls. In those days it was the Girl Reserves, later to become Y Teens. Now, at this time, I don't know if the Y has any special adolescent program. At any rate that was really where I was quite involved in a variety of things.

Jan: At Pittsburgh?



Ruby: Yes. Actually, it was really the camping. I went to camp in summer, the summer they had tried an experiment to see if it was all right to have colored girls at camp. So, there were about three or four of us. Anyway, camp was so important to me, I mean for the experience, that it was a compelling kind of idea. We had a YWCA day camp, then we had Pittsburgh day camp, (that is the city of Pittsburgh day camp) and I worked in both as a volunteer, and then from that into an overnight camping situation that the Urban League was starting and from that into graduate school. Because one day Bill Berry, who was with the Urban League, asked me, "Have you ever thought about going into social work?" Well, I had thought about it and discarded it because the YWCA Secretary for the teenage program

had a degree in social work, I think from the New York School, so there was a period where I thought that I would never be a social worker if that particular person represented social work. But anyway, on this occasion Bill asked if I had ever thought about it and I said that I had given it some thought. He said, "Why don't you go and talk to Gertrude Wilson?" So I went to talk to Gertrude Wilson, and I wound up in graduate school. So that's how I got to graduate school

Jan: Even as you began graduate school, you knew it was group work that you would be concentrating in.

Ruby: Oh, definitely! That's right out of the past background—the camp, the YWCA. My interest in international affairs also relates to the YW. When I was with the YW, I was involved with the public affairs committee and also the whole concept of the worldwide YWCA and its international interests and connections.

Jan: Was this before your MSW?

Ruby: I can't separate these things out. Yes, I'm sure it was. Plus, with the YWCA I worked—when I say work, this is volunteer work, I did a lot of volunteer work with the YWCA—I led groups, the "Girl Reserves," and got involved in some of these kinds of overall things like the public affairs committee and world fellowship programs.

Jan: Tell me about the University of Pittsburgh. Gertrude Wilson was there; Marian Hathway was there...

Ruby: Gladys Ryland, Wilbur Newstetter. He was the first dean of the School of Social Work. And, Ruth Gartland and Ruth Smalley, that marvelous, marvelous faculty who originally started commuting, as you might know, from Western Reserve.

Jan: Right. At that particular time the war was going on. I understand that the University of Pittsburgh School of Social

Work was a center of progressive thought and that a lot of the progressive students and faculty were group workers. Do you remember Pittsburgh as being that way?

Ruby: I suppose so. I know that we were, for example, in the years when people were interested in the union, SSEU, and I remember that in our particular union (I worked for Soho Community House, one of the agencies with unionized staff). There was this little Communist cell in one of the other agencies and we had to figure out what their agenda was to keep a step ahead of them. There were a lot of interesting things going on back in those days. Like the things that you would boycott and things you would support. I think that people like Gertrude Wilson, for example, with a very progressive orientation, aside from people like Marion Hathway, were quite into it. But, I think that group work, not in terms of political, but in terms of a kind of a cultural openness in orientation, that group work of that period was a marvelous kind of experience to really develop a liberal point of view, because we were still very much aware of and involved with settlements and their historical role and with the development of the Federation of Social Agencies, community councils, things of this sort that kept you related to the community; and because of where the settlement ethnic neighborhoods were got you aware of the cultural backgrounds of different people. All of these—the music, the dances.

Jan: Tell me about the program. [Ruby lists some of her group work classmates who overlapped with the period she was there: Gisela Konopka, Ruth Middleman, Celia Weisman, Bessie Pine].

Ruby: The war was on. After we were there, they decided to speed up the curriculum and go through the summer. So, some people finished before others. There was this little batch of people, I think there were seven of us, who were devoted to camp. We couldn't give up the summer in order to study. So we all worked in camps. Helen

Northen was one of this group. Mary Lee Nicholson and Margaret Hartford were there, but I think Betty went into the other group and finished in the accelerated program. Patricia Collins was in our program and she taught at Carnegie Tech for a while. Dorothy Bodin taught on the West Coast for a short period of time and was with the YW. Mary Lee Nicholson taught at Wayne State University. Practically all of us became sort of second generation of teachers. That was an interesting group. Once, Gisela [Konopka] and I were in Atlantic City at the National Conference on Social Welfare. If you've ever heard of this, you'll know that it was a big conference. All of the organizations met at the same time with their own program within a total program. So group work was part of it. This time Gisela and I were walking down the boardwalk with some of our students and we met Gertrude Wilson and Gertrude says, "Oh, are these the grandchildren?" Since we were the children, our students were the grandchildren. That's why I say that we were sort of like the second generation of teaching because we fanned out because it was just at the point where group work was developing at other schools. When we were in school, the major places for group work were the New York School of Social Work, that's Columbia now, Western Reserve University, University of Pittsburgh and Atlanta University. Frankie Adams was there.

Jan: At Atlanta?

Ruby: Yes. She was a friend of Gertrude's. Claire Kaiser, who had also taught at Western Reserve earlier, was in New York.

Jan: At New York School of Social Work?

Ruby: At the New York School of Social Work. Then, in Chicago, Neva Boyd was at the University of Illinois at Chicago. George Williams College also had a group work program, mostly identified with the YMCA. But I don't know if that was quite in the

same developmental line as the other schools. It was after that, that suddenly there were these group work programs at so many different places. That's why my classmates and I happened to get involved in just that particular time frame. I remember one particular conference in Cleveland, which I attended as a student, and going into this crowded room where these group work "greats" were holding forth debating whether their organization, the Association for the Study of Social Group Work, should become a membership organization. We were sitting on the floor because there wasn't any other place to sit and looking at Grace Coyle and some of those "greats" we read about all of the time. We were in awe. It was a momentous meeting and, though we didn't realize it, some basic decisions affecting the profession were being made. It also was the beginning of the group work literature so to speak, because our bibliographies mainly had source material from sociology, social psychology, etc. While we were in school, Gertrude [Wilson] and Gladys [Ryland] were busy writing "The Green Bible" (*Social Group Work Practice*).

Jan: That's right. That came out in 1949?

Ruby: Yes. We could recognize some of the case material. And then Grace Coyle had written a couple of books. Then there was a lot of periodical literature. There was this publication called "*The Group*," and the earlier publications from the American Association of the Study of Group Work which was the predecessor organization.

Jan: That was before AAGW.

Ruby: Yes. In Cleveland, that was what the big debate was about: shifting from AASGW (the Study of Group Work) to AAGW, a membership organization. "The Group" was the AAGW publication. You have to remember that at that period the people who were interested in group work were not just people who were working in the social work field. You had social psychologists, the recreation people, the adult

and informal education people. They were all part of this. So, the question was should it remain this kind of loose research kind of organization where people could develop their ideas, research or whatever, or should it become a membership organization? So, it became a membership organization. The next great decision was to become one with the other social work organizations in the proposed National Association of Social Workers. Group Workers had a major role in The Temporary Inter-Association Council (TIAC), the committee formed to guide this process. During the five-year lead-up period, AAGW dropped categories of membership, ending up with the MSW as the sole acceptable qualification. You have to remember that many of the people interested in group work were not in the social work field. This meant that we lost the richness of the varied membership we'd had before.

Jan: Most of that small cohort with whom you got your MSW went into academia.

Ruby: No. Well, that little group did, but otherwise we went into a lot of other things too. People like Florence Ray Stier, and Celia Weisman, of course.

Jan: And a number of you got doctorates from that group that you mentioned. What do you think that group's impact has been on group work?

Ruby: I think that we had a very great impact on group work. We had as great an impact on group work, I think, as the first generation because we were a direct line. In other words, what we were teaching and practicing at that point was what we had learned.

Jan: From the pioneers, in a way.

Ruby: That's right. It was only later that some of the different kinds of concepts, ideas, and models, began to come in, moving group work as we knew it a step further. A major contribution, for example, was the

development of theory on stages of group development by Saul Bernstein and his students at Boston. During this period, things began to change in social group work. The emphasis on research and writing came in as a natural outgrowth of the academic emphasis in social work and the need for professional recognition. This made people think in theoretical terms more than in the direct practice terms of the past. People began to develop new paradigms and ways of thinking and describing and borrowing from others (e.g., behavioral theories). The need for professional recognition was strong, but also the academic push was very important.

