

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



Volume 9, Number 1

Winter 2003

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

I have just returned from spending several weeks in India. Traveling through India was not really *being* in India, of course, because I saw India only through my own opaque lenses of cultural ignorance, privilege and confusion. As I moved around the country, I was struck by the diversity of the human population swelling into the apparent chaos of the urban and village streets, all spinning madly without discernible order. Animals and humans, brightly colored silks and the thinnest of muslin coverings, bicycle rickshaws, dogs and elephants, cars and camels filled the streets in whirl of movement and sensation. Not wanting to be an Orientalist* and consign India, as other Westerners have done before me, to a place of exotica, I strove to talk with Indians every chance I had. Of course there were many chances in a country of a billion plus people with very few tourists. The Indians I met were friendly and bemused by my own cultural attitudes, dress, behavior and limitations. As I talked with people it became clear that their views of themselves were far different than the views I held of them. Indians viewed the contradictions I saw—of scarcity and plenty, of gentle caring and stoic unconcern—as a consistent way of life. They likely would have seen contradictions in my way of life that equaled or surpassed what I experienced in their country.

Having digested an enormous assortment of books and essays about the country, its history, its people, its religions and its leaders, I nonetheless left uneasy with my complete inability to even begin to comprehend what I experienced. I can only *describe* these things: the richness and sense of extraordinary vitality

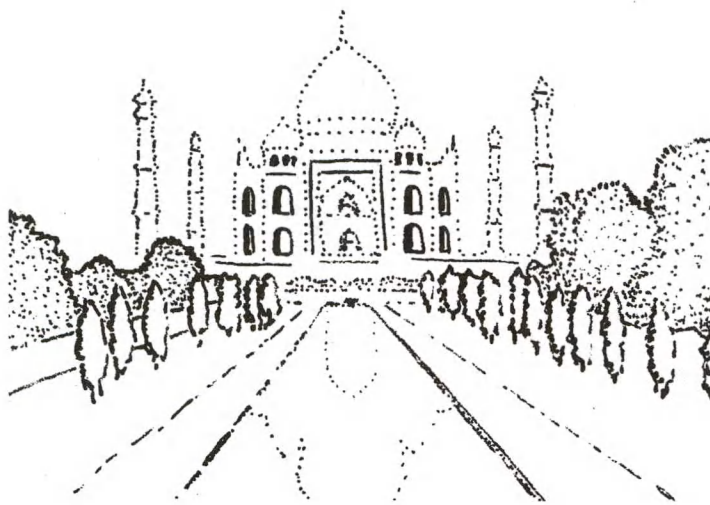
I sensed in family life, in the spiritual electricity that illuminated every village and town, in the riot of flowers and diversity of the presentations of self, including dress, facial decorations and jewels.

Of course the most important thing about travel to another culture is how such travel deepens our understanding of our place in the world. India reminded me that if I cannot understand the experience of persons from other cultures, neither can I understand the lived experiences or the perspectives of people in this country whose lives have been unmarked by the privilege that has shadowed my own. It reminded me that economic prosperity is only one measure of satisfaction, and that poverty is relative to the lives lived by others and the resources available in the places we find ourselves. Like the United States, India is characterized by inequality. Unlike the United States, you cannot escape the knowledge that people are poor, that some have no shelter, that many have little to eat, that most have no health care. In these matters India's hold on life seems precarious. In India there is no privilege of not knowing of the suffering of others: even the wealthy must see it as they drive through the streets.

In this country all those problems exist, but most of us do not see them. Is it because the suffering of people in this country is less? While the absolute level of poverty is less grinding in the United States, the fact that many live at the edge of misery and desperation cannot be denied. The major difference seems to me to be the invisible nature of the suffering in the United States. Since most of us do not see people who endure these privations, we

notice them only when they are pressed upon us. Only those dedicated to ameliorating human suffering, including social workers, physicians and nurses, experience human privation directly and routinely. This experience is itself a privilege, one that carries a heavy burden to respond—to be responsible. In the United States, unlike in India, economic resources are available that could wipe out a good deal of the human suffering caused by inequality, selfishness and ignorance. As David Gil reminds us in this issue of *Reflections*, the solutions to many of our problems are already known, and the will to act is the only element missing from our ability to ease the suffering of many. In this regard, Americans indeed are fortunate.

* Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.



Call for Narratives

SPECIAL ISSUE:

The Making of a Gerontologist: The Role of Intergenerational Relationships

This special issue focuses on the role that intergenerational relationships played in choosing a career in the field of gerontology. *Reflections* seeks to give a voice to gerontologists to describe how their interest in aging emerged.

Narratives:

- * Accounts by members of the helping professions about how a relationship with an older adult impacted their decision to become a gerontologist.
- * Narratives about an intergenerational relationship that impacted your professional development.
- * Narratives by retired members of the helping professions about the role of intergenerational dialogue in mentoring newer members to the professions.

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Manuscripts are due by: May 31, 2003

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

REVIEW OF *UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE THERAPY*

We are pleased that Agathi Glezakos in reviewing our book *Understanding Narrative Therapy*, (Fall 2002) felt it was "a significant addition to the existing social work literature," and plans to integrate the knowledge into her teaching and clinical work. We have always appreciated her teaching and writing. We wish to comment on three items in her review.

Dr Glezakos writes, "The founder of the theory on Narrative Therapy is Michael White, a family therapist in Australia, who identifies himself as a social worker. The exact nature of his professional credentials is unclear." She raises the same question of "other authors who are recognized as experts." Society holds certain "therapies" as privileged. A post-modern view would be less concerned with credentials and more concerned with helping approaches that treat clients with respect and dignity, that are grounded in our humanistic perspective, and that are doable and effective.

In another section of the review she notes about the authors, "They are critical of the profession's ongoing search for its identity and recognition, and of its struggle to 'create a unifying practice methodology'." It would be important to look at the section in the book from which her selected quote and her subsequent assessment of it as our being "critical" appears.

"The profession has struggled to explicate and translate into practice its primary concern to develop among the members three practice capabilities: (1) improve persons' quality of life and social relationships through the development of individual and community well being, competence, and mutual responsibility; (2) effectively support individuality, cultural integrity, diversity, equality, and social justice; and (3) secure the social environmental modifications and institutional supports in keeping with such developmental efforts.

The struggle to achieve these ends, that is to create a unifying practice methodology that will allow the profession to accomplish this very complex mission and its contract with society, is ongoing. The story of how the profession came to accept such a multifaceted social contract offers some clues as to the reasons it has been unable to unify itself and develop an overarching methodology."

Rather than being critical of the profession, we believe its story is still being told and that Narrative Practice provides one way of approaching its overarching methodology and unifying a profession with such ideal and diverse missions.

The only other point we wish to make is related to a statement in her concluding paragraph. She says "Narrative Therapy is not a revolutionary approach to helping' Please note her earlier statement. "Narrative Therapy is a new paradigm; as it introduces some new practice techniques. The use of the Reflective Team, the Virtual Group, Mapping the Problem, Relative Influence questions, and Regular Letter Writing by the therapist to the client..." She did omit one of the major ideas, Externalizing the Problem, but that aside, it might not be quite accurate to say this is not a "revolutionary approach?" What other practice is she aware of that incorporates those ideas? Since "revolutionary" has many meanings, and while we might argue for it being "revolutionary" in a radical sense, we will settle for narrative practice as being in a process of "evolution" and we welcome the suggestions she makes.

Paul and Sonia Leib Abels

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID GIL

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

On a Sunday afternoon in December I sat down with David Gil and his wife, Eva Gil, for an interview about his life and his commitment to social justice, equality, and non violence. David Gil was my dissertation chair and mentor while I was a student at the Florence Heller School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, at Brandeis University in the 1970's. He continues to be a professor at the Florence Heller School. He has been a profound influence on my life and on the lives of many students and dedicated social activists. He has a unique and compelling story to tell.

J Tell me about your childhood experiences and their role in shaping your beliefs and values.

D I was born in Vienna between the two great wars. I was born in 1924, which is 6 years after the peace of Versailles and I guess the situation in Austria was not simple after the war. Austria used to be a huge empire, I guess like the USA is today, and Vienna after the war was a capital without a country. It was reduced to 6 million; Vienna had 2 million. My parents married after the war. Housing was very limited at the time, so we lived with my father's parents and they all worked. They had a store. They lived in an apartment; they all worked together in a fairly large business. We had a comfortable middle class life style.

I don't think as a child I had a real understanding of what was happening and what was coming. We were not observant Jews. Being Jewish didn't mean too much except for 3 days a year, we went to synagogue. Other than that, being Jewish didn't mean too much except my grandfather was religious – he used to pray.

So anyway, I went to good schools, a private, elementary school and then I went to an elite high school—we called it a gymnasium—in central Vienna. I studied Latin and Greek and all the intelligent subjects: history, science. And then when I was not yet 14, Vienna was taken over by the Germans and suddenly everything changed. When the

Germans took over it was a weekend, Saturday, March 13, 1938. The following Monday I couldn't go back to school. Hitler took over and I could no longer go to the school I had been going to.

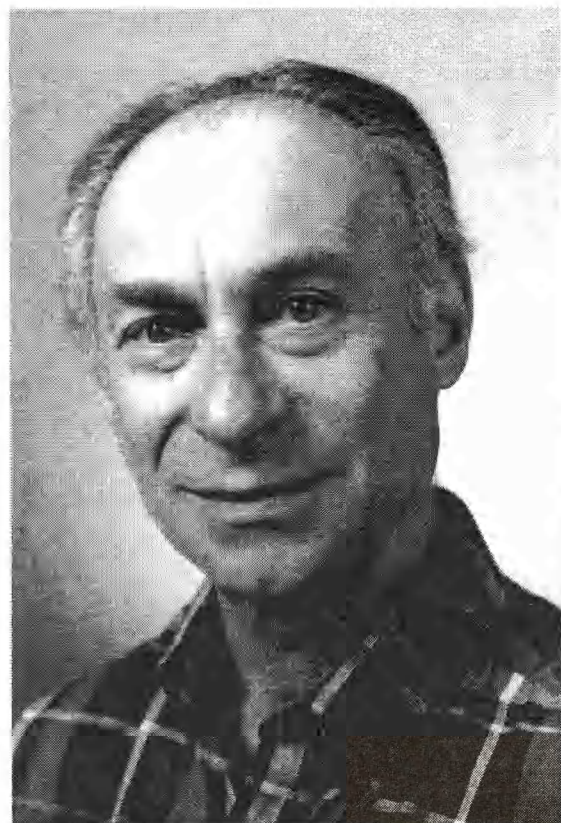
J Why?

D Why? They didn't want Jewish kids

J And you knew that right away?

D Within a day or two they had a school for Jewish children in a different part of town. So at that point I began to realize the meaning of being Jewish. Now I guess three months after the Germans took over my father was arrested and was sent to a concentration camp, Buchenwald. And at that point mother took over running everything. Her efforts were to get a place where we could go as a family, because at that time the policy of the Nazis was not yet extermination. They wanted the Jews to leave. The tragedy was there was no place for them to go. Nobody wanted them.

So my father was arrested and I



remember, you know, the famous knock on the door in the evening. Two came in—in civilian clothes—they told him to come with them and of course he left. Then mother tried to get a place where we all could go but she wasn't able to do that. We had meanwhile lost the store; it was taken over by – well it was “arianized,” and our guess is the guy who wanted the store had apparently been a factor in my father being arrested, but we don't know this for sure.

When my mother wasn't able to get us a place together, she tried to get the children out. My brother is a year older and under the rules of British Palestine he could go there directly. I was too young, so I went to Sweden.

J What was the rule?

D You had to be 15 years old to go with the youth immigration scheme to Palestine.

My mother was able to get a place for me on a children's transport to Sweden.

J She saved your life.

D Well, she saved everyone. She took me to the railroad and that was the last being close to her—you know, touch, kiss, and hug. And I left, and she stayed, and was continuing to try to get her husband out. And she succeeded eventually to book transit on an illegal transport to Palestine.

J For her and her husband?

D Her and her husband.

J What a powerful woman.

D Yes.

J She got him out of Buchenwald!