Jan: Is there anything else that you want to say about The University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work?

Ruby: I think it was just great because we were together in the field as well as in the school. Many of the field instructors, for example, had been trained at this school. We were one, so to speak.

Jan: Was Margaret Berry a field instructor there?

Ruby: Margaret was my field instructor. There was a regular course in field instruction and then there were regular meetings of field instructors. So it was a very coherent kind of a program. As I mentioned before, there were these other supporting organizations that everybody was a part of. We were very much aware of what was going on generally in terms of the city and some of the developments in group work as well as the neighborhood settlements. The Federation of Social Agencies had a group work section. The settlements had an organization that brought group workers together and there was an AAGW chapter. These were mostly the same people. There was a lot of overlap.

Jan: Was group therapy a concept yet?

Ruby: Group therapy was just developing and Gisa [Gisela Konopka] was really the

original actor in that field, so to speak, in the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic. She probably got into that area out of her German background, not necessarily out of her Pittsburgh background, because at that point that was not the focus. We were much more focused in those early years on "normal" people who might be having problems with their social environment. We were looking for strengths and there was the whole value system, for example, in terms of the democratic concepts that were part of what we were doing. I think that getting involved as a group worker in the Child Guidance Center was something that was really coming out of another stream. I don't think it was even coming directly out of the casework stream at that point.

Jan: That's interesting.

Ruby: Casework and group work were not terribly closely related. Gertrude Wilson insisted that in the second year, group work students spend some time in casework agencies. I can remember an argument between Gertrude Wilson and Ruth Gartland where Wilson insisted that I have a casework placement – Wilson won! I can remember a placement in a family agency where I was working with a woman whose



child needed a pair of shoes. I immediately got into trouble because I tried to get her shoes but was told I should, instead, be focusing on "feelings." My placement was not particularly productive from the agency's point of view or from mine!

Jan: What was the stream do you think that it came out of? That group therapy

piece.

Ruby: Well, the therapy piece, the child guidance piece, of course had a very strong Freudian influence. With Gisa [Gisela Konopka] being, I think, the first group worker at the Pittsburgh Child Guidance Clinic that was coming out of the pedagogy background that she had brought from Germany, the group work theory from the school and the Freudian theory of the Child Guidance Clinic. You know that a few years later there was much discussion in the literature about the difference between "Group Work" and "Group Therapy."

Jan: What brought you to Minnesota? Was it Gisela Konopka?

Ruby: Yes.

Jan: Tell me about that. Did she just say, "We have a position open?" Did she go to Minnesota to create a position?

Ruby: Yes. There had been some group work there before taught by Helen Phillips, if I recall correctly (she later went to chair the Group Work Program at the University of Pennsylvania), but not a program as such. Gisa went really to develop it as an integral part of the graduate social work department at the university. She was there one year and I came the second year to work with the field because at that point there was nobody to do field instruction because everything was just developing. So that first year I did six different agencies. I think I had ten students placed in six agencies. Anyway I worked with a number of agencies to develop the learning opportunities and I supervised the students.

Jan: Did you work in the field program the entire time you were in Minnesota?

Ruby: That's what I started with. During the first years, we had people from agencies who were in the program. Our first students were from the agencies who then became supervisors.

Jan: From the settlements and the YW and the Jewish Centers?

Ruby: Yes.

Jan: Did you find the community segregated?

Ruby: I didn't have any problem. I know that when I was going to move into an apartment, one of the neighbors came across the street to speak to the owner to protest the idea that I was moving in. She later rented her garage to me and became a great supporter. In fact, when I was going into the Foreign Service (you know they send the FBI around to investigate you), she was very upset that nobody asked her opinion. I don't initiate things; good things happen to me.

Jan: When did you go to Germany?

Ruby: I went to Germany in 1951.

Jan: Tell me about that.

Ruby: I went there as a consultant on group work for youth. After the war there was the thought that since most of the youth organizations like the *Catolische*, the *Evangelische Jugend* had been superceded by the Hitler Youth, that there had to be some sort of re-education in more democratic ways of working with youth groups. There were four regional schools for leadership training, that is, training for youth leaders in various parts of Germany. So the U.S., whatever that section under the U.S. High Commission for Germany was called, arranged to have consultants work with these schools. In these schools, participants learned games and songs and all of these kinds of program activities that you do with youth. They could find their own experts in these areas, but they also had to have some content on working with groups in a democratic framework and this was what the U.S. consultants would supply. Also there were people like Dorothea Spellman, Margaret Berry (we were there at different times),

and Anna Stenzl (consecutively or concurrently). Anyway, we worked with specific schools. I worked in one in Bavaria and also did a month's course in Berlin with staff members from all four schools. An important person who was very involved was Henry Olendorff. The Cleveland International Program was started by Henry Olendorff. It was a direct development out of this kind of idea to bring youth leaders to the United States for some training and experience in group work. That is what we were there for, to teach group work to youth leaders.

Jan: What do you think your impact was?

Ruby: Well, I think it was very positive. I still have friends in Germany from that particular period that I visit and they have visited me here. One person from the school I was with, Franz Camps, came and studied at Minnesota. We had four other German Youth Leaders who had studied at Minnesota overlapping this time – probably as a result of Gisa's [Gisela Konopka] visits. I think we had quite an impact in certain areas. I'm remembering the month-long course in Berlin which brought together people from all four of the schools. The impact of being in Berlin was an enormous emotional one because many of them hadn't been there since before the war. It also was a time when the borders between East and West Berlin were fairly open and there were relatives, like mothers, who were living in East Germany who were able to come to Berlin. So there were these tremendous kinds of impacts of meeting families and friends who hadn't been seen since before the war, or of just being in Berlin again.

Jan: An emotional impact.

Ruby: Another stress was the fact that they had Americans, because Margaret Berry had come and Anna Stenzl was there at that time. So, there were three of us. There was sort of a hostility toward the Americans because we were Americans, and because we were trying to teach the

Germans group work. So, there was this kind of hostility and emotional upheaval. It was very difficult for a while. When we started out, it was our (the Americans) problem – the content was constantly challenged. Then, it was the ‘other people’ who were the problem. Some would come and say ‘those people from ___ are ruining it.’ At the end I was doing a summary and using the blackboard and then we had a break. There were a bunch of them gathered around the blackboard giggling. Afterwards they showed us what they had done. They had this diagram. Here we are over here and here is this boat on the sea and just when we get straight and we know what we’re doing, you’re gone. They had moved from ‘their’ fault to ‘ours.’ We’re the ones (the Germans) responsible for what happened. It was lovely.

Jan: You took a sabbatical while at the University of Minnesota, right? Was that to get your doctorate?

Ruby: No, I really went on a sabbatical with no intention whatever of getting a degree. It really was my stupidity that led to my getting a degree, not my smarts. I had decided, having worked with many foreign students, that there was a lot about being a foreign student that we didn’t understand. We said that we understood, but we didn’t understand. There is a whole area of cultural subtleties that foreign students have to contend with that we don’t really understand. So, I thought that when I have time to be on sabbatical, I think that I’ll be a foreign student. So, I applied for a Fulbright and I applied for England, because I spoke the language, so I thought. I decided, because I felt guilty, that I really ought to be using this time to start working on a Ph.D. instead of going abroad. So, I combined intentions. What I did was to apply for the Ph.D. program at the London School of Economics. However, my intention was (when I say how stupid I was, it is because I didn’t understand the educational system) that I could earn some credits that I could apply to a program in the U.S. Well the stupidity was

that it is not the way things are organized. There is a basic incompatibility. I didn’t realize that. I remember that when I kept running around trying to find out how to register, I couldn’t get an answer because they didn’t know what I was talking about. I finally found out that I was registered already. I can tell you that it was a very frustrating experience that I felt that I had trapped myself into. I felt at the end of the year that I really should go home, but by then I felt trapped, so I stayed.

Jan: How long were you there?

Ruby: Two years.

Jan: Is that a system where you have an advisor?

Ruby: Yes, I had an advisor and it really was because of that advisor, for complex reasons, that I stayed on. I can only repeat that it was one of the most frustrating experiences of my life. I think that part of that frustration was that it yielded something positive. I felt it should not have been because it was less than I wanted.

Jan: So you did a series of readings all directed toward writing a dissertation?

Ruby: Yes. But, actually, there was much more to it because I was able to find classes and lectures more broadly related to my interests. If I’d known the system, I would have enrolled in the M.Sc. (Master of Science) program, even as an audit or whatever, because then I would have had a much more directed and guided experience. What made this so terribly frustrating was that I was accorded too much respect. Now that sounds incredible, but this was a period when the people who were teaching in LSE (London School of Economics) and some of the others were very much influenced by the U.S. model of social work education, the methods approach, etc. The reason that I was interested in England was the opposite. I was interested in the social policy aspects because this was an area we were not doing

much with. We were into methods. I was hoping to have lectures with Richard Titmus and his crowd, and Eileen Younghusband. Well, what happened was that Richard Titmus became ill and Eileen Younghusband resigned. Plus, the fact that because I was accorded too much respect, there were people who did not want me in their classes because they felt that I knew more than they did by virtue of coming from the U.S., not by virtue of being who I am. That general identification, plus the fact that Grace Coyle had been there just before and had been doing some institutes and lectures, and when people wanted more of that content, she told them that someone who taught group work was going to be in London. So, that's what I fell into when I wanted to be treated as a blank slate – a know nothing student.

Jan: Instead, you were treated almost as a celebrity or an expert.

Ruby: Like an expert. Anyway those were some of the frustrations that I found very difficult.

Jan: So you returned to Minnesota and, eventually, you went into the Foreign Service from Minnesota?

Ruby: Yes. I left Minnesota in 1963.

Jan: And then you went to India?

Ruby: That's right. For five years. I left India in 1968 and came to Western Reserve.

Jan: How did India and you connect? What was the connection?

Ruby: Well, actually I had been involved in various kinds of international groups, for a while. In 1947, right after partition of India and when the post-war problems were still rife in Europe, there had been the creation of a position of Social Welfare Attaché in the State Department and there had been two people appointed: Evelyn Hersey went to India and a man, whose name I don't remember, went to France with some wider

group responsibility in Western Europe, not just France. So, there were these two positions. They went out with the Eisenhower administration. During that interval, from the time they disappeared, certain organizations, like NASW and the National Social Welfare Assembly, had really kept the pressure on the State Department to reinstate these positions. In 1963 when Chester Bowles was appointed ambassador to India, he agreed to have a Social Welfare Attaché because he had been there when Hersey was there. That came through and at the same time Mary Catherine Jennings, who had been with USAID in Brazil, was appointed the Social Welfare Attaché in that country, so there were two positions again. Anyway, when the India position came through, I was asked if I would consider it.

Jan: You were known in the international community. Is that because you'd been to Germany earlier?

Ruby: No. It was because I'd been active in the organizations that were interested in international issues. My interest, no doubt, had grown out of that experience, but even more out of the involvement with foreign students.

Jan: What did that job entail?

Ruby: Well, it was an embassy attaché job, but at one level I always call it a "nothing" job. In the embassies (I'm telling you something that you know already), there are two kinds of Foreign Service Officers and Reserves. One category is "secretary." These are your regular Foreign Service employees who are responsible for areas like economics and politics, and then you have specialists, the attaches. Your specialists would be like treasury attaché, agriculture attaché, social welfare attaché, labor attaché. These are people who serve as a liaison between U.S. interests and the interests in that particular area of that country.

Jan: Did India have a social work

program at that time? Was social work well established?

Ruby: It depends on what you mean by well established. They were just on the verge of getting a government department of social welfare and did so while I was there. Elmina Luckey, a group worker who worked with the YWCA in Lucknow, came to Delhi in 1947 with her students and worked in displacement camps. That became the nucleus of the school of social work in Delhi. Another U.S. group worker was instrumental in the development of the TaTa Institute, School of Social Work in Bombay. There already was a development of schools when Evelyn Hersey was there. She had managed to develop a contract with TCM (Technical Cooperation Mission, which was the forerunner of AID) to develop social work education. That's when a lot of social work educators from this country went as consultants to India to work with schools of social work in developing the program. Indian faculty began to come to school in the U.S. and went back and taught what they had been taught. Within a British system of education, the schools of social work developed an American pattern because of that kind of assistance. Then social work, as such, is deep in the Indian tradition. For example, as a politician if you claimed you were a "social worker," that was another feather in your cap. During the time I was there, Indira Ghandi was the chairperson of the Indian Child Welfare Council. So, of course, there were people who loved getting on that board because it brought them close to power. Being a "social worker" in this broad sense had the meaning that you were concerned about the welfare of people. So in those terms the tradition of social work was very much established in Hindu, Moslem, and Christian communities. Most of the large, influential social services, particularly for women and children, had been organized and administered by such voluntary "social workers." Being a social worker had a definite relationship to doing good works, not just handing out of alms. Religiously, for Hindus, it was a way of earning merit in your

next life. Politically, it had meaning to care about the poor and destitute.

Jan: Why did you leave?

Ruby: When I took the job, I wasn't sure the government and I could mix because I tend to be a free spirit. Fortunately, the person to whom I was immediately responsible said, "Well, I don't know what this is all about, but we'll see what develops." Nobody knew what I was supposed to be doing so I could do what I thought needed doing. About my third year, there was a State Department budget cut. I had gone to Japan for a conference and when I came back I learned that somebody had decided to eliminate my job. So, I wrote a letter to the ambassador describing my activities and contacts and that got the job back. But, eventually, when there was another very big budget cut, this was one of the jobs to be eliminated. I really didn't feel that I could argue for it because I really didn't feel that it was an essential position at that point. When I refer to it as a "nothing job" it's because it has no program content of its own. What you do in an attaché job is dependent on what's going on in your country or in theirs. It's a reporting job and you report back to the U.S. What you report will influence policy or help them make necessary decisions. Then you get the feedback. So, you're kind of this liaison function, reporting what's going on, keeping an eye on what's going on, interpreting it for the way in which it might influence policy, facilitating things that the U.S. wants done, trying to facilitate requests from the country's government, and maintaining contacts with governmental and non-governmental persons in your area of concern.

Jan: Do any of those kinds of positions exist today, Social Welfare Attaché?

Ruby: They both went out at that time [1968] and I doubt that they will ever reappear with the kind of climate that we have today. Certainly, when they first came in they were important. I think Evelyn

Hersey did a lot, because remember this was right after independence, right after partition. The government was new, U.S.-India relationships were new, and the social problems were enormous, particularly those related to partition. She did a lot in terms of influencing some of our foreign aid, particularly things like food aid and things of that sort. We were just having NGOs getting involved in this area and Evelyn facilitated many of their contracts. She also facilitated the contract for the development of social work education. Things of this sort were very important at this stage. By the time I got there, there were things that were in place with both the Indian government and voluntary organizations and with our own. Things that she might have been involved in were now firmly in the hands of US/AID or USIS [U.S. Information Services]. So, I worked with these U.S. agencies as their resource because I was the only person with social welfare ties, but I did not have direct responsibility for these programmatic things. I do think that considering some of the deteriorating conditions in some parts of the world that the Social Welfare Attaché might again be a very useful position.

Jan: When you did leave in 1968, did you go immediately to Case Western as an instructor at that point? Was that when you were the acting dean?

Ruby: No. I was asked to come to fill the position of the Grace Coyle Chair. Coyle had recently died and it was created as a memorial. Herman Stein, who was the Dean at the time but also a consultant for UNICEF on a mission to India, made the offer to me. At first, I said, 'no.' Eventually, I agreed.

Jan: And that entailed teaching and directing? Tell me about that.

Ruby: Primarily it was to further Grace Coyle's interests in the social group work and international areas.

Jan: What did you do?

Ruby: I taught group work and began developing a course in International Social Welfare and a Study Abroad Program with the University of the West Indies. Shortly after I was there, we went through a major curriculum change. I took on the responsibility for shepherding us through that particular period. I chaired the curriculum committee, and I chaired the Masters Program.

Jan: And group work was still strong at Case Western?