D After I left she wrote to me twice a

week and I had kept all these letters, and 50 years after the Nazi take over, the city of Vienna published these letters. We saw a notice in the *New York Times*. They were looking for material for a memorial and I wrote and asked if they would be interested in these letters. They were very eager to get them. So all these letters cover a period from 1939 through 1941. Mother died in 1941 in a British concentration camp. You see when they came to Palestine on an illegal transport, the British caught them and they were supposed to be deported to a British colony in Africa, when the Jewish underground blew up the boat—the *Patria*.

J Why did they blow it up?

D To prevent them from being deported.

J What did they think was going to happen to the people on the boat?

D Well, you know military planners have a particular calculus—they figure if they save 90% that's a good outcome. Two hundred people were killed and there must have been 2000 on that boat. My parents swam to shore and were caught there by the British and were put into a camp—an internment camp for illegal immigrants. I was able to see my mother there once. There were barbed wires for the people in the prison and the visitors were at a distance behind another set of barbed wires, so we were screaming at each other.

J That's the only time you saw your mother?

D Yes, that's the only time, because a few months later she died of typhoid in the camp.

J I'm sorry.

D Well anyway, I was in Sweden in 1939

and trying to make sense out of what really didn't make much sense—this traumatic transformation. What I had figured out at that time already was that it wouldn't be any better whether this happened to German kids or to any kid—it shouldn't happen to anybody. The question is not retribution but how to get out of this cycle of violence. These ideas I developed the first year I was away from home. I was fortunate to read the biography of Gandhi at that time—for some reason that came into my hands and was very important. The other important book I read at that time was Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*¹.

J You read that at 15?

D I was 15.

J Who were you with in Sweden?

D I was with a group of kids like me and we worked on farms. I took care of cows—40 cows!

J How peaceful.

D It was peaceful. You can dream and think when you clean them and it's warm in the cowshed. It's an opportunity to think and figure things out.

In Sweden I developed a position of non-violence as the way out of violence. You can't solve problems that are the product of violence by counter violence—you have to find ways beyond that interaction.

I got to Palestine a year later—when I reached 15 I could go to Palestine. There was no longer any thought of the family being together. My brother already was in Palestine in a kibbutz. I got to Palestine in March 1940. My parents arrived in late 1940. When I got to the kibbutz, one of the first things there is that you are inducted into the underground and after a little while I decided that wasn't for me. That (the underground) was directed

as a defense and an offense against Palestinians and it didn't seem right to me.

J So the underground was against the Palestinians and not the British?

D Well, it was also against the British, but primarily it was part of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict.

After a while I let them know that I wanted to quit. And that created some problems because the people who were responsible for the underground thought I knew too much and they were afraid that I would betray them. We learned years later that I was supposed to be executed and that the guy who was our youth counselor saved me.

J How did he save you?

D By assuring them he would watch me, but I didn't know this at the time. But I did leave the group in the kibbutz and went to live on the farm of a pacifist and there I learned a good bit more about the philosophy of war resistance—non-violence.

The next problem was I refused to go in the army and therefore I couldn't get work. I was working on different farms as a day laborer, every day some other job.

J Tell us about the army.

D When I was of army age you were expected to go into the British army. That was in 1942-1943. So I did all kinds of work, worked for a bookbindery and I learned printing.

J Where was your father?

D My father had gotten out of the camp; he was living in Israel. I visited him and he came to visit when I was still in the kibbutz.

When I refused to go into the army—in order to get work you had to have evidence

that you had done your duty by the army—it was very difficult to get work. I did get a job in a home for wayward children. I got this job because I had become involved in a peace movement around Martin Buber² the philosopher, and with one of the people with whom I had become kind of close, a professor at the Hebrew University, Ernest Simon. He got me that position in the home for delinquent children. So I was sent there. I had no formal education; I mean I stopped formal education when I was 14. I got to this place and there was supposed to be a woman and a man for 30 kids and the woman who was to be there with me left after a week. I was responsible for 30 and it was a young group, 12-14, and I was 19. Now the problem there was that the headmaster believed in corporal punishment and I didn't, so one of the results was that my place developed into a jungle because the kids were used to corporal discipline and I told them I wouldn't do that. So they were testing out how far they could go until I would break down and beat them up! I held out (I think I had read Makarenko's book—a Soviet educator who had run a children's home right after the revolution. It's a beautiful book—he believed in self-government for the kids)—that influenced me but also my pacifist position.³

It was very interesting. The kids after a while, when they realized they couldn't get me to beat them up, started to organize the house. It was never a clean, perfect place, but it was quite livable—it wasn't worse than the others.

I also became involved in challenging the headmaster's method. He was a pediatrician and he knew how to torture kids without killing them (illustrates by pulling his thumbs up under his chin).

We began organizing, another educator and I, and we went to the press to tell these stories. The difficulty was that the headmaster's brother was the head of the Jewish Welfare Services. It wasn't easy to get rid of the headmaster, but we did, except that the one that came afterward wasn't much better.

J That's a parallel to U.S. presidential elections (laughter).

D I worked there for 2 years and then I was offered a position as a probation officer. The problem there was I was too young—by law you had to be 25 and I was 21. So I went to the head office in Jerusalem to talk with the British chief and to get an exception. The lucky thing was he was a British Quaker so he was kind of impressed by my story, so I got the job as a probation officer. I got that job and I got her on that job (gesturing to his wife, Eva). She came to work there the year after I did. So anyway, I worked there under the British. I met Palestinians and we became friends.

That was during the war years. The war was over in 1945 and Israel came into being in 1948. I was working as a probation officer when Israel took over. And as soon as Israel was established there was the first war with the surrounding countries. I belonged to a peace movement with Buber, who advocated against the establishment of Israel. We advocated for a bi-national commonwealth with equal rights for both peoples.



David Gil in a kibbutz in Palestine, 1941.

J I guess not many people at that time thought much of the idea of a bi-national state—it was pretty radical.

D It was the intelligentsia in the university who supported it.

J Wasn't there a great deal of pressure to have Israel as its own state for the right of return after what happened during the War?

D The idea of the bi-national state didn't mean the Jews couldn't return. It just meant that they would live together with Palestinians in the same state. That movement was an old movement from the early times of the Jewish settlement—there were peace efforts back then.

J And you advocated a bi-national state before 1948?

D Yes, I still advocate that. It's my position that this country is too small for two national units—there ought to be a federation or something—it ought to be an economic unit even beyond Palestine, which should include Jordan, probably in an economic system. But if you divide it, it always means that each side puts its resources into the military to fight for every inch.

J Now, could you imagine this solution with the anger and the desire to arm?

D Not as an immediate step; as an immediate step you could have a Palestinian state and then a federation. The model is Switzerland, where the Italian and the French are not in love with one another but they have learned to live together as one federated nation.

J Do you think a Palestinian state is still a viable idea given their desire to arm? What

is the future now?

D There is in fact a Palestinian state but it is occupied. The issue now is to get the occupying army and the illegal settlements disbanded. Of course there would be nothing wrong to have Jewish settlements in the Palestinian state, just as there are Palestinians in Israel, but they would have to accept the Palestinian state and be citizens of that state if they want to live there. Probably the immediate solution is for a good many of these settlements to be evacuated. And you know the latest development is that the labor party had a primary and the guy who was elected advocates unconditional peace negotiations. He advocates the withdrawal from the Gaza strip and withdrawal from some settlements on the West Bank and immediate negotiations with the Palestinians. So sooner or later that will happen.

J It may, since it's already in the political discourse. It must be very hard for you to see all this carnage and hatred in Israel and Palestine, having lived there.

D It's horrible, but you have to say the same for Africa and Latin America. You see all nations operate on the paradigm of power, rather than on the paradigm of human unity, human dignity, as citizens of one planet. But what goes on in Palestine/Israel is no different than what goes on in Rwanda, what happens between Moslems and Hindus.

J The whole thing is beyond comprehension.

D The whole thing doesn't make sense. On both sides you have extremes—fanatics, religious fanatics.

J Okay let's get back to you—you are working in the probation office. Israel became a state in 1948. You were already married,

and then what happened?

D Well, there was a call up into the army. You know you go. The first thing you do is go to a swearing in ceremony. You line up everybody on the parade ground. And to indicate your agreement, your loyalty, you step forward. Well I remained standing.

J Did you know you were going to do that?

D No, I didn't know—there was a call up and I went and when they said that, I decided I could not go that far. So they arrested me and I spent a few days in jail. And then the commander called me in and I told him my story and he was understanding, so we worked it out so that I would do social service for army families. I did not know what was going to happen; at the time there was no such thing as conscientious objector status or anything like that.

J (To Eva) Did you know he was going to do that?

Eva No. I remember I found out on my birthday. They came and told me he was in jail.

D And after about two years I went back to the probation department and applied to study social work at the School of Social Work in Jerusalem. I got a certificate in social work. I decided I had to leave the country to get more social work education.

J Why leave the country to do that?

D Everybody did—some went to England. I thought of going to the London School of Economics, but I got in at University of Pennsylvania and we went there. I picked the University of Pennsylvania because they emphasized functional method as opposed to

the diagnostic, medical model method. I had been in psychoanalysis in Tel Aviv and didn't want to study that again.

J Why were you in psychoanalysis?

D Everybody had to undergo it in the probation department—it was a condition of the job.

In Pennsylvania we made a lot of close friends. We met other people from the left, including members of the Communist party, Quakers, and social activists. It was while I was in the United States that I began to understand the dynamics of U.S. foreign and domestic policy and began to see its destructive role in the world. On the other hand, we enjoyed the openness in the U.S. Here you can find people with any orientation. When we lived in Israel, anyone not an enthusiastic supporter of Israeli policy had very little space. Here there was freedom of thinking, expression and association. Of course we shouldn't take it for granted. Now we are in a phase of reduction of these freedoms. Also it depends on who you are; minorities have less freedom than others.

But we made good social connections in the United States and felt we wanted to come back. But we had to go back; we had a commitment to the government. When I went back I also went to Hebrew University to get the bachelors degree because at Penn they told me you couldn't get the master's degree until you have the bachelors. So I did the bachelors in two years.

I was back in Israel and I worked all over the country as assistant director of probation services and then the kids were born in Tel Aviv in 1957. We came back here to settle in October 1957 and I had a position waiting in Philadelphia in the agency where I had trained, Jewish Family Services, and I went back to school for the doctorate.

J I assume you elaborated your interest

in peace, equality and social justice in your doctorate, or were your ideas pretty well formed by then?

D I don't think that social work education meant very much.

J To you, or in general?

D I would say in general.

J Then, or now?

D Always (laughter). That's something I am going to talk about in Taiwan, because they want me to talk about welfare reform and my point is there is no welfare system unless there is an ill fare system to which the welfare system is an inadequate response. But the real issue is socially structured injustice, domination, exploitation and what the welfare system does is very inadequate corrections with no focus on causes. I don't think in my education in school that I was ever helped to understand the social realities to which we are supposedly to respond. And when you can't understand the causes, you can't do anything to prevent the perpetuation of these conditions. So I would say that social work education doesn't deal with social issues, it deals with some of the symptoms of social issues, but it's not like public health, which has to prevent illness rather than cure. And at Penn there was no focus on prevention in a deep sense—the root focus.

All that they teach in schools of social work is how to reduce the intensity of suffering that the system generates. Even when we had the war on poverty it was a fraud. The poverty gap was 10 billion; they spent two billion, of which one billion went to places like the Heller school to count and observe poor people. So we won that war!

J Two billion dollars a month from 1967 to 1972 on the Vietnam War and three billion

dollars period on the War on Poverty!

D Actually, I don't say I didn't learn anything, but I didn't learn anything about what really is important. I did learn certain techniques. I did a dissertation to develop a follow up system for children in foster care. It doesn't deal with the question of how you prevent foster care. It's the same with the whole child abuse system, which becomes activated after the fact—once a child is abused. Now we know what we would have to do to prevent child abuse. As I told [Senator] Mondale, when he had his Child Abuse Prevention Act, when I testified, "Sir, you have to change the title of the act; this is not prevention. We are lucky if it ameliorates suffering after the fact. It doesn't prevent a damn thing." We know what to do in order to prevent it: full employment, stable income, adequate housing.

So anyway I got through Penn, got my degree and then I worked for a year for the Massachusetts Society to Prevent Cruelty to Children.

J How did you happen to move to Massachusetts?

D I got the job.

During the year I worked there, my article on my dissertation was published in *Child Welfare*.⁴ Within a week we had five job offers. It was a very different time; there were very few people in social work research. I had done a research dissertation.