Ruby: It was strong when I went there because it was still an identifiable group work program with a number of group work faculty members. When we went through the curriculum change, we instituted the integrated methods course. We worked as teams to develop the content of these courses and so the group workers were very much involved. But, over time, we lost the group workers. When I went to Case Western Reserve, there were about four or five people who were identified as group workers. And gradually we lost them. And, gradually again, you know history, you know how the field was changing in terms of what students wanted to do. For example, my interest has always been more related to community than to an individual case and not as related to the therapeutic kinds of clinical things. For a while I thought that one of the things that we should be doing—this is when we still had group work—was in the first year, regardless of what students were going to concentrate on, that everybody ought to have an experience in some place like a settlement to know what "normal" is. Then they could go into all the clinical things. One of the changes going on in this period was that students were getting the right to decide where they would be placed in the field. So we severely curtailed the faculty's ability to say, "This is the kind of experience you should have, or the kind of experience we require."

Jan: Yes, we were in that student power period.

Ruby: Right, yes. See the influence that it had on trying to hold something together in terms of focus. Then you get this shift into the clinical area and the need that group workers have felt from my day, I guess, to have professional recognition and status rather than being seen merely as "playing with kids."

Jan: Do you feel group workers, then, were in favor of the shift to the generalist curriculum?

Ruby: I think that when we changed the curriculum we were concerned about our input although we supported the change. We really were concerned that whoever was teaching this content should understand group work and its relevant content. As I said, we worked together as teams, teaching teams for the different sections of this program. Some of the problems I think arose about the questions of electives and required courses – because we kept in the curriculum that you could move on from integrated courses to a number of options. You could have more in group work, you could have more in clinical or whatever, family counseling or whatever we were calling it. Whether or not we required content beyond one or two courses, or whether or not we left it as an elective, made a difference. We did have fights about content that had to do with groups. Like whether or not the group process course should be a required course and making the point that regardless of where you are in this social work community, you need to know something about group process.

Jan: How did that come out?

Ruby: I don't even know if they have a course now. It came out as an elective rather than a requirement. We thought, okay, if we're going to put some emphasis on social planning, you need to know something about group because this is the way you do it. Things of this sort were argued. At one point I remember being absolutely furious, this was after I retired, when I realized that,

despite the fact that the chair of the Masters Program had a group work background, and the chair of the curriculum committee had a group work background, they had agreed on the elimination of the group process course as a requirement. I was so angry.

Jan: Was this in the 1970's?

Ruby: No this was probably in the 1980's.

Jan: In what year did you retire?

Ruby: 1983. As I say, the concerns were around specific things, not general. Certainly, in the NASW we went through these problems of being first a group work section, then becoming a group work commission, to being nothing. You know, that sort of thing. But I think again that if one looks at this in the ecological perspective of what's going on and what's affecting what, and how are these things interrelating, you've got this very strong emphasis on being recognized as a professional by other professions. I mean as social workers, not just as group workers. This kind of pressure of who are we, what's distinct about us that we've gone through. This really, I'd say, is kind of a difference of what you're paying attention to and what you permit to happen without a lot of protest.

Jan: Tell me about your retirement.

Ruby: In 1983, when I retired, I looked for something to do that was in direct involvement with people, sort of their life circumstances, and I decided to volunteer in a hospice program which I've been doing ever since. I've stayed active in AASWG (Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups). In 1979, there was a CSWE conference in Boston. Three people, Beulah Rothman, Ruth Middleman, and Catherine Papell, came up to me and said, "Don't you think we ought to have a group work conference?" I said, "Of course we should." "Don't you think it should be in Cleveland?" I said, "Of course it should." That's how I got involved with what later became the AASWG, which I have been

completely involved with ever since.

Jan: So, you've been involved with AASWG ever since, both at the local level as well as the national/international level, right?

Ruby: Yes.

Jan: It sounds as though you have continued to travel internationally. I know that you were in France in May, for example.

Ruby: Oh, yes, I've always traveled. I've kept up international contacts but they've gradually thinned out.

Jan: Is there something that you would like to say about group work? Where you think it's going, where you think it's at?

Ruby: Give you something profound?

Jan: Preferably. [Laughter.]

Ruby: It's interesting to me that there is this feeling that history repeats itself. I'm not even sure it's a feeling. I think that, in a way, it's a fact that things come around again. Some of the kinds of emphases that we had early on in the social group work are reappearing. I particularly think of socialization as a concern. I also think that it's interesting that so much of what was unique to social group work is now part of many other professional activities.

Jan: Do you feel that there is still a place for AASWG to continue as an autonomous organization?

Ruby: Oh, yes. I think that the history of group work is one that shows us in a way that we're not unique enough to preserve our identity within a large organization. One of the challenges, I think, for AASWG is really whether or not to try to preserve a core of what has been called "social group work" with its broader value commitments that necessarily lie in a variety of social work

activities with groups.

Jan: Tell me more about that; I'm not sure that I understand.

Ruby: Value commitments, for example, to democratic process. A sense of responsibility that leads to social action. The emphasis on helping groups function in a simultaneous personal and socially satisfying way. In other words, I think that one of the unique things about social group work as it was taught and learned early on was that you could do both. You didn't have to choose to work with the individuals or to work with the group as a whole. You saw the way in which what happens with the individual and what happens with the group are totally interrelated and you can work with a group in such a way that you are helping with those kinds of goals at once. I'm not sure that we teach this anymore, or that people who work with groups have a sense of this wider potential for the way in which one can be effective within the kind of society that we have. We have bundles of techniques to do this or to do that without this kind of sense of mission which I think was part of the earlier education for social group work and is sort of a distinctive thread within social group work. I've said in the past that I think that there is more to "social group work" than there is to "social work with groups."

Jan: So, you purposefully began that sentence earlier with social group work and ended it with social work with groups.

Ruby: Yes. I think that there is a difference. I think that "social work with groups" has a much broader application, but I think that "social group work" has a depth dimension that the other doesn't. That's what I'm describing here.

Jan: Relating to the mission?

Ruby: Well, the sense of where you can go in terms of wider concerns than just what happens to the individual, because what happens to the individual affects what

happens to the group and vice-versa. In social group work early on, the democratic dimension occurred through small group activity. It was very much a core of the concept as it developed. When we say in AASWG that we have a social action committee, that really is an expression of the social group work origin. That's not in the social work with groups concept. That's a little clinical group here, a little social group here, or a little community group there, or whatever, but not necessarily seeing that they all can exist in one group experience.

Jan: Maybe that's why the social action committee of AASWG struggles with its purpose.

Ruby: That's why we have trouble finding what it is.

Jan: So early on, social group work was a movement and then as it became more institutionalized with social work, its focus may have shifted more into technique.

Ruby: Yes. Yet, I remain optimistic that the concepts of social group work will survive.



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A CANADIAN ANTI-RACIST SOCIAL WORK COURSE: REFLECTIONS ON A SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Rosemary Clews, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Social Work, St. Thomas University,
with Renée Sharpe, BSW Graduate, 2000, St. Thomas University,
and Bill Toner, BSW Graduate, 2000, St. Thomas University

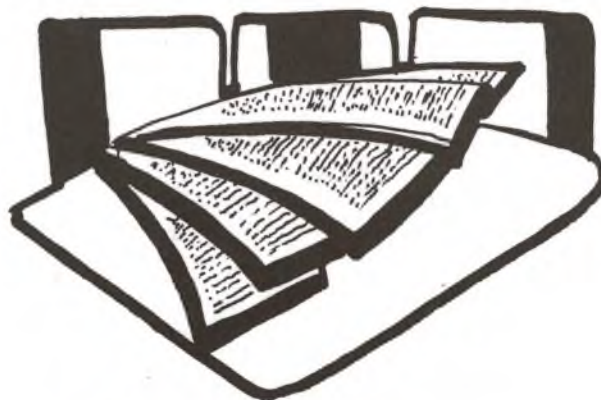
Two social work graduates and their professor reflect on the ingredients of success in an anti-racist social work course. They conclude that an environment in which students were given permission to take responsibility for their own learning enabled these students to enhance their self awareness and generate and share knowledge about ethnic and racial diversity, and to develop commitment for anti-racist social work practice. This environment also enabled the class of students to mount an impressive multicultural fair for university students as well as adults and children of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds in the local community.