I didn't know which job to pick. We went to Wayne State—we brought the whole family to look the place over. We almost agreed to come to Wayne State, but the Dean said there were some budget problems. They said they should know in a week. Then I called David French at Heller to consult. He was one of the first faculty there. He had helped me with the job in Boston with the Massachusetts Society

Eva That was my idea. I said, "Call him and talk it over with him and see what he says."

D So I called him he told me, "Don't do anything for one half hour—I'll call you right back." So within an half an hour he calls back—he must have talked to Charles Shottland. The Heller school at that time was a highly prestigious outfit—the only place with a Ph.D. program and no masters program. And I never thought this was something I was ready for—that they would consider me. Now you have to know what is behind the scene.

The school had got a grant from the U.S. Children's Bureau to start a child welfare training program and at the last minute the guy ran off to Africa with the United Nations—a job

he liked better—so they were stuck. They either had to return the money or they had to construct somebody to take the position. So when I called, I had child welfare experience and a child welfare dissertation and he said, "Would you consider coming to Heller?" I didn't know any of this and had no experience with academia, and so I said, "Yeah, but you have to make up your mind this afternoon because I have to answer to these other guys!"

J What timing you have.

D So by the end of the day I had a two-year appointment.

J You didn't have to move. Heller was more prestigious than Wayne State!

D So when I got this job in 1964, the first thing I did was go to Washington. I wanted to know what was their concept of child welfare because I knew child welfare was a

mess, and I wasn't going to teach people that kind of nonsense that goes on in child welfare agencies. I asked the grant officer, "What do you want me to do in the child welfare training?" They had no idea. So I said, "Do you want me to prepare people to work in the child welfare system as it now operates?" They said, "Yes, that's it."

I said, "Suppose the way the child welfare system works is not good for children?"

J What did they say then?

D At the end of that conversation it was agreed that I would do anything that is right for children, which means income, housing, family stability, and what we know is right for children. Not to wait until they are in placement and they have been pushed from one foster home to the next. I wasn't willing to teach that. So anyway we agreed on that and I began to develop the program at Heller. Before long I got a call from the research division at the Children's Bureau: "Would you like to do a nationwide study of child abuse?"

J They must have really liked you at that meeting!

D You see, it was very different than today. Today if you want to do research you have to apply. At that time they applied to you—do you want to do this research?

J You came along at the right time.

D I said, "Yes, I'll do this study." I began setting it up and then the word got around that Brandeis got this grant that over several years involved half a million dollars, which at that time was a lot of money. So once the word got around that we had that grant, I got a call from the School of Public Health at Harvard; would I want to come there? So I got this letter from the School of Public Health. I just copied the letter and sent it to Charlie

All that they teach in schools of social work is how to reduce the intensity of suffering that the system generates.

Shottland and said, "Charlie what do you suggest I do?" So I got tenure at the Heller School.

J Just like that?

D Just like that, after two years.

J It's a good thing you got tenure before they really got to know your thinking!

D So I did that study and essentially turned the whole field upside down because the assumption at that time was the medical perspective: it is sick parents who abuse their children. I said most abuse is poverty, life stress, and unemployment.

J That's been upheld over and over again—the importance of poverty. A recent study by HHS found that controlling for income, there are no ethnic differences.

D There are ethnic differences. Look, if you take a people for two hundred years and expose them to violence, and don't enable them to return that violence it erupts against themselves. The reality of slavery and post slavery and the continuation of conditions of discrimination.... A Black family has the same stresses as the white family does and a good many more. If you just take economics, the poverty rate is 3 times as high, so that the consequences of poverty will be three times as high.

J Controlling for economics is somewhat specious, because in fact there are great differences among ethnic groups.

You shifted the paradigm. You are the first person who took into account these wider economic factors.

D You see you have to be careful, I am not saying poverty causes child abuse, but poverty reduces the ability to control oneself

—it's a stress.

J Poverty is also associated with high homicide, suicide and alcoholism rates, which are all related to stress.

D Yes. At that time I didn't have a theory of violence which I developed much later. But briefly that theory says when development is blocked by needs frustration, the constructive developmental energy is transformed into destructive energy which then results in destructive behaviors against others and one's self: suicide, mental illness, escape, drug addiction. All these are what I call "counter-violence." The real violence is not what we say it is. Violence is the state maintaining structural injustice and when that blocks development, the developmental energy is displaced and transformed into destructive and self-destructive behaviors.

D I went from this study into a deeper study of policy and of violence and that led to the development of the theory of social policy and a theory of violence.

Meanwhile I was teaching and teaching became increasingly focused on understanding the dynamics of oppression from the local to the global scale. And of course with this comes a critique of capitalist economics and culture, and the realization that if you want answers they cannot be found within the culture of capitalism. So much of the teaching is an elaboration of that theme.

J That's what my teaching is, as well. When you're teaching, are you ever stopped in your mind by the realization that few students will ever make that idea their own and proceed with it in a fundamental way in their lives—that they might get an insight and say, "Oh yes, I see that," but that's where it ends? Does that ever stop you?

D The students I have worked with and

I am touch with, I know that this message is not lost. I have large numbers of students in St. Louis at the [George Washington] School of Social Work. I have been back there for 27 years and the students keep coming. Every now and then you meet people who remember.

J I think you've made a much bigger impact than I have. If I am totally dedicated to giving this message for 16 weeks to 30 students, possibly 10 will take it seriously and maybe 3 will want to do something about it when they graduate with their MSW.

D You are realistic. We are fighting a condition that has come about over 10,000 years. Because the last 10,000 years, ever since agriculture surplus, there have been variations on the theme of domination and

exploitation, whether you call it feudalism or you call it slavery or you call it capitalism, these are variations on the theme. There's a dominant class and there are dominated classes and they are dominated not for the fun of it, but for their work potential.

They are exploited. Exploitation I define as social-structural permanent imbalanced exchanges. The master gives little and gets a lot, and the slave gives a lot and gets little. That we have done for 10,000 years. How can this be overcome? What's the strategy of changing it? I would say that the only strategy that can change it is the transformation of consciousness of large segments of populations. To overcome it through an armed uprising is an illusion. I don't doubt the good intention of armed revolutions, they are very committed and dedicated people and they are ready to sacrifice their lives, but when the people are not ready you cannot get a real

transformation.

J So one of the roles we have as educators is to get people ready.

D To develop critical thinking, critical consciousness and the guy that perhaps wrote best about it is Paulo Friere.⁵

J How has it been to work at Brandeis?

D Brandeis is not a problem. I have been to two teach-ins on the situation in Iraq. These were organized by students. The faculty organized a teach in but their differences were differences in tactics. They never spelled out their assumptions. Their implicit assumption is that the United States ought to be the dominant power in the world and anybody who dares to challenge the United States, it's our right and our mission to stop them. And the good thing about the current government is that they honestly admit this.

J What is the role for radical social workers today?

D To use their practice context to help people discover the underlying reality of their deprivation. Instead of finding something wrong in the people, help them find what's wrong in their realities to which they then respond. That's a different paradigm for social work. Instead of blaming the victim and finding something wrong with the people with whom you work, help people with whom you work find what's wrong in reality. Help them discover that reality is the work of people and not of gods and that they can organize with other people to change their reality, just as people maintain this reality. But you also have to show people that reality is not something out there, it's something that is created every day by what you and I are doing.

J Berger and Luckman⁶ changed my life.

The real violence is not what we say it is. Violence is the state maintaining structural injustice and when that blocks development, the developmental energy is displaced and transformed into destructive and self-destructive behaviors.

You gave me that book to read and I have never thought about things in the same way since.

D Exactly. As long as people conform to the expected patterns, we perpetuate the mess.

J How have your personal relationships supported your work, and been a source of strength?

D One source of strength from my colleagues is to do what they don't do and not to do what they do. You come to my class, there are no requirements, there are no exams, there are no grades. There is no teacher control.

Eva Like in the children's home.

D There is an experience in freedom, there's a liberated space. And I know about that space by having been a victim in a non-liberated space. And I continue to be—the university is not a free space. Especially since neither students nor faculty want to transform it into a free space. When you were in school, we didn't have comprehensive exams. We had a substantive paper, which was a good thing, because you decided what you wanted to do it on. They introduced exams. I said to students, "You don't like it, don't take it. The faculty is more dependent on you than you are on the faculty." And if they really had collectively said, "We don't want these exams" they couldn't have been implemented.

J What do you see as the most significant contribution in your life thus far?

D Mine? I got married (laughter). Well, I certainly would say the theory of social policy systems, the theory of violence, and the theory of liberation strategy.

J And from my perspective, I would have to say all the people you have influenced and who have gone and done their own work. How do you sustain a life as a dissenter and all the loneliness that accompanies that life?

D Well, first of all you don't have to be lonely. We created a radical social work support group. You need support groups—you cannot remain alone. You need to work with people who are similar and have a similar worldview and goals. And you have to come together with them and have a setting where you can examine your effectiveness in political terms.

J What makes you hopeful for a just society in the United States and across the world?

D Hopeful? I don't want to waste time worrying whether I am an optimist or a pessimist. I work towards that alternative way of life in my classes, in my conversations. It's entirely possible that the human species has gone too far and we will destroy ourselves. Gramsci used to say, "Pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will."¹ If you analyze what goes on, you can't say it looks hopeful, but instead of constantly pointing out how hopeless it looks, do your part to change it. Get others to do it.

J Thank you, David, for sharing the story of your life and your commitment with *Reflections'* readers. You have re-inspired me to deepen my commitment to the work of social justice and social change.

¹ Peter Kropotkin. *Mutual Aid: A Fact of*

Evolution. Boston: Extending Horizon, 1956.

New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

²Martin Buber. *Between Man and Man*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

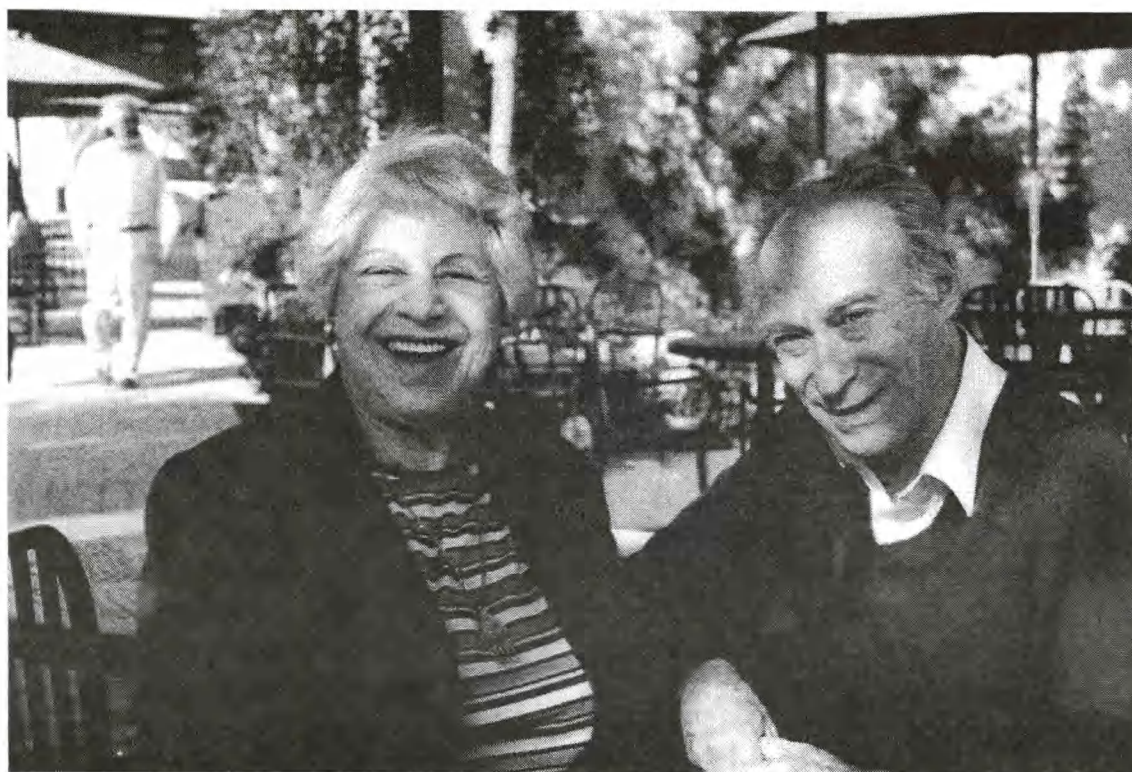
⁶Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.