Introduction

It was the last class in a thirteen-week elective anti-racist social work course in Eastern Canada. The major goal of this course had been to heighten student awareness of how racism was experienced by diverse people and to help them to learn how to construct anti-racist responses in their work. All students in the course participated in a "circle round" to evaluate their personal learnings as they related to the course goal. As course instructor, I was delighted when students concluded that the course had been a great success. I concurred with the student evaluation. I had found the course to be successful for a number of reasons: it had reflected my philosophy of education; it had achieved the course objectives; I had enjoyed the course and learned from it; I was content with the role that I had played in facilitating student learning; and I was very proud of the diligence and creativity of the students and the high quality of their work.

During the course evaluation, one of the students, Bill, commented that failure was often analyzed but the ingredients of success were rarely considered. Bill and another final year student, Renée, decided that they would like to celebrate our success by joining with me to write an article that would explore the success factors in the course. The other sixteen students in the course agreed to provide Bill and Renée with short papers in

which they evaluated the course and reflected on their learning. This paper includes an overview and evaluation of the course by the instructor and an analysis of student views about why the course was successful.



Background to the Course

The anti-racist course is an elective in the Canadian St. Thomas University BSW programme where I teach. The anti-racist course objectives are to help students to heighten their awareness of racism and to develop commitment, knowledge, and skills to engage in anti-racist social work practice. The 1999 anti-racist course included Aboriginal, Jewish, Acadian, and a majority of white Anglophone students, although four students had a first language that was not English and three were not born in Canada. Although I was born in Canada, I moved to England as

a baby and lived there for more than forty years before returning to Canada six years and New Brunswick three years before the course began. Therefore, there was diversity in the classroom in a Canadian province that is often considered to be stable and homogeneous. This promised to provide opportunities to learn about anti-racism by exploring diverse experiences of those of us who gathered together for the course.

My pedagogy as I teach the course is informed by the work of a number of thinkers, particularly Knowles (1980), Kolb (1984), Freire (1970), Lather (1991), and hooks (1994). I discovered from Knowles that adults often learn best when they are permitted to participate in deciding what they want and need to learn and how they learn. I do not consider my social work students to be empty vessels that must be filled with knowledge that *I* think is important. Instead I encourage social work students to reflect on their existing experiences and also to develop new experiences to prepare themselves for practice. My task as the instructor is to provide an environment where this can occur. Kolb reminded me that experiences alone are not sufficient and created an "experiential learning cycle" that informs my work. Therefore, I endeavour to provide an opportunity for a concrete experience, followed by an opportunity for students to reflect upon this experience. The reflections enable students to develop concepts that can be transferred to other situations. Students are then ready to engage in active experimentation where they can apply their concepts in a new situation. My third mentor is Freire, who emphasizes the power imbalance between students and teachers, which results in oppression in the classroom. How can I help students to develop the commitment, knowledge, and skills for anti-oppressive practice if *I* oppress *them* in the classroom? Therefore, I seek an alternative by drawing upon Lather's feminist pedagogy and postmodern orientation and hooks's ideas about "Teaching to Transgress" (1994). I try to create an environment where students can empower themselves to develop their own unique understandings about anti-racist social

work, discuss these understandings in the classroom, and apply them in the community. As I designed the anti-racist course, I attempted to incorporate the ideas of these writers.

On previous occasions when I taught the course, there were many emotionally charged classroom experiences. So, I began the course by leading a discussion about how to create a safe learning environment in the classroom where students would not feel judged by others and where different experiences and world-views would be respected. I took notes of the key points made and they formed a contract that guided our work together. Our discussions continued by my sharing my ideas about the course. At this time, I reviewed some of my learning acquired during twenty-five years as a social work educator in multicultural communities in Britain and Canada. I spoke about my research conducted in two Canadian provinces that provided an insight into experiences of racism (Clews, 1995; Clews, 2000a). I offered these experiences as a resource and I encouraged students to share what they could offer as well as what they wanted to learn. My role as instructor, I told the students, was to facilitate student learning about issues that were important to them and I would veto ideas only about curriculum content that did not relate to the major goal of the course.

At the outset, I thought that the course might be organized around student assignment work to enable students to pursue individual learning objectives. This model had proved effective in the past. After sharing information about student resources and learning objectives, students agreed that this model seemed appropriate for the 1999 course. We began discussions about project work in the first class and continued in the second class. By the end of the second class, we had confirmed that the major assignment was to be an anti-racist project to be completed by individual students or small groups of students. Students were to produce a proposal for project work that contributed to anti-racism and was relevant work for a social worker. Therefore they

needed to explore their understanding of the concept "anti-racist" and also justify that their proposed anti-racist work was social work. A second assignment was to make a presentation to the class that heightened student awareness about racism experienced by a particular group and to explore the nature of anti-racist social work with this group. My role was to consider proposals, evaluate whether they appeared to satisfy course and individual objectives, give approval for planned student work, offer suggestions to students about their work, grade the work, and relate student work to other theory or research when I thought that this was appropriate.

Reflections by the Instructor

Although I firmly believe in the principles I have outlined, sometimes I crave the certainty and the imposed structure of an instructor-led course. Invariably I become anxious when I attempt to put my educational principles into practice. However, my anxieties quickly dissolved in this course. Students participated fully during the early hours of the course and small groups negotiated with other class members and me the content of student-led seminars about particular groups. The entire class decided that they would like to host a "Sharing our Difference" multi-cultural fair for the



university and for the local community.

The first part of each class was devoted to the student seminars. These seminars were of an exceptionally high quality. Students used a variety of media including guest speakers, film clips, novels, and music. They shared their own experiences of diversity to provide an insight into the lived experiences of their selected groups. A francophone student was a member of a group that led a seminar about Acadian people, and a Jewish student shared his experiences during another group's presentation about Jewish people. An Aboriginal student explained "smudging" and provided an opportunity for interested class members to participate in a smudging ceremony. Throughout the discussions, I was enormously impressed by the students' willingness to share personal experiences and take risks by acknowledging personal cultural biases.

The second part of each class took the form of a student-chaired business meeting to discuss the ambitious project that they had agreed to undertake. I was very impressed by the way in which students adhered to our classroom contract, respected the strengths of each other, and played roles that allowed them to use their personal skills. One of Bill's key roles was to keep us organized and on task. Renée decided that there was a potential for obtaining contributions from local businesses for refreshments and door prizes. I was allocated the task of trying to obtain grants from St. Thomas University and the Atlantic Region Anti-Racist Curriculum Fund. Students were learning about anti-racist social work, but they were learning about many other things as well. They were learning about cooperative teamwork, creating an environment of mutual respect, exploring and utilizing community resources, fundraising, and publicizing and organizing a multicultural fair.

The day of the fair arrived. Not one student complained about having to come to the university on Saturday. All accepted full ownership of their self-designed project. When the day ended, tired students and their instructor agreed that the event had been

hugely successful. We were delighted that approximately 200 different people from 20 different countries had participated in the event on a rainy day (which happened to be the day of the Fredericton Santa Claus Parade). The display booths, exhibitions, and guest speakers were first rate. The group of students who entertained the children witnessed their delight at watching the anti-racist puppet play which had been written by a previous anti-racist social work course (Clews, 2000b). Young and older participants gathered together to eat pizza and watch local people from different cultural backgrounds provide entertainment. Once more, I had proved to myself that if I have the confidence to provide a structure in which students can create their own learning experiences, their achievements and their learning will exceed anything I had imagined!

Reflections by the Students

Renée and Bill analyzed comments in the student reflections papers and discovered that although students had many different ideas about why the course was successful, there were distinct themes. Students spoke about success in creating a positive learning environment that enabled them to enhance their self-awareness about racism, gain knowledge about different cultures, and organize their time and efforts efficiently and effectively.

A major dimension of success was enhanced self-awareness. Students made the following comments to Renée and Bill:

The course allowed people to embark on a 'journey' of self-awareness and helped them identify gaps in their knowledge.

Students learned the value of not judging people on the outside but to look on the inside. Doing so will enable us to see that most of us have the same basic need: 'to be treated as respected citizens.'

The course challenged students to examine their own views

and ideologies. Some said that this was not always a pleasant experience as they learned that their long-held views were not always positive.

The course helped students increase their level of sensitivity towards other cultures as well as their comfort levels in interacting with other groups.