³Anton Makarenko. *The Road to Life: an Epic of Education*. Translated from Russian by Ivy and Tatiana Litvinov. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951.

⁷Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from Cultural Writings*. Eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Translated by William Boelhower. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

⁴"Developing Routine Follow-up Procedures for Child Welfare Services," *Child Welfare*, Vol. 43, No. 5, May 1964.

⁵Paula Friere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.



David and Eva Gil, December 2002.

WOMEN ON THE INSIDE: A YEAR OF PAINTING WITH WOMEN IN PRISON

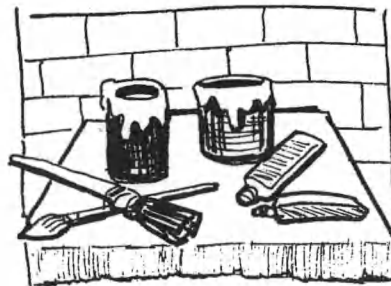
Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, Ph.D., University of Iowa

The following is a chronology of the author's experience as an artist in residence in a women's prison. The purpose of this narrative is to illustrate how this experience changed the focus of her research. This experience shaped the author's views on teaching, collaboration, and the importance of constructive, positive programming in women's prisons.

Each week I go to prison. I go there not as an offender, but as an artist in residence and researcher. Almost all of the prisons I have worked in have been for women. This work has changed my life, teaching, thoughts on collaboration, and view of the importance of art and community. When I started in 1993, I had no idea that a small volunteer opportunity would become such a meaningful, extended experience.

Now, almost every Monday, I drive 96 miles to a women's prison in the middle of Iowa. I started driving to and working at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) over two years ago. Before I moved to the Midwest, I worked with incarcerated women in Florida. I drove sixty miles to Jefferson Correctional Institution, a large women's prison in Monticello from 1993 until 1997, to teach art classes. While collecting data for my dissertation in 1998 and 1999, I drove six hours each Thursday to Taycheedah Correctional Institution in Taycheedah, Wisconsin. These long drives have become part of my research. On most of these drives I think about things that are pressing: I work out problems or ideas, and I think about the women whom I am going to visit. Their voices are often the ones that I think about the most. When I leave the prison, these drives are like a coda at the end of each experience. I have used them to try to analyze the events of the evening, my feelings about my experience at the prison, and my life as a young assistant professor.

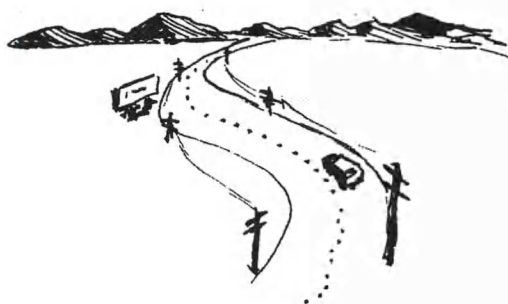
It is not surprising to me that life skills are an inherent component in most arts in corrections programs. The success of this combination is what drove me to continue my



work in women's prisons and to finish my doctorate in art education. My previous academic education was strictly in painting and drawing. While working at a prison as an artist in residence, I found that through the act of creating a visual image women could build their self-esteem, gain skills they could later use to earn a living inside and outside of the prison, and discover a way to reach beyond the prison to their family and friends through the gift of something handmade.

There has been little research on the arts in prison. Most scholars that do approach this subject are psychologists, art therapists, artists, criminologists, art collectors, or critics (Brandreth, 1972; Cleveland, 1992; Durland, 1996; Fox, 1976; Gibbons, 1997; Harrington, 1997; The Home Office Standing Committee for Arts in Prison, 2001; Kornfeld, 1997; Liebmann, 1994; Maizels, 1996; Williams, 2000, 2001). Studies have shown

that arts in corrections can reduce recidivism, create a decline in violent incidents within the prison, aid in the teaching of new vocational skills, improve literacy, reduce stress and tension, build a climate of community support, and improve overall mental and physical well-being (Durland, 1996, Gibbons, 1997; Harrington, 1997; Liebmann, 1994; Williams, 2000). While all of these things are motivating, they are only a small part of the reason that I continue to work with women in prison. Working with these women has become an integral part of my daily life. I look forward to seeing them and to hearing about their lives. I look forward to our camaraderie and to our small accomplishments each week. Most of all I look forward to the weeks when I learn that some are going home. After that I look



forward to their phone calls, especially the calls when they tell me that they are doing well.

This narrative account is the story of the most recent project at ICIW. Most of it was mentally written while driving home at night from ICIW. The story itself is interspersed with the voices of incarcerated women talking about not only the project, but also aspects of their lives. I do not use their real names because of principles related to confidentiality and because many of them have children and will return to their lives after their sentences are over. They do not want the residual stigma of incarceration to haunt them forever. This article ends with the beginning of some ongoing reflections about working in prisons and working with women.

I have tried to use the structure of a journal in order to depict the chronology of the project and also of my interactions with the women. This chronology is approximate and most of what I have written is based on my memory, tape recordings, and a small collection of written notes. This account is written using the present tense because I found that it was more appropriate when I began to decipher my notes, transcribe my tapes, and sift through my memories. In writing this account I hoped to gain some insight to my experience and motivation and to give a glimpse of prison work to others who may wish to pursue similar endeavors.

The Mural Project: Working with Women of Strength

April 2000

This is my Monday routine... driving to the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) in Mitchellville, Iowa, listening to National Public Radio, and eating Starlight Mints for 96 miles. Mitchellville is a rural town with a population of 1,670. I am not sure if this number includes the 400 women incarcerated at the prison. I am nervous because I have a meeting with Kelly from the Arts Council and a woman at the prison who is going to help me gather data related to a program evaluation for Heartland Collaborations, an arts-in-corrections program that has three sites across Iowa. ICIW is hosting the dance program. On the way to meet Kelly at the prison, I keep eating Starlight Mints to distract me from thinking about what I am going to say to this new person. I am nervous because I need the help of the already overworked prison staff to collect a large quantity of data. The woman that Kelly is introducing me to will oversee this process. My teeth are beginning to feel fuzzy.

I have been going to ICIW for over a year to collect data about the arts in prison

culture. Working as a researcher I often find that in the early stages of data collection, the staff is generally distrustful and sees me as a general nuisance and a warm body that they have to monitor. ICIW seems different from most of my experiences, though. The administrator of the prison is new and is a woman. She seems very progressive and concerned about the women in the prison. Her presence has made a real difference in the atmosphere of the institution.

Even though I am familiar with most staff members, I have never heard of Jane Parsons. When I meet her I sense that she is going to be someone that I like very much; she is different from the other prison employees I have worked with in the past. She has on baggy pants and a man's tweed jacket. The collar is trimmed in lace that was sewn on by hand; her sneakers offset the entire outfit. When I ask her about the jacket she says it had been her father's. She added the lace from one of her old white shirts to make it more feminine. Through her explanation of the creation of this jacket, I get the impression that she is sentimental, practical, thoughtful, and attentive to aesthetic issues.

Her "office" is a big empty room in the education wing. There is a blackboard and a clock. After introductions, Kelly, Jane, and I



sit down at a long institutional table. It looks like the tables I associate with public school cafeteria food. Jane laughs when I ask her why the pale Formica top is divided with masking tape into squares. She explains that the institution hired four curriculum counselors, including her, and has no space for them to have offices. The solution for the moment is

for each woman to have a square on this table for a desk. I notice that none of the squares are labeled and there are no signs that the table has really been used. Jane said she and the other counselors float from room to room. None of them have walkie-talkies or telephones yet. The institution's administration knew they needed to overhaul their treatment and education programs by hiring some counselors, but they were not prepared for how this would impact the prison resources.

We talk about the dance project and data collection that Jane is overseeing. By the end of the conversation, Jane and I are talking about art, dogs, and weird jobs. As the meeting concludes, I tell her that I am interested in setting up a painting and drawing program. She finds the idea exciting.

June 2000

While driving to the prison for the last time this summer, I notice that the sky is growing dark. I have an appointment with Jane and an interview with Katie, a female inmate who has lived in the Iowa prison system longer than any other living female inmate. Katie has been painting in the activity room for many years. Much of her work is based on still-life images or the Madonna. She sells her paintings and donates the money to the chapel building fund. Just this year she has donated \$1,200. Katie is part of an effort to continue my ongoing research about the arts in prison culture.

I have been talking to women in Iowa for almost a year. Time after time I find that while the role of art in corrections is interesting, my research interests are slowly being drawn more and more towards how these women deal with the deprivation of incarceration, their isolation from their children, and their history as victims of physical and sexual abuse. These topics are much more interesting and, I feel, will probably be more helpful in terms of improving the correctional system and helping women to recover from the stigma of prison.

I have also begun to note that not only are the lives of the women and their victims damaged as a result of their offense, their children's lives are also turned upside down. Women in prison are mothers to over 1.3 million children (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999). I want to learn more about these things, listen to the women, and try to find ways to improve their situations through education, through community-based options for corrections, or even through their treatment by the justice system. As a tenure-track assistant professor in art education, pursuing this would be outside of my discipline. My peers have advised me that I need to publish things related to my discipline if I am going to successfully gain tenure.

By the time I pull into the prison parking lot, I have worked myself up to a point of almost panic thinking about the entire situation of going up for tenure and creating a relevant research agenda. My breath is cool; my tongue is busy prying the last lump of a Starlight Mint stuck to my back molars.

Katie is waiting for me in the room adjacent to the volunteer coordinator's office. I usually meet with women in this room because it has a bathroom, because it is located in a housing unit and therefore always has an officer nearby, and because the volunteer coordinator is my contact person. The weather is getting worse. I open up my notepad and start talking to Katie about her art.

After a few moments an officer interrupts us. He tells us that we might be evacuated to the basement. A tornado has been sighted moving in our direction. Katie and I abandon our discussion and walk over to the window.



We watch as a bench tumbles across the yard. The sky is green and hazy and the trees are blowing back and forth. I tell Katie that I am really frightened. I have never been in a tornado.

At this moment in the prison, all I can picture is a sepia-toned memory of my grandmother as a girl. My grandmother's house was torn apart by a tornado when she was a child. She remembers hiding under the dining room table, the back door flapping and the ceiling of the house being torn off and repositioned. After the cyclone giant had passed, her mother spent hours picking glass and debris out of her hair.

Katie maternally comforts me and tells me that in all of her years as an Iowa native she has never worried about tornadoes. We watch the wind whip around and strain to listen for the warning siren. Soon after a second bench rolls across the yard, the wind dies down and it begins to rain. Our interview slot has slipped by and Katie has to go to the dining hall.

Jane meets me at 4:30 and we walk over to her new office, a partitioned space in the basement of one of the units. Her new office has no windows and smells somewhat damp. In spite of the setting, signs of activity abound. The new counselors have decorated their cubbyhole spaces with pictures, plants, piles of books, and even office jokes. Jane tells me that she has started a new round of classes and that things are going great. She misses the Heartland Dance Project but has started a drawing class. Her supplies are limited, but the women love it. We talk more about a project on which we can collaborate. Finally we decide to do a series of murals. I look at my watch and realize that I am supposed to leave. We agree to meet again in late July.

July 2000

This time as I drive to the prison I notice that most of the wildflowers are beginning to turn brown and their stems are starting to

shrink and harden as autumn approaches. Soon they will be sticks and the corn planted on either side of the highway will be nothing but stubble poking out of rich black dirt. School is going to start in a week. I have spent most of the drive singing to Patty Griffin's album *Living with Ghosts*. After hiking for a month in the mountains of North Carolina, I think a ghost is what this mural idea seems like.

Jane greets me at the prison gate with her walkie-talkie slung low on a man's belt around her slender waist. She usually has a cigarette in her hand and tennis shoes on her feet. Beneath her dark brown shoulder-length hair are two long narrow braids that reach past her chest. On the ends of the braids are colorful beads that bounce against her body when she walks.