Students also commented on how their own knowledge, as well as the knowledge of participants in the multi-cultural fair had been enhanced. Some students were surprised to learn that people from so many different cultures lived in the local community. Others thought that the course was successful because it achieved the objective of bringing together many different cultures and points of view. They spoke positively about the fair.

The fair gave the participants (including the speakers and those who had booths) a chance to share their experiences and tell their stories. They welcomed the chance to educate the students and the community at large, even each other!

Many students were pleased that they had an opportunity to participate fully in the planning and development of the course.

The structure of the course was unique in that it did not follow the 'typical' course where the professor lectures and the students take notes. Instead the anti-racist course reflected an excellent approach where the students indicated what they wanted to learn. The course followed the experiential style of learning through student-led seminars where students and the professor shared information, research and experiences of interest to them.

The course was 'all encompassing' in that it provided an opportunity for students to learn and practice specific skills, including: group-work, event planning, seminar facilitation, community networking, and conducting research.

Students were impressed by the way that they organized themselves during the course and described a systematic structure that enabled them to achieve a great deal.

We established our objectives at the first meeting: our goal behind the event; target audiences among the community; and the key messages we wanted to convey through the event. As a result everyone in the group knew what we wanted to accomplish and, therefore, we all worked towards a common goal (this also resulted in a strong sense of group cohesiveness). And because WE set the objectives (rather than have them imposed on us), we were able to take ownership of the project. It was OUR project.

During each class we reserved time to have a 'business meeting' so that each group could update the class on what had been done to date and what we still needed to do.

During this course students learned ways in decision making by consensus in the social work theory course that could be applied in the anti-racist social work classroom setting.

No egos! Everyone was willing to share ideas but, at the same time, when someone came up with a better idea, people were able to let go of their original thought and accept the better one.

Renée and Bill concluded their analysis of student reflections as follows:

The course represented a new style of learning. It was practice-based rather than theory-based. Students learned by 'sharing ideas and learnings' such as through the student-led seminars and by 'doing' (organizing the multicultural fair) rather than simply learning and taking notes. The bottom line, however, is that this course taught students how to take action to combat a serious structural issue in our society, namely racism.



Conclusion

The course was an elective so students self-selected it. Therefore, probably students who were most resistant to exploring their ethnic biases were likely to opt for a different elective. Nevertheless, the students who did register were clear that they had explored personal biases that prevented anti-racist social work practice, and developed knowledge and skills that promote anti-racist social work.

Students' knowledge about other cultures and different experiences of racism was heightened by their project work and by some of my short lectures. We often discussed how racism was reflected in individual interactions as well as cultural assumptions and social systems that favour the dominant Anglophone white majority. We considered strategies and methods that can be employed by social workers to confront this racism. These discussions emanated

from the decisions students needed to make as they designed the fair and prepared for their presentations. They were alive and real. It is difficult to simulate such vitality from textbook study. As the course ended, my conviction that student-designed project work is an effective way of helping students to develop commitment, knowledge, and skills for anti-racist practice was enhanced.

Students cannot be persuaded to develop anti-racist social work knowledge and skills, but this course enabled participants to celebrate the diversity in ethnic background, skills, knowledge, and abilities in the classroom and community. They worked cooperatively to learn from this diversity. This learning experience was successful for both the instructor and the students. It was student directed, but in many ways it required more work than courses I have designed that are instructor directed. At the beginning of the course, I had a number of ideas about what we might do, but I allowed the students to decide what actually occurred. I had to think on my feet and do rapid research so that I could support students (or identify supportive resources) when they embarked on work that was unfamiliar to me. As with many successful courses, I am grateful to the students for helping me to learn as I facilitated their learning. My commitment to pursue anti-racist social work education has been enhanced. I hope, and I believe, that this successful learning experience will encourage the student participants to value ethnic and racial diversity and to be vigilant in identifying and challenging personal, cultural, and systemic manifestations of racism, oppression, and other forms of domination that they encounter in their practice.

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COMING HOME: AN ISRAELI-AMERICAN KIBBUTZNIK RETURNS TO THE GALILEE

By Shoshana Shonfeld-Ringel, LCSW, Assistant Professor, Western Michigan University
School of Social Work

The following article describes this author's return visit to her native Kibbutz in Israel after nearly two decades. The author visited at a time of severe crisis for the Kibbutz's societal foundations. She discusses her visit in the context of the history and philosophy of the Kibbutz. Several vignettes are included that illustrate the impact of this crisis on Kibbutz gender dynamics and on the elderly Kibbutz founders. The author concludes by describing the impact that her childhood in the Kibbutz had on her own personal and professional development.

I was born on an Israeli Kibbutz in the Galilee, near the Lebanese border. I left the Kibbutz as an adolescent in order to join my father in the United States following my mother's death several years earlier. Over the years I maintained sporadic contact with some of my classmates on the Kibbutz, but had not gone to visit for nearly two decades. I recently returned to find that the Kibbutz community had changed tremendously and was currently undergoing a profound social and economic crisis. In order to give you a context for my visit, I will begin with a brief historical and social overview of the Kibbutzim movement in Israel.

Overview

The Kibbutz movement began in Israel in the 1920's and 30's. The first Kibbutzim were founded as small communes that expanded, eventually reaching a few hundred members each as Kibbutz members started to have children. The Kibbutz's values were based on the traditional socialist ideals of social, economic, and gender equality. Everyone worked and contributed according to their abilities and received according to their needs (Maron, 1998, Rosner, 1998). Women enjoyed equal rights and, to insure that they would not be tied down by childcare and that children would have equal opportunities, children were raised communally (in the case of my

Kibbutz), since birth. In the early Kibbutz, the family unit was strongly de-emphasized and the group or the collective was the most powerful factor in everyday life. Individual needs were supposed to be set aside for the sake of the group. Although we, as children, enjoyed little personal privacy or time with our parents, all of us, as part of the communal socialist ideal, did receive equal educational opportunities (Plotnik, 1998, Adar, 1998, Spiro, 1979).



The Kibbutzim also served several important military and social functions for Israel. Many of them were built along hostile borders and thus provided a measure of fortified protection to Israel. They also served as a refuge for survivors of the Holocaust from Eastern and Western Europe and for Jewish refugees from other parts of the world, such as North Africa and the

Middle East. Although the Kibbutz was based on many important social and ethical values, as those values changed corresponding political and economic structures shifted. Over time and with changing needs of the Kibbutz society and of Israel, some of these early ideals no longer seemed feasible.

Some of the social changes the Kibbutz had to face were the growing importance of the family unit and the strong desire of second generation Kibbutz parents, especially women, to live with their children. As a consequence, communal child raising was eliminated in most Kibbutzim during the early to late 80's (Adar, 1998, Plotnik, 1998, Sagi et al., 1997). An additional problem was the rapidly growing aged population. When the Kibbutz was founded there were no elderly people, as the Kibbutz members left their own parents behind in Europe when they immigrated to Israel. However during the 80's and 90's the Kibbutz founders themselves became elderly, and the Kibbutz had to develop a new social model that would address this demographic shift (Leviatan, 1998, Maron, 1998). An additional issue was gender roles. Although in principle the Kibbutz was based on gender equality, in reality most Kibbutz women, daughters and granddaughters of their idealistic, pioneering (or Halutzim) mothers preferred to take care of their families and work in service branches rather than in professional or administrative capacities. Consequently gender roles in the Kibbutz became polarized along more or less traditional lines (Spiro, 1979, Adar, 1998). All of these social adjustments acquired new meaning when many Kibbutzim, including mine, experienced a serious financial crisis in the mid-80's due to Israel's rampant inflation, bad investments, and inefficient business practices. Suddenly the Kibbutz had to re-think its economic policies along profit-making, capitalist principles that contradicted much of its earlier socialist ideals (Getz, 1998, Leviatan, 1998, Rosner, 1998). These social and economic changes served as the backdrop for my visit.

The Impact of Communal Sleeping Arrangements

There is a rich and extensive body of research regarding the effect of the Kibbutz communal living arrangements on attachment patterns between children and parents, and on the Kibbutz children's self-concept and consequent ability to engage in intimate relationships. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine these studies in detail; however, it is relevant to my purpose here to briefly discuss some of these studies' findings as they relate to my own personal and professional development.

Several studies have examined the Kibbutz children's attachment styles in relation to those of the general population in Israel. Two studies, for example, found that Kibbutz children exhibit a higher rate of insecure/ambivalent attachment to their parents than the general population in Israel (Aviezer, Sagi, Joels & Ziv, 1999, Sagi et al., 1994). Some of the long-range findings are that disruptions in attachment behavior can have long-term impacts, such as lower self-confidence, a difficulty in establishing intimate relationships, and a decreased capacity for empathy. However, other studies found that Kibbutz children demonstrated resilience in that they were able to draw on other ecological factors to compensate for the lack of parental bonds, such as their peer group, teachers, caregivers, and the social milieu of the Kibbutz (Sagi et al., 1997, Howes et al., 1988). Several studies examined the impact of communal living arrangements on Kibbutz women. Two studies, for example, found that Kibbutz women showed lower self esteem and self confidence than women in the general population, despite their relatively high level of education (Orr & Dinur, 1995, Lobel & Agami-Rozenblat, 1993). Another study found that although there were no differences between Kibbutz children and children in the general population concerning their attachment to their fathers, there were significant indicators of disruption, or lower level of attachment, towards the Kibbutz mothers (Sagi et al., 1985, Sagi et al., 1994). These findings may have long range implica-

tions both in terms of the Kibbutz women's ability to mother and to develop their own cohesive feminine identity.

The impact of the Kibbutz communal sleeping arrangements on girls was particularly relevant to my own development and was clearly apparent in our social behaviors. We, the adolescent girls, did not want to be identified as overly feminine by wearing skirts and dresses publicly, or by wearing close-fitting outfits that would emphasize our developing bodies. To further disown our own feminine identities, or perhaps to compensate for our need for a closer relationship with our mothers, some of us, including myself, also became "tomboys." Thus, throughout my childhood and adolescence, the values and ethics of my Kibbutz environment had a profound impact on my gender identity and on my relationships with my parents and my peers.

Childhood and Adolescence

I was born on a Kibbutz that was founded during WWII. It was situated within the beautiful, hilly terrain of the West Galilee, not far from the Mediterranean Sea. Like many others at the time, both of my parents came to Israel as refugees from Poland and Romania after World War II. My father's family was killed in Poland, and my mother's remained in Romania. She came to Israel as a nineteen-year-old girl. When I was growing up, the Kibbutz boasted a successful agricultural economy, a factory for agricultural machinery, and a small mosaics factory. We, the children of the Kibbutz, were raised communally from birth and were taught to view the communal needs above our own. We were also taught to appreciate intellectual and moral values above material ones. Children, the future generation, were extremely important on the Kibbutz as well as in Israel as a whole following the Holocaust in Europe and the constant threat by Arab nations surrounding Israel. As a consequence of these social values, we received the best liberal education that the Kibbutz could provide. The ideal Kibbutznik was someone who was a scholar and an intellectual as well as a person who could perform

hard physical labor in the farming and production branches.

We were taught to handle responsibility at an early age and had to work at least four hours a day in the agricultural or service branches. When I was growing up, the ideal of gender equality in the Kibbutz was carried out to such an extreme degree that both girls and boys were encouraged to wear the same exact outfits: dark blue pants and shirts, frequently handed down from the older children. I remember that for my six-year-old birthday my mother saved her Kibbutz allowance and bought me a pretty silk dress. She wanted very much to have me wear it so she could send the photograph to her family in Romania. However, to my later regret, I absolutely refused, petrified of my classmates' reaction to seeing me in a dress.

I left the Kibbutz to come to the United States a couple of years before the rest of



my classmates went to serve in the Israeli army. My childhood and adolescence in the Kibbutz shaped me in profound ways, both personally and professionally. I believe that my later choice to become a social worker had much to do with the values and ethics that the Kibbutz instilled in me, such as social and economic equity for all and egalitarian gender roles.

The Visit

For diverse reasons, it took me many years to return to my old Kibbutz. After nearly two decades I finally decided that the time had come. As our car was approaching the Kibbutz, I felt simultaneously anxious and excited. In my memory I held vivid images of my parents' house, the children's house that I grew up in, and the hills and valleys surrounding the Kibbutz. But as my husband and I arrived I was surprised, saddened, and disappointed. The Kibbutz appeared small, old, and neglected. The children's house I was raised in seemed tiny and rundown. Is it possible that I really lived here? Instead of my parents' house, there was an abandoned lot, and much of the Kibbutz's gardens and lawns seemed dry or overgrown, very unlike the well-cared-for landscape that I remembered. I saw mostly elderly faces, women, and children, but it seemed that there were few adult men around. Some of my peers still lived there, but most, I was told, had left. The communal dining hall, our old social and cultural center, also appeared abandoned. It now served only lunch instead of the three meals a day I remembered. I felt both a deep sense of joy at my homecoming, and sadness at this apparent deterioration.

I spent the next several days talking with my old friends and other Kibbutz members. I was told that the communal child raising system came to an end during the 80's and that now all the children lived with their parents. The Kibbutz was undergoing a tremendous upheaval. As the family became a more predominant paradigm, communal life receded to the background and people no longer spent their evenings together talking and playing chess in the communal dining hall, watching a home-projected movie, or enjoying a visiting theatre company. I was told that the Kibbutz could no longer meet its financial responsibilities and pay its debts. In order to address this desperate situation, everything was going to be privatized and all Kibbutz members were going to start taking home their actual salary, rather than an allowance, to live on. In the future, the Kibbutz would take on much less responsibility for providing services such as heating,



food, and clothing. This change would create a potential division into economic as well as gender inequities, as most women worked in service branches on the Kibbutz while most men worked in production or outside the Kibbutz, earning a good salary. For example, one of my women friends, a single parent who was working in the mosaics factory in the Kibbutz, would make very little money. On the other hand another classmate, a man who worked outside the Kibbutz in a software company, would do very well. There seemed to be a lot of anger, resentment, and envy among the people I spoke with, disappointment in the Kibbutz's inept economic management and bitterness at having been apparently betrayed by one another.

The elderly Kibbutz founders I spoke with seemed to feel displaced and dispossessed. They had devoted their lives to the Kibbutz and now they felt that they had lost their identity as the Kibbutz founders and pioneers, cast aside by the younger generation. One of my friends told me a poignant story, a metaphor both for the older members' feeling of displacement and for their fierce love for the Kibbutz. A few years ago, a seventy-year-old poet, one of the Kibbutz founders, became sick. She felt that she was no longer useful to anyone and decided to end her life. She got up in the middle of a cold winter night, wearing only her pajamas, and went to lie down in a river valley near the Kibbutz, a beautiful, isolated spot that she had always loved. Her lifeless body was found the next morning. Her death seemed to be an apt metaphor for the way the older founders of the Kibbutz, now in their 70's

and 80's, saw their predicament and their present role in the Kibbutz society. Although they continued to work at least part time, they felt useless and forgotten as the younger generation on the Kibbutz was moving towards a way of life that negated their old ideals and beliefs. It was clear that bitterness and conflicts were now dividing the community, that the Kibbutz, as a community, was no longer able to overcome personal animosities and that its essence was about to be lost.

My friends' mother, a healthy, active, eighty-year-old woman who used to be the Kibbutz nurse, a central figure on the Kibbutz, told me another poignant story that also seemed to imply her feelings of uselessness and displacement. She recently flew to visit her son in the United States. In the middle of the flight, the plane started to wobble and the crew informed the passengers that the plane was having trouble and that they should start using the safety measures. My friend's mother, however, said that she wasn't afraid or nervous at all. She told her husband that maybe it would be a good thing for them to die in a plane crash, because then their children would be able to collect a lot of money from the airline companies and become rich. This vignette as she told it clearly illustrates that this woman, who was once such an important and productive Kibbutz member, now felt that she would be more valuable to her children dead than alive.

The Kibbutz and My Professional and Personal Development

As I stated previously, my formative years on the Kibbutz had a powerful influence in shaping my personal and ultimately my professional development. This was reflected in my lifelong desire to find a close association with a peer group, to seek out a communal environment, and to be engaged in a socially meaningful endeavor. At the same time, I have always had a deep need for privacy and to find my own personal spiritual sense of meaning, something that was missing for me in the Kibbutz (a strictly socialist and non-religious community). The

search for these sometimes conflicting agendas was reflected in my intense pursuit of a creative life (as an artist) and involvement in the spiritual movements of the seventies. These pursuits offered me both a private spiritual significance and a close-knit community.