I get through the gate and Jane immediately says, "Let's get out of here and go to Des Moines for lunch." We drive into Des Moines and I tell her about our trip. She loves the outdoors and likes to hike in Minnesota and Colorado. We pull into the parking lot of an old drug store. This was one of Jane's hangouts as a teen-ager. There is still an old-fashioned lunch counter and soda fountain. Over grilled cheese and tuna fish sandwiches we talk about the grant. We decide that we need almost \$1,000 to create these murals. I tell Jane about Faith Ringgold's story quilts and we decide that instead of making large wood-framed canvases for the murals, we will do them on loose canvas and frame them with a quilted border. This idea seems more feasible and less awkward with regard to supplies, restrictions in the prison, and our limited resources. Our conversation is easy and our discussion lends itself to the creation of mutual goals and a singular idea. As I leave with the notes I need to write a grant to the Iowa Arts Council, I am almost giddy with excitement at the prospect of this project.

August 2000

As I listen to the phone ring through the receiver pushed against my ear, I read the sticker stuck on the desk lamp that I inherited with my old office in North Hall. It reads, "Today is only a figment of your imagination." I felt that way when I opened the letter from the Iowa Arts Council. They gave us \$500 for the mural project. It was much less than we asked for, but much more than we expected. After navigating through the institution's automated answering system, I reach Jane to deliver the news.

September 2000

The supplies that I ordered for the mural project have finally arrived and we are ready to begin. I look at the end of the giant cardboard box bouncing along next to my head as I drive down Interstate 80. It has made driving a little tough because it obscures the view from my passenger window. I am so excited about starting to paint.

For the past few weeks Jane and I have met with a group of interested women to plan these murals. The group has remained fairly stable. This is a good sign that we have gained their commitment. The women have decided that they want to depict famous women who have succeeded in changing the world. They have done research at the prison library and I have sent my research assistant looking for more information at their request. We have found photographs and even looked at the site where the murals will finally be installed. I think the combination of library materials from the university and seeing the unit where the finished pieces will hang has really motivated them to get excited about the project.

There will be four murals: three will be portraits of individual women; the fourth will be a collection of images chosen by the artists. The three women we have decided on are Nilak Butler, a Native-American activist,

Clara McBride Hale, the founder of the Hale House in New Haven, and Mother Teresa.

Jane meets me outside the gate to help unload my old jeep. There are three women on the other side of the fence who are going to help us carry everything to Unit 2; the room in which I used to interview people has become the new art room. In the past it was used as a chapel. Jane is slowly filling the walls with the drawings of her students. The atmosphere of the room is transforming from an empty generic space with a single strip of green carpet, to an active studio.

When we begin to unload the large box of paint and brushes, the officer in the control office starts to shift back and forth in his chair behind the glass window. When the large, long box that is our giant roll of canvas appears, we can tell that his curiosity is really piqued. He stops us as we drag the boxes up on the curb to tell us that all of it will have to be inspected. This is no surprise to Jane or me. Because of safety, everything that goes into a prison must be searched and accounted for. I have had experiences in other prisons where the search of art materials becomes a huge ordeal and even a power struggle. Here at ICIW, I sense none of that. When the officer sees that none of the supplies have been opened, he lets us pass through the gate without any trouble. With the help of three women we make our way to Unit 2. The women in the yard crane their necks to see what we are carrying to the art room. Jane and I decide that this curiosity might be a good way to get more women interested in the project.

Jane picks up the intercom phone and announces that the mural class is open. In ten minutes a core group of women is gathered around the boxes. With anticipation the women rip through the cardboard and pull out the newsprint packing. I am glad that I did not open the boxes; it is great to watch the women count the paint and feel the new soft bristles at the end of the brushes. After

opening the second box, the women are all surprised to see the giant roll of canvas because until this moment the size of these murals was hard to imagine. We place it at one end of the room and roll it out. It follows the green strip of carpet that used to be the aisle in the old chapel. There are 18 feet of unspoiled primed canvas. Everyone pauses for a moment just to stare at the starkness of the canvas. We cut it in three places for the murals. Two will be seven feet tall and one will be four feet tall. I realize that we need more canvas to finish the project.

The next step heightens the magic in the room. The women asked the week before how we were going to paint the images on a surface that large. We decided that the best way to accomplish this task was to use an overhead projector and a photocopied transparency. We stand on two tables and tape one of the canvases to the wall with masking tape, cross our fingers that it will hold, and then turn on the overhead. As we slowly bring Nilak Butler's image into focus on the canvas, it seems as if each woman is holding her breath. Finally, Nilak Butler's image is projected, like the head of the great and powerful Oz.

Perhaps because the canvas is so pristine, or because the process is so intimidating, no one wants to begin to trace the lines of Nilak's image. I step over and show the women what it will look like. After a few moments of drawing, I ask Vera to turn off the overhead. When she does Nilak's eye appears alone in light graphite lines on the canvas. After this, Vera, Ruby, and Sara take over the tracing without hesitation. Our murals have begun.

January 2001

Now that deep winter has settled across most of Iowa and there is nothing but snow and ice for miles, my drives have become even more meditative. I spend most of my trip thinking not about the mural project, but about my research. I have talked with many of the

women as we paint side by side. Over the course of many months I have come to know each woman as a friend; most have told me about their families, their circumstances, and their lives before prison. These conversations have made me even more convinced that I should shift my research focus in spite of my discipline and tenure pressures.

I think about tying art making to the creation of a space for normalcy and conversation. These spaces are rare and reassuring within the prison. We have painted each Monday night and laughed, compared stories, sang to the 80s music on the radio, and talked. The women have said that being in the art room on Monday nights makes them feel human again and not like they are in a correctional institution. Each woman has become committed to this project not only because the project itself is compelling, but also because they have become part of a community. They have built a supportive atmosphere and have reached out to help one another.

I think this supportive space has been opened because the murals have been such a collaborative effort. It is like almost every person has painted every part. There are layers and layers of paint underneath each image that would reveal the history of the entire process. During this creative process the images have changed, been muddled, been beautiful, and even been completely painted over. They are organic, growing and changing each week.

One night, Nilak's face was finally complete, but her neck looked disconnected from her head. Ruby, Katie, and Sara tried to "fix" the problem. By the end of the evening Nilak looked like E.T. In spite of this, the group pinned her up and stepped back, and everyone laughed at the mistake until tears were streaming down faces. Ruby, Katie, and Sara were surprised at how the image looked hanging on the wall versus lying flat on the table. During the next class the problem was

corrected, and Ruby and Katie especially seemed pleased that they had worked through the process.

In hindsight, I think our humor was an unusual response to a mistake. Typically, mistakes in prison, even if they seem trivial, are accompanied by severe consequences. For example, Sara, who works for a private industry within the prison, builds office furniture. One night she accidentally left with two screws in her shirt pocket. Before leaving she was searched; the screws were found and she was disciplined by not being allowed to leave her cell for a few weeks. Her mistake was honest, but unfortunate.

The muddled process of trying to fix the disjunction between Nilak's head and neck produced a visual mess. In spite of this, the group's reaction was so human and normal that the mistake became trivial. As I drive to the prison in the late afternoon, I think it must be comforting to find places within the prison where mistakes are treated as a normal part of human process and not grounds for punitive action.

The holidays in prison are always difficult. It has been two weeks since the New Year was celebrated. When classes resume, it seems almost as if the women are relieved. Their lives are back to normal, and they don't have to be reminded that they are missing their family celebrations. No matter how adjusted the women seem to prison life, it is easy to see that living at ICIW is a constant struggle. Tonight I sit next to Ruby.

Ruby is fit and lean with shoulder-length light brown hair. She has light blue eyes and a fantastic laugh, and she moves like a dancer. Her thick, inner city New Orleans accent draws attention to her immediately. She is very well read, extremely humorous, and always has high standards for herself as well as others. She started in Jane's drawing class and has steadily progressed as a portrait artist. When I ask her about this she says:

I really like people and I wanted to draw faces with emotions and wrinkles. I think I have gone from drawing stick people to being able to put down an emotion on a paper. I am giving myself five years to learn how to draw.

When I ask her why she has continued to be involved in art classes and the mural project, she tells me that it is because they are positive.

Things like this really help. You have to run after the positive ... you have to cling to it and grab on to it like it is going to fall off the face of this earth because you will get caught up in the negative. There is no gray area; yes you will turn to the negative if you don't look for the positive. I mean I got lemons and I am going to make lemonade and not only that I am going to make pink lemonade!

I ask her how she thinks people will react when these murals leave the prison and people on the outside say to themselves, "Oh, women in prison did these murals. Does it matter?"

I think it does matter. I am perfectly aware that I was not a bad guy until I did my crime and now I am a bad guy. I used to view that as, 'I don't care if they are hungry, thirsty, sick, cold, I don't care. You did your crime, and now you are paying for it...' This project shows people that we are kept busy in here. We have jobs, we do projects, we go to school.

Ruby's experience in prison has really changed her political views about crime and people who are in prison. She insists that people who are in prison should not complain.

If you don't like it in here, don't complain... you should not have committed a crime!

I ask her about the mix of people in our mural class, noting that we have people who join us one night and then don't come for six weeks. Overall, we have a core group of people that have become friends; I wonder how the women view these stray painters. Ruby says:

In this class we get all kinds of different people. People who would not mix at all. For sure not mix, they just hang around with different people, live in different units. Especially in the wintertime ... we all hibernate. We all get cabin fever. And you are not seeing that here. You're not hearing the bad things, you are hearing the positive stuff come out of everybody's mouth. It's not like, that stinks, it's like, whoa let's try this... doesn't that look good! There are different groups of friends and that mixes it up in here ... Some days are so frustrating and you come in here and just mellow out.

I look around the room and notice that it has been totally transformed. There are drawings and paintings everywhere. The Mother Teresa mural is hanging across a curtain rod on one wall. The women are all sitting in small groups, painting and talking. It is very different from the way that it looked when I did interviews last year. I see very little at the prison besides the yard, Jane's office, and this room, so I ask Ruby how this room is different from other rooms at the prison.

It's not like being here for a while. When we have to leave, Jane practically has to force us out. Some of the rooms (at the prison) are really, really small. Our rooms are our bathroom, our bedroom, our laundry room... I love this room. I love to see what other people are working on.

On my drive home in the dark, I turn my

car heater to high and think about Ruby's comments. I take for granted the normal space of the art room. To me it seems like any other makeshift community setting where adults are making art. After my conversation with Ruby, I see the room differently, as a rare place for normalcy. For Ruby, it seems that there are few places and ways in the prison to feel normal, and this project offers her one opportunity.

April 2001

I am eager to get to the prison tonight. In two days I leave Iowa to speak at the National Art Education Association Meeting. I submitted an abstract from my paper about this project. I have been writing and rewriting for the past few days, but I know that there is another world of important data related to the women that I have left out. It has nothing to do with art. These data relate to how the women function as mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, and partners. The other side of these data is connected to their institutional journeys. The journey begins with their pre-offense lives in the free world and moves to their offense, then to court, and then to prison. When I sat at my computer this morning finishing up my notes for New York, I thought about the importance of making people understand that most of these women are going to go home one day; they have the same needs and desires that all humans share. Art is one way to address some of these things, but more information needs to be available to people in the community and the correctional system.

After class has started and the familiar hum of conversation, low music in the background, and the feeling of a studio space is visible, I sit down to talk with Vera. Vera looks almost like a doll. She is petite with large brown eyes, rosy round cheeks, shiny brown hair, and smooth pale skin. She is vivacious and intelligent. Tonight, instead of working on the mural, she is painting a plaster

cast of two fish. The small sculpture is for her son's ninth birthday. I can tell she has been working on these fish with meticulous attention to detail. She is in the process of dry brushing the scales to make them look iridescent. "My son knows more about fish than any eight year old should."

In the course of our conversation she tells me that she has two children, a daughter and a son. The daughter, Katherine, is in the midst of puberty and having a hard time without her mother. They talk every night by telephone. Vera said when she saw Katherine during her weekly visit two months ago, they decided that she should start wearing a bra. Vera wanted to be the first person to buy her one. She ordered one from Sears and then later found out it was on back order. In the end Vera's best friend took Katherine shopping. Vera said the entire experience was heartbreaking because she wanted so much to make that time in Katherine's life special and filled with mother and daughter moments of sharing. Vera thought she would be home by now, and hopes that during her parole review in late summer she will receive some good news.