This quest also played out in my professional career. I chose to become a social worker, a profession that offered a similar social justice agenda to that reflected in traditional Kibbutz values. Later on, my longest and most meaningful professional work was in the arena of counseling people with HIV and AIDS. This work offered me the opportunity to work within a close and dedicated community, isolated and apart from the larger New York milieu, which in some ways paralleled my earlier Kibbutz context. At the same time, working with people with HIV and AIDS also brought me in intimate contact with the question of life and death, existential meaning and spirituality. These issues were rarely discussed during my childhood and adolescence, perhaps because of the proximity in time to WWII and to the Holocaust. Maybe at the time these were issues that the adults on the Kibbutz wanted to forget, as they were too painful and too threatening to their newly forged identity as Israeli Kibbutzniks. My Kibbutz experience helped to shape my personality and later professional and personal choices in unexpected ways. I gravitated towards familiar group experiences but was also moved to explore spiritual and existential domains that were denied to me during my childhood and adolescence.

Conclusion

When I saw my Kibbutz again, I felt an intense joy, a deep sense of "coming home" that I hadn't experienced in a very long time. I re-connected with a sense of belonging not only to the community, but also to the mountains, the valleys and the woods that had remained so vividly imprinted in my memory. At the same time, as I left I also felt a deep sadness that this unique way of life that had shaped me seemed to be

vanishing. I was grateful that I was able to experience a very special childhood yet sad to see that the Kibbutz ideal had lost much of its original meaning. I was moved to realize, however, that the Kibbutz was still my home, that clearly I was still remembered and cherished by my old friends as a long lost family member. I realized that although the Kibbutz itself had fundamentally and irrevocably changed, some of its essential values still played an important part in who I am as a woman, a teacher, and a social worker, and would continue to inform my worldview, perceptions, and relationships with students and clients.

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SENSE - MAKING

By Paul Abels, Ph.D., Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach

"Let them eat cake"; No... let them smoke cigarettes!

Whether or not Marie Antoinette really said those infamous words, which fanned the French revolution mood, the story seems to be that the people didn't like her sentiment much. Even today, we believe that flippant remark by a powerful person was just a bit callous. As the world turns we are reminded of the maxim that those who forget the past are liable to repeat it. Like it or not, some persons, the "assessors," historically judged people by some type of cost benefit analysis, and they have not learned that most people don't like it.

Malthus, one of the early "assessors," claimed that the world would soon be in ruin because there were going to be too many people. He advocated that the aged, the poor, and the ill not be helped in any way.

"We are bound in justice and honor formally to disclaim the right of the poor to support...But above all, we should reprobate specific remedies for ravaging diseases; and those benevolent, but much mistaken men (could he be talking about us men and women?) who have thought they were doing a service to mankind by projecting schemes for the total extirpation of particular disorders. That to do so would be a crime against humanity." (T.R. Malthus, 1807 quoted in Chase, 1977, p. 6)

Few countries now admit to that kind of

thinking (except those that openly practice genocide or subjugation of minorities). Most countries attempt to practice a more humanitarian view; they try in some way to care for those in need. But occasionally, we are jolted by the reality that we are repeating the past. Someone has built a better mousetrap, so to speak, and we are caught up in it. Want to know how to get rid of some excess population and save money too?

This past week the world was informed that permitting people to smoke and die early was a benefit, at least a benefit to the Czechs. The New York Times on July 21, 2001, headlined a report "Czechs Debate Benefits of Smokers' Dying Prematurely." This report, written by Peter S. Green, might seem to us as lacking in sense making, but not if you are Phillip Morris, a corporation that controls 80% of the Czechs cigarette market and posted a profit in that country alone of \$82 million in the year 2000.

A report commissioned by the Phillip Morris Company declared that "smokers saved the state millions of dollars by dying prematurely." The report said public finances would save \$24.2 million to \$30.6 million from lower costs for health care, savings on the care of retirees and the costs of housing for the elderly as a result of the shorter average life spans of smokers. It then spelled out, line by line, the savings smokers brought the state in 1999 by dying early (N.Y. Times, July 27, p. 12).

There was outrage expressed by the Czech government, and by groups who were either anti-tobacco or just plain angered by

the grotesque and cynical approach to profit making.

Phillip Morris has since condemned the report, disavowing the ideas and stressing the evils it suggests, and stating it "exhibited terrible judgment as well as a complete and unacceptable disregard of basic human values" (N.Y. Times, July 27, p. c12). Wonderful- they may even use a few of those millions to educate Czech youth about the dangers of smoking.

Measuring the value of human life from a bookkeeping, cost analysis view based on profit is certainly not a new development. Slavery and the Holocaust are horrible examples. Less dramatic examples during the past half-century include an automobile company that avoided repairing dangerous gas tanks because the cost of settling law suits for injuries and death in such accidents was calculated as significantly less than recalling the cars and repairing them. We have had "ethicists" champion plans to limit the health care given to the frail elderly beyond normal maintenance and pain-relieving potions, as it would make health care much too expensive (Callahan, 1987). We have heard calls for "life boat ethics" in an effort to limit welfare services (Harden, 1947):

"Visualize the earth as a lifeboat, and imagine that the 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the water outside, asking for admissions to the boat or for handouts. How shall we respond to their calls?"

His answer:

"Future survival demands we govern by the ethics of a lifeboat." (Harden, 1947, quoted in Abels and Abels, 1979, p. 24)

These ideas are just modernized versions of the ideas that Malthus had promulgated. He proposed:

"Instead of recommending

cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits.... (cigarette smoking?) In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations." (Malthus, 1807 in Chase, 1977, p. 6)

But it doesn't take too much analysis to realize that persons without homes are more likely to suffer illness and higher death rates than those with decent shelter, or to understand that denying or delaying pre-natal care increases infant mortality and less healthy infants. It is startling to consider that those who know that the spread of HIV can be limited somewhat by distributing clean needles, but refuse that path on "moral" grounds, are in fact measuring costs in a way that supports Malthus' stand to "encourage contrary habits." The continued use of dirty needles? The cost is to the addict. Something similar may be occurring with the hierarchal opposition to stem research by limiting the public dialogue.

Social work has not escaped moral decisions imposed by the "assessors." Not only by submitting to decisions from health insurers and business oriented service providers, but by simple things—like setting limits on the number of sessions a client can miss before service is suspended—thus saying the cost to us is more important than service to difficult clients or clients who may have problems getting to meetings. There are life costs when we refer children to unsafe foster homes or to boot camps where they are often mistreated. Such decisions are moral decisions, and we make them thousands of times a day.

Roy Lubove noted, "Jane Addams of Hull House referred to the honest outrage experienced by many people who came into contact with them (Charity Organization Societies). When they see the delay and caution with

which relief is given, these do not appear to them conscientious scruples, but the cold and calculating actions of the selfish man”(Lubove, 1972, p. 11). While we have come a long way from the feuds between the Charity Organization Societies and the Hull House, there are still national conflicts and devastating consequences related to decisions about the deserving and undeserving. When it comes to smoking, needles, health research, and client needs, there should be no dispute. We should choose life.

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REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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The purpose of *Reflections* is to publish narratives, personal accounts that describe and explain the process of helping others and shaping social change over time. The journal seeks to build a literary tradition for critical study. It encourages stories that convey a sense of immediacy, portray practice across diverse populations, and capture the range and variety of strategies and systems within the helping professions. The journal publishes stories of professional helpers such as ethicists, psychotherapists, community organizers, case and group workers, policy makers, family and child practitioners, health and mental healthcare providers; educators, researchers, and administrators in the helping professions. Historical and contemporary narratives are encouraged.

Narratives should give readers a fresh perspective about the practice of change. Narratives explain and describe events; results; conflicts; complicating actions; and how, why, and what was done. In narratives, the writer evaluates the experience, whether or not there is a resolution, and explores the meaning of the experience. Some narratives end with a coda, a perspective on what occurred.

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California State University Long Beach
Department of Social Work
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90840-0902
(562) 985-4626
<http://www.csulb.edu/depts/socialwk/reflections>

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