Lucky is sitting across from us; she has been listening while she paints. Her daughter is 14. Lucky looks older than she is. She has shaggy hair and bright blue eyes. Her voice is soft and husky; when she speaks it is gently with a neutral, midwestern accent. She first came to our mural class late in the fall. She was the first woman to paint a flower on the mural of Nilak Butler. Until that moment she didn't realize that she could paint or that she would enjoy creating fanciful flowers with a brush. After her first night she was hooked. Since then she has come to every mural class.

Like Vera, Lucky is not working on the mural tonight. Instead, she is painting on a small, cardboard canvas. The image is familiar. She has painted several variations of a heart and cross. Love and faith are the two things that she considers most important when she

returns home.

This is her second time in prison for drug use. Soon Lucky will be released. She is planning a huge reunion with her son and daughter; both are teen-agers. The last time she returned home they were angry with her and had lost all respect for her as their mother. She said she felt as though she was losing control over the entire situation.

"My second time in prison seems different." Lucky feels as if she is going to be successful at staying off drugs this time. Her daughter is older and their relationship has grown stronger through letters, phone calls, and visits. Her son is still distant, but she hopes that she can somehow regain his respect. Lucky said she is really nervous about returning home.

When Lucky returns home she plans on going back to college, taking care of her children, and getting a job so that she can support her family. She is nervous about all of these plans. The transition from the prison to the free world is often a time of high anxiety. It seems as if painting helps Lucky stay focused. Working in the art room every night that it is open helps her keep her mind off her worries until she leaves. She says that these images of the cross and heart serve as reminders of the goals she has set. As we talk, her hands start to shake ever so slightly and her eyes turn glassy. Both of us pause and realize that if we talk more, it will be very emotional. I sense that Lucky is just trying to hold all of her feelings together and that she would rather not cry in front of everyone.

Tonight I can hardly bear these conversations. For some reason they overwhelm me, and I don't want to get upset in front of these women who seem so strong. I walk over to the sewing machine where Lilly and Sara have been working for weeks on the quilted borders. Each session they lay out a swath of colored cotton squares, label them, and then sew them together to make fantastic patterns for the borders of the murals. They

have been working since early this afternoon on one border so that it might be finished in time to travel to New York. The chance to show off these murals at a national conference is exciting for them and for me.

Over the past few months Lilly has slowly taught Jane and me how to make quilts. This project has given her a sense of purpose. She and Sara are the only ones who feel confident enough to tackle this portion of the murals. Their contribution has been extremely important, and they realize that these murals would never have been completed without their dedication, knowledge, and hard work.

When the night is over, the group helps me roll up the murals and I leave with them. I promise over and over to make sure that they don't get lost at the airport. I promise to bring back pictures of New York and the murals.

June 2001

Three of the murals are finally finished. They have traveled to conferences in London and New York. They have hung in a gallery in Iowa and a museum in Florida. In the Fall, we will hang them permanently in Unit 9. Today I will work with the women for the last time this summer. I am leaving this week to work for a month in London with women in Holloway Prison. I am hoping that the lessons I have learned here at ICIW will help me to work effectively as a teacher and to further develop my ideas related to research. I am curious about the differences I will encounter between the women in London and the women here. I also wonder if the prison will be different. I am sad that I will not see these wonderful women for eight weeks. When I return we are going to plan a dedication ceremony for the murals. We want to invite women in the prison and people from outside. The last mural is almost complete. It is filled with images of mothers, movie stars, activists, songwriters, and women who have survived oppression and racism. The women have all worked on an image for this final mural. We

have decided that it will not be hung permanently and instead will travel outside the prison to help educate people about arts in corrections and the potential of the women who created it.

Final Reflections

For me, this experience speaks of women set apart by acts of violence, poverty, destruction, defense, circumstances, addiction, and necessity. These women have experienced a space where they can forget they are prisoners and instead become women artists sharing stories, ideas, and four murals. In the process of writing this narrative, I have been able to see how this project has helped me to formulate a new research agenda that focuses more on the seldom heard stories of women in prison and less on their art. It has also helped me understand more about the role of art education opportunities in prison, as well as the importance of a community space where the women have a chance to feel "normal," interact with each other positively, and create things that are valued and beautiful. Through this project I have been rejuvenated as an artist and a writer. I have already started to think about our next project together.

The mural project created a common bond among women who would never have interacted. Their positive attitudes and willingness to engage in a process of collaboration over the course of many months strengthened this bond. In the process of making these murals and spending time together in a relaxed atmosphere charged with a singular purpose, a community of support has been created.

Prison is a place where deprivation, oppression, and disenfranchisement take place. Due to limited resources, the chances for personal renewal and transformation are bounded. Art offers an outlet for inmates to channel individual expression, human feeling, and creativity while dealing with the frustrating

and depressing experience of being incarcerated. It also offers a portal that leads to an in-depth understanding of the symbols and objects that have power within the cultural collective. These symbols and objects can help community members like Lucky understand, define, and confirm personal belief systems and social functions for successful day-to-day living. Art making also presents a way for women like Ruby to control and create personal connections to the universe through the manipulation of materials (Dissanayake, 1992).

Suzanne Langer (1962) states:

It may serve somebody's need for self-expression, besides, but that is not what makes it good or bad art. In a special sense one may call a work of art a symbol for feeling, for, like a symbol, it formulates our ideas of inward experience, as discourse formulates our ideas of things and facts in the outside world. (p 90)

In this narrative I have tried to depict both the process of art making and the importance of discourse. I have tried to combine these two things in order to shed light on the world of women's incarceration, their experiences, the art that they produce and the daily routines and frustrations they encounter, as well as the positive outcomes that are possible. I have also tried to better understand my reasons for working with women who are incarcerated and how they have impacted my life as a teacher and a researcher.

Post Script

Recently, Lucky called me to ask for a letter of recommendation to a local business school. Later I found out that she had successfully enrolled in classes and that her children were living at home with her. Vera was paroled on work release and will be reunited as a normal mother with her husband and children in a matter of weeks. The prison

is in the midst of serious budget cuts and Jane has learned that she might be one of the twenty people laid off.

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WHO HELPS WHOM? MY SERVICE EXPERIENCE IN LIBERIA

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While serving as a volunteer social worker in a rehabilitation program for former boy soldiers outside of Monrovia, Liberia, the author was bombarded by cultural differences which led her to rethink many previous assumptions. Her experience provides another example that help cannot be provided without help being received, perhaps in greater measure.

Who Helps Whom?

Who helps whom in social work practice? We train and study, learn how to help others, how to communicate in curative ways, how to interpret intra- and interpersonal dynamics, and how to examine our own issues for intentional use of self. Clients don't go through any courses of study to learn how to be clients who spur the growth of their worker. But can clients ever be helped without the worker being helped? Who benefits more from the exchange? Who is really the beneficiary of social work practice?

Social Worker Practice Is Curative for Social Workers

Social work's ecological and person-in-environment perspectives indicate that our focus is on the interface between systems—that if there is a change in one part of the system, there is a corresponding change in the other. Applying these perspectives to social work practice makes it clear that treatment is a mutual process. There is no pure helper or one helped. If the exchange helps the client, there usually is a curative impact on the worker. The theory of intersubjectivity as applied to clinical practice suggests that client and worker are mutually influenced by the therapeutic relationship (Aron, 1996; Bowles, 1999). Many clinicians attest to the profound benefits they have reaped in their helping roles, so much so as to make any “scientific” comparison of who is helped the most, client or social worker, impossible

(Engels, 2001; Glezakos, 1995; Wall, 2001; Yu-Wen Ying, 2001).

Decision to Serve in Liberia

These questions of who helps whom became even more compelling after my volunteer social work experience in Liberia last year. I replied to an announcement posted by the American Refugee Committee (a small international aid organization) on the Internet requesting a volunteer to serve in a youth village for war-affected teenage boys. The position called for counseling and intensively interacting with 50 former “street kids,” many of whom were former boy soldiers during the seven years of raging civil war in Liberia. Furthermore, it involved consulting with the staff about program and daily operations and management issues, as well as providing training in counseling techniques and the emotional consequences of trauma. The announcement also called for a written report of suggestions for future development of the program as a final volunteer task. The enormity of the assignment gave me shivers, as did the political instability in the country and the lack of safe, healthy living conditions in the wake of the war's destruction. Despite all my reservations, however, I sent in my vita, hopeful that my limited time commitment would automatically disqualify me. This way I wouldn't have to confront the reality of backing away from an opportunity to help where the need was intense. It was far more ego syntonetic to apply and be rejected with a

feeling of relief.

My academic vita, purposely long, entangled me. The ARC Country Director was interested in interviewing me. Soon I was wrestling with whether I would accept the offer to go to Liberia or face the fact that I really wasn't willing to take the multiple risks of reaching out to people in very dire circumstances. Was I being a daredevil and foolish if I went? Would I make any difference that would outweigh the possible dangers? Could I really meet the director's expectations that I had the skills and understanding to work in a Third World country with violent youth and with staff who had personally experienced the fresh impact of severe trauma? Who was I to think that I could make a contribution in one month that would have any impact sufficiently lasting to warrant being in harm's way?

With dread and ambivalence, as well as resolve and desire, I decided that I soon would be Liberia bound. I thank my lucky stars that I took the risk to work in Liberia because it has given me a growth spurt in midlife that I didn't believe was possible, greatly enriching my life both personally and professionally.

The Youth Village

After a long flight from Kalamazoo, Michigan, to Monrovia, Liberia, I arrived at the youth village, which is approximately 25 miles from the capital city. The campus facility in the countryside served 50 youths, ages 13 to 20. There were more than 10 buildings, but all of them had been bombed out, and only some had walls remaining. Two of these buildings had been roofed. One was the trainees' dorm and classroom building, along with some rooms for staff members. The other was the staff boarding house, which included the nurse's station and additional makeshift classrooms. The trainees slept on the floor with only thin plastic mats between themselves and the cement. Mosquitoes flocked in, and

little red smears polka-dotted the walls where the trainees had smashed them during their disturbed and itchy nights.

The kitchen was outdoors, with only a torn plastic sheet over the cooking area. Since Liberia has huge rain forests, it almost always rains at least once daily. The cooks ladled the food into the trainees' bowls, but before they could take their first bites, the rain diluted their food. The material deprivation extended to the trainees' learning and training programs. In literacy class, they were short of paper, pens, and pencils. I observed a class in which 22 students, who were trying to draw the flag of Liberia, shared one red crayon and one blue one. During vocational training sessions in carpentry and agriculture, one hammer or one hoe was distributed among 15 teens.

Trainees and Staff

Amazingly, the teenage trainees had improved greatly in the three months since the program had begun. Staff reported that initially the swearing and threatening were continuous. Now the trainees' aggressive behaviors had subsided greatly, and there was some evidence that the boys were beginning to care about the staff, the program, and each other. Even during the month I was there, I observed this progress continuing.

The staff, who were all deeply traumatized by the war, were now helping the traumatized boys to recover. At night staff members often sat with each other, recounting their nightmarish memories of the war. One counselor told about a soldier who was peddling parts of a body in a wheelbarrow, demanding that he (the counselor) buy the body parts—otherwise he would end up in the wheelbarrow, too. Another described weeks of fleeing on foot to escape to neighboring Guinea and of the arrests and near-death experiences he had.

One very well-known and liked counselor talked about how he would intervene when soldiers were about to kill those they



suspected of belonging to the Krahn ethnic group (an "enemy" minority). He would intervene and tell them that the intended victims were his friends and were not Krahns, even if they were. Others reported how human intestines were used as rope to mark off areas and how corpses were decaying throughout Monrovia, the capital. No one could touch them to bury them because they might be killed. The staff who had survived these extreme terrors were now helping the youth who had been themselves drastically traumatized and conscripted into war, some as early as age six.

The Program: Help Given

English is the official language in Liberia and all the trainees and staff at Boys Town spoke English in addition to their own tribal languages. Because of differences in dialect, grammatical rules, and colloquialisms, I often had to listen carefully, but I lost comprehension only when trainees argued using rapid speech and slang expressions. For the most part, the language similarities enabled me to understand a great deal and be understood. Consequently, I believe I was able to make significant contributions in a month's time because of the rich culture of acceptance that almost immediately allowed me to be a functioning team member.

First, my mere presence, in the ostracized, isolated, war-ravaged country depleted of tourists, communicated, "You are not alone, and you matter to others on the outside." I conveyed interest in, admiration for, and acknowledgment of the trainees' accomplishments and listened to their stories, thoughts, and feelings in daily informal contacts. I had on-the-spot dialogues working with another counselor when a trainee presented difficulties. I joined in the trainees' daily activities, such as hauling sand, pumping water, and listening to the stragglers at night who could not sleep and who needed comfort, company, and perhaps some food to tide

them over until a late breakfast the following day. We took walks to the beach during which our talk would drift to life on the street and comparisons to where they were now in their lives and their goals for the future. I joined staff in initiating and organizing friendship gatherings and bonfires that provided the teenagers with times to talk about their remembrances of war. The trainees would take the guilt and remembrance of wrongdoing and would throw them into the fire so that they themselves could be free to be the good people they chose to be. I engaged trainees in recreational and group activities in an effort to help staff plan for their "down time" so that trainees would have an alternative to wandering off into town and taking drugs.

But overall, I directed most of my professional efforts toward the staff. Initially, I observed the program and interviewed the staff regarding their training needs and reflections on the program. During my first week, I observed the distribution of used clothing to the boys. At one point a near riot broke out as some boys were delighted with what they received while others were outraged: "This is a girl's shirt." "This is an ugly shirt." "America is a rich country—why isn't it sending us new clothing?" The boys pushed those who got the clothes they wanted, intimidated others to force exchanges, and screamed into the faces of staff who pounced back with advancing moves and angry shouts of reprimands and orders. The conflict intensified further.

My first training session to staff focused on analyzing this incident. What were the countertransferences that hooked them, and what were the responses that fueled the escalation? Before the war the counselors lived in a country that knew relative peace and prosperity. They had known a country in which they could trust strangers and a country that was relatively free from personal associations with extreme brutality. Counselors had known a country in which



there was running water and electricity, buses that ran through the city, and streets that were passable. Perhaps they angrily shouted at the children to be grateful for less than the children wanted in order to push down their own anger and anguish at having to settle for far less after the lasting and reverberating destruction of war. Counselors also spoke of countertransferences that arose because many of these children were perpetrators of the brutal violence that demolished social norms, human relationships, and possibilities for the future. It wasn't always easy to keep in their minds and hearts during intense conflict with trainees, that being conscripted into war was an extreme form of child abuse and that trainees had been victims even as they perpetrated violence. After talking about such countertransferences, we discussed how incidents, such as the recent explosion over the clothing distribution, could be de-escalated before they elicited trainees' negative behaviors. One staff member exclaimed that I was just saying words and what I suggested wouldn't work. Others said that this was Africa and the children were tough and couldn't be dealt with adequately in the ways I was proposing. Furthermore, they didn't want their children to be disrespectful and irresponsible as they perceived American children to be. The staff were right up front with their concerns so that they could be talked about and I could learn about their culture. But they also listened and reflected on what I said and were eager to put new learning into their own cultural context.

At the next day's training, some counselors reported trying the de-escalating techniques and declared them successful. Others started to analyze past events and consider how incidents could have been defused. Two staff members role played a situation to illustrate how they would calm and redirect the boys and leave the rational problem solving and moral learning discussion

for a less agitated moment. Their ability to be open and direct in their opposition, as well as their great ability to rethink and emotionally regroup, must assuredly be part of the reason for their successful program.

Other training followed based on staff interest and need, including learning behavioral programming techniques and responding therapeutically to the personal manifestations of trauma. I interviewed many trainees for their evaluation of the program. In response, I introduced group activities, such as relay races and focused discussion groups, as well as worked with the program manager and staff to develop a schedule with more planned activities. Providing consultation with the program manager enabled us to restructure and refocus supervisory sessions to more effectively direct and empower staff efforts. I left the Program Manager of the Youth Village and the ARC Country Director an evaluative report of my perceptions of the program's strengths and difficulties, as well as suggestions for future development and proposed changes. Staff listed some priority material needs, such as mosquito netting to protect the trainees from mosquitoes at night, recreational equipment, and over-the-counter medicines (and their prices within Liberia), to help me with fund-raising efforts when I returned to the States.

The Helper: Help Received

I might have contributed in an incremental way to the program at the Youth Village, but the contributions that they made in turn to my life were no less than transformational. How I look at the world, at my life, and at my professional work has changed dramatically. I am conscious of this difference each and every day. Here are just some of the many jarring, awakening reality checks that the Liberian experience has impressed upon my heart and mind forever.

Relativity of Time - One month was so packed with moments of being connected, alive, contributing, intensely involved in an effort so critical to human well-being and mental and emotional growth that it has lived on as a major time in my life. Naturally it begs the questions, What have I been doing during previous months that does not leave a legacy of vital memories and expanded understanding that continually enriches the present? How must I use my time now to do what is most meaningful, to serve and to develop my capacities and understanding?

Empowerment - Beside survival issues, I worried that I could not meet the clinical, consulting, teaching, program planning, and evaluation tasks expected—and all in one month. And yet I did perform all these tasks and consequently experienced a revitalized sense of my own skills, abilities, and professional worthiness. The Liberian culture of the youth village communicated acceptance and inclusion that allowed me to fully use my knowledge and skills and express my personality. It was a powerful, personal demonstration of how growth occurs in relationships: the need for such human support, permission, and encouragement for me to unfold and become all I could be in that month. I returned to the States with a greater sense of my own power, value, and worth and a deep sense of gratitude for so much help having been given to me.

Self-reliance - The idea that poor people in Third-World countries are unskilled and somehow less knowing is a cultural bias that to some extent I bought into. One day we were driving down to the beach in a pickup truck to gather sand that was brought up to the village to be mixed with, molded, then soaked and hardened in water to be used for roofing tiles. The lack of money and resources makes it essential that Liberians know how to create something from nothing, and they

ingeniously do so. They know that they have only themselves to rely on and can't call for a plumber, an electrician, a contractor, or a tow truck. When the truck got stuck in the sand, which entirely covered the two back tires, I thought that there was no hope of digging out (we didn't have a shovel either) and wondered if we could get a tow truck. But the staff member didn't waste a second thinking of what help he could get outside of himself; he started problem solving immediately. Amazingly, he used reeds found about the beach, the strength of the trainees pushing, and his own skills at using the power of the vehicle to dislodge the truck. When I returned home and my washing machine broke, I—amazingly!—didn't immediately walk away and think what it would cost for a service call. Rather, I pulled the machine out, looked for how it was hooked up, and fixed it myself. The Liberians' modeling of self-reliance and ingenuity was another way they empowered me.

The Poor - En route to Liberia, I saw a United Nations poster requesting donations for the world's poor people: A woman in scant, tawdry clothes was bent over, cooking food on the mud ground in a flat pan with some grains beside her. I was struck by the extreme deprivation and poverty depicted in the photo. The poster jumped out at me on my return from Liberia. This time I wondered about what food she was cooking, whether she was a good cook, how the food might be very tasty, and how competent she must be to make something from so little. It's not that I didn't see the poverty, but it's that I didn't see the poverty exclusively. There was a human being in that poster, someone with focus, mastery, beauty, and personality. Being poor is not the sum total of who that woman is; it doesn't define her. Now people living in abject poverty don't appear to me as caricatures of their living situations.

American Poverty - Liberians have a culture of sharing, so if one person in an extended family of 40 works, that salary may be divided in 40 ways. As a result, Liberians often can outwardly hide their poverty. There are layers of degree of poverty, and I wasn't exposed to the most severe depths because I spent almost all of my time on the grounds of the youth village. I did not view the most horrific poverty in Liberia "up close and personal." Perhaps for that reason, or perhaps for others, I grew sorrier for poor Americans.

In Liberia, where up to 80% of the population is unemployed and illiterate and an average monthly wage is between 10 and 15 U.S. dollars, people do not blame those who are poor for their poverty. They know better. Public messages that poor people are lazy, immoral, stupid or in some way deficient, and not as inherently able and worthy as those who are not poor don't fly in Liberia. Poor people don't get vilified, excluded, or ostracized. They aren't at risk of having their self-esteem worn thin by public denunciations and rejections. I felt even sadder for those in America who are poor when I saw the Liberians intensely interacting in support of one another in their conditions of material deprivation. They didn't have to simultaneously endure the absence of survival necessities along with a thwarted sense of belonging, as do people who are poor in America. Liberians who are poor are respected, valued, accepted, and comforted by others who often are experiencing and/or understanding the same hardships.

Acculturating to Poverty - The trainees had only two meals a day because the sponsoring agency couldn't afford to provide them with three daily meals. I began to think that this wasn't so bad because there were others in Liberia who were actually starving and many more who were always hungry. And I rationalized that the trainees could climb the trees in the early morning (as indeed they did)

to get mangoes if they were hungry before the purposely late breakfast, set at 10 o'clock to shorten the time span to supper. Even in the short period I was in Liberia, poverty became relative and by different standards than I had had when I arrived. It seemed so unjust that these excellent social workers and counselors were being paid 2,000 or 3,000 U.S. dollars a year and that was okay because by Liberian standards that was an extremely high salary. Here I was in Liberia less than a month and already thinking that it was okay that teenage males could not get the amount of food they wanted and needed. Catching myself at the very dynamic that I condemn in others was humbling.

"My Son" - I suspect American youth who committed acts similar to the atrocities these boys had been responsible for during war and the criminal behaviors they continued to perpetrate on the streets would be incarcerated. Many of the trainees had been much feared fighters and commanders in the Small Boy Unit (SBU) during the seven years of "civil" war. Conscripted, drugged, and trained, they were ordered to commit atrocities—atrocities that had traumatized the very staff who now, in a sense, worked with the perpetrators of these acts. These Liberian youth were not placed in a punitive, detention, jail-like facility. They were placed in a strongly nurturing environment *and* were expected to become exemplary citizens and leaders for their nation. I heard each staff member say "my son" when he talked with a complaining trainee. When a staff member wanted the trainees to do something or understand a position, he would say, "I beg you." Appealing to the heart and expecting mutual compassion were underlying parts of many interventions. The staff would often communicate to the teens that they needed to get their behavior and emotions under control and to learn skills to be the future leaders of their country—that they were important to the well-being of the

beleaguered nation.

A worker in charge of construction, who did not work with the children directly, explained to me, "They don't have to become human beings—they began as human, they were human before they acted as savage soldiers." Later he restated his philosophy directly into the face of a teenager who was haunted by extensive experience in battles. Two nights before, around a bonfire circle, the teen had talked of a skirmish in which he and a childhood friend confronted each other with guns. It wasn't clear whether he had killed his friend. The teen was sullen, unfocused, and withdrawn and left the recounting of this episode unfinished. "Do you really believe that?" he asked after he had finished. "Yes, I do," the construction worker responded with straightforward, convincing honesty. The boy began to zestfully eat his bowl of rice covered with bean sauce. These youth, who had perpetrated and witnessed unspeakable atrocities, were regarded as the future promise of their nation. They were not throwaways; each was "my son."

Nature of Treatment - Even without traumatized staff and extreme material deprivations, social workers face enormous challenges in making a difference with youth who have been traumatized over long periods of time without treatment. It was therefore remarkable that the youth were changing their behaviors, expressing their feelings, and planning in more hopeful ways in just four months from the program's inception. One explanation could be the strong identification that the staff had with the trainees. They had experienced trauma themselves and so could identify with the youth who had been drastically traumatized and conscripted into war. Furthermore, the Liberian culture seeped through in the way staff related to trainees. Staff often said that they felt these children were like their own. "It takes a village to raise a child" was not just a reasoned, warm

statement at the youth village, but a way of life. This inclusive, social culture that stresses mutual responsibility and connection affected the nature of the treatment and could not be separated from it.

No Need for a Drug Program - There was no formalized drug program for the youth who had been heavily into drugs. These youth had been drugged so that they would perform as uninhibitedly violent and brutal soldiers. As "street children," drugs remained a part of their way of life. I was astounded that there was no supportive and confrontive group and individual counseling nor educational training to stem the use and abuse of drugs. Nevertheless, staff and trainees alike reported that drug use was subsiding dramatically. It appeared that there didn't need to be a "war on drugs" because the needs driving drug use were being met. The youth were gaining acceptance and a sense of belonging and of possibilities for their future and were participating in activities and receiving responses that reinforced their pride and sense of self. Apparently in response, they were giving up drugs spontaneously and without fanfare or attention. Though there were extremely inexpensive drugs available in surrounding villages, drug use was ebbing. When my initial alarm at the lack of a drug program turned into a realization that the youth village didn't need one, I questioned whether our focus in America on our drug problem is just another expensive way to divert us from meeting the human needs of our citizens and to further penalize vulnerable people in our society. Perhaps rather than a war on drugs, we need to work on the alienation, distrust, exclusion, blaming, and lack of sharing that pervades our culture and denies many citizens feelings of importance, value, respect, and acceptance.

Touching Teenagers - During my second day at the youth village, I took a ride



with the material procurement worker and some of the trainees. We were walking from the road to the hut village where a carpenter lived who needed to be paid for the contract work he had done for the facility. The procurement worker so wholeheartedly, assertively, and vigorously held a trainee close to him on his walk that I was curious and later asked him if he knew that teenager particularly well. "No," he responded, "but I don't have to know him well to know that he needs to feel appreciated and that he matters." The trainees were allowed to give and receive physical affection without interpreting every touch as sexual. I began to feel sorry for American teenagers who are often not touched except for sexual purposes. How they must need the physical supportive and affirming touch that the children in the youth village in Liberia received frequently from staff.



These are just some of the awarenesses that broke through and challenged realities in my personal and professional life. My relatively brief stay in Liberia transformed me. The moral courage, strong sense of humanity, and rich community exemplified by the staff and the trainees at the youth village where I worked have taught me inestimable lessons.

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TRANSFORMING PREJUDICE INTO PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH

A LATINO AMONG LATINOS: A DOMINICAN IN PUERTO RICO

Daysi D. Mejía, DSW, Florida Gulf Coast University

This is about the author's personal experience as a Dominican living and working as a social work practitioner and educator in Puerto Rico for 14 years. She was unprepared for the discrimination she encountered, and began to seriously explore her experience of living with social rejection, as well as her attitudes toward diversity.

I had lived and worked as an advocate for Puerto Ricans in New York City for eight years. As a Dominican, I was treated with respect and with the recognition that we, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, were part of the same family. Puerto Ricans always related to me with warmth, almost as a part or extension of themselves. I was a professional they could trust; my ethnic or national origin was hardly relevant.

In 1979, after the fall of President Balaguer in the Dominican Republic, I returned to participate in the newly found democracy of my country. In 1987, for personal reasons, my husband and I decided to move our family to Puerto Rico. I did not entertain any misgiving. I assumed from my previous experience with Puerto Ricans in New York, Puerto Rico would provide me with the best opportunity for professional growth. How wrong I was! Instead of being a Latino among other Latinos, I discovered that I was a Dominican among Puerto Ricans.

To be a Dominican in Puerto Rico is to be stigmatized. Dominicans are often oppressed and abused. Dominicans come to Puerto Rico looking for a better life. Some

are legal residents of the United States who choose a similar island in climate, language, and culture. Others, perhaps

the majority, are illegal aliens who see the worst part of Puerto Rico: living in the slums, the alleys, the inhuman and intolerable conditions of the streets, as house maids or taking the backbreaking jobs that most Puerto Ricans don't want. There is little mercy or compassion for "those people." Often, Dominicans are the joke of the local comedians whenever a small boat is located with hundreds dead or badly hurt from illegal and unsafe trips taken from different points of the Dominican Republic. Dominicans are killed in the streets of Puerto Rico, and perpetrators are rarely prosecuted. Judges and juries apply stiffer sentences to Dominicans than to Puerto Ricans for the same type of crimes. For 13 years I prayed to God that nothing happened to me while in Puerto Rico because I was afraid I would not get justice.

We Dominicans pride ourselves on our ability to relate to all types of people from any nationality, race, color, or religion. So I decided to explore the discrimination suffered by Dominicans in Puerto Rico.

Both countries share Spanish culture, language, and religious tradition. Both groups live on islands, which give them a sense of isolation. We both share the works of common historians, educators, and patriots. Both countries have racially mixed populations, the Dominicans being more colored than the



Puerto Ricans.

I wonder if the discrimination may have to do with a different history. The sense of nationhood instilled in the Dominican people is a factor with which most Puerto Ricans find it difficult to deal. They see pride, and often arrogance, in the destitute Dominicans who arrive to the island looking for better opportunities. The Dominican Republic became independent in 1844. It was not a negotiated or given independence; it was a conquest. Puerto Rico has never existed as an independent nation. Puerto Rico receives billions of dollars every year from the Federal Government; the Dominican Republic has to struggle on her own limited resources. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens while Dominicans are "just" poor immigrants. Dominicans consider that Puerto Ricans are not free since Puerto Rico is a "territory" of the United States, and Puerto Ricans resent this.

Or perhaps it has to do with the darker color of my skin? But Dominicans of light skin color experience the same practices in Puerto Rico, even those few who are wealthy. I know also of white Americans and Europeans being discriminated against.

The discrimination of island-based Puerto Ricans against Dominicans is not a simple act. Like other discrimination, it is an orchestrated effort of the powerful ruling society to keep down a determined group. While there is no law prohibiting giving a job to Dominicans, they and other outsiders are the last to be hired, regardless of qualifications. It has to do with power. Kivel (1992) talks about the power struggle that goes on between the groups that are in power and the ones that are not. Puerto Ricans are "the" power, and anybody else who is not Puerto Rican is under such power, is "less than" the dominant group. I encountered the discriminatory statements, behavior, and attitudes from those more powerful and in control: The Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico are the "majority."

So, in Puerto Rico I was considered a

"minority" person with a "minority" status. But I had never thought of myself as "a minority." Born in the Dominican Republic, I have lived in Sarasota, FL.; Wilmette, IL.; St. Louis, Mo.; New York City; the Dominican Republic; Puerto Rico; and at present Ft. Myers, FL. I have traveled around the world. I am part of an amazing international family with close relatives from the Dominican Republic, Spain, France, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Canada, Ireland, China, United States, Venezuela, and feel comfortable with differences whatever they might be: from physical handicap to differences in color, race, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation. In fact, I always thought we are all "minority" in some ways. I used to joke about being a minority and the meaning of it. I realize now that what De La Cencela, Jenkins, and Chin (1993) say about the term "minority" is true; it goes beyond the color or group of any people. It has connotations of oppression, of disempowerment and poverty that are inappropriate and offensive in the context of Latino groups (as well as other groups) that are educated, economically strong, and socio-politically organized.

Reality forced me to accept that I was "minority" in Puerto Rico. This means that I was deprived in many instances of opportunities due to me as a regular U.S. citizen: I was denied equal pay for a similar position held by a Puerto Rican, pay increases were less, caseloads were bigger. I was not able to work for any public office. I applied for vacant positions with the University of Puerto Rico; although I had a DSW, the position went to a Puerto Rican with an MSW. I made applications with the Court system, the Department of Social Services, the Public Mental Health Outpatient Clinic, and even the Puerto Rican Telephone Company. I was always turned down because I was "overqualified," or because references were required from the politicians or the party in



power. After many months First Hospital Panamericano, an American hospital, hired me.

But what happens when you get a job and the clients you are servicing discriminate against the social worker delivering the service? Often, the clients do not want to openly discuss difficult situations with someone they don't trust.

Discrimination brings out in the open the best and the worst of our personalities. It helps me think, it helps me to process my thinking, and it also helps in confronting my own values and beliefs. Anger is displaced by a sense of understanding, and some empathy emerges, which allows the change to start, continue, develop, and eventually bring to closure for both the client and me.

Journey to the Inner Self

It was not all about Puerto Ricans but also about my feelings and me. Would I be paralyzed in terms of my practice? Could I work with Puerto Ricans? Could I maintain peace within myself and serve the Puerto Ricans?

Being a social worker and doing clinical work, it occurred to me that all I had to do was to enter the road less traveled: a journey to my deepest feelings.

I had to do what Flores (2000) says about reflection on one's own identity. Flores discusses the type of questions one must ask in order to do some reflection: Who am I? How comfortable am I with myself? In other words, when doing this type of reflection you will find your real self, the reality of you. You can confess to yourself among your innermost feelings.

These questions can be intensified among Latinos because ethnicity is continually changing by marriage into a different group, accepting and assimilating many new values. I realized the extent to which my family of origin, my religion, and my social class status, together with the social environment, media,

television, and the different geographical settings have influenced me.

In traveling towards the inner me, I encountered a reality: I am a unique individual with some specific purpose in life. Also, I came to the conclusion that many people were not as aware as I was of my purpose, yet I had to fulfill it in order to experience a sense of achievement and accomplishment. There was no longer space for anger; there was only space for growth and development.

My first reaction in Puerto Rico was anger, shock, and disbelief. I was angry because I felt it was unfair and I certainly didn't deserve such treatment. When I think about it now, I must ask myself the same question: who deserves it? No one does. It was rejection. It necessitated coping, adaptation and a degree of acculturation. As I began to seriously explore my experience of living with social and verbal rejection, I also began to re-examine my attitude towards other groups of people known to be "minorities," towards those of the different ethnic groups to whom I provided mental health services. I found room for improvement and gaps to fill.

I looked into the mirror and I saw myself a "majority" in the Dominican Republic discriminating against Haitians, much as the Puerto Rican "majority" behaves in Puerto Rico. Many of the Haitians who come to the Dominican Republic are poor, even poorer than the Dominicans, they get the lowest paid jobs, and they sometimes work for food alone. Dominicans exploit them and look down at their culture.

Again, discrimination seems related to power. Dominicans in the Dominican Republic are the "majority," and as such push around those in less powerful positions, the Haitians. There are many reasons for this: Haitians have different history, different language, different culture, and darker skin. Dominicans dislike Haitians perhaps as much as Puerto Ricans dislike Dominicans. I realized for the first time



in my life that Haitians in the Dominican Republic must feel the same way I felt while in Puerto Rico: unwanted, foreign, alien.

Being "majority" and "minority" in different stages of my life has awakened my conscience to a better understanding of both ends of discrimination.

The learning that has taken place because of this experience in Puerto Rico is rich in terms of feelings aroused and, as a result, there has been much growth and peace. The growth includes a deepening empathy for all who experience oppression and discrimination, and a clear vision of my need as a professional to continue searching in order to serve others and to maintain the needed peace within the self.

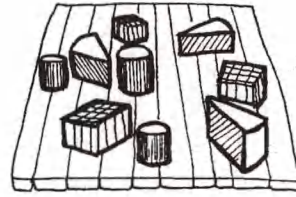


Journey to the Puerto Ricans

I realized in practice what some authors discuss at length, that when one holds an ethnocentric perspective it really is only one dimension of the entire situation in which the individual is developing and working. The ethnocentric perspective prevents understanding and recognizing of cultural differences.

In working with Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico there were some very specific tasks that I had to do if I was to be a successful practitioner: it was imperative that I compare the two cultures, and instead of taking for granted that we were the same, I had to look at both cultures and find both similarities and differences. I made a point of discussing those differences and similarities with my clients and with friends, family, and colleagues.

Doing so forced me to identify and value differences as well as to identify and avoid stereotypes. The literature on diversity suggests that a significant component of multicultural practice is the need to learn from and about other cultures (Murphy & Dillon, 1998). Such knowledge is very helpful in recognizing the differences and being supportive of them. Differences are not good



nor bad; they are just differences. As a clinician, I have found it very helpful to acknowledge differences. The recognition of differences goes beyond the obvious and also gives a sense of acceptance to the client. The fact that the clinician knows about the client's particular culture can be an icebreaking technique in a multicultural situation. The sense of openness, the idea of being immediately accepted and the clinician's willingness to discuss problems make it easier for the clients to disclose the situations that brought them to the consultation.

I was challenged by and adapted to the circumstances, dedicating myself to learn more about the complexity and richness of Puerto Rican culture, literature, history, economic resources, and political status. I wanted to be proud of my knowledge of Puerto Rico and its people. And I am.

End of the Journey

Now I look back with joy to those 14 years in Puerto Rico; I am grateful for my stay there. My work was appreciated "in spite of being Dominican." It made me a better person, a better clinician, and a better teacher.

I learned about Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans, but most interesting, I managed to learn about myself and discovered many dark places as well as some brilliant spots. I learned about my values, my beliefs, my thoughts, my talents, my language, my heritage, and my family. I was happy as I discovered what I was about.

By living in different cultures and hearing different languages, one learns to adapt to new surroundings and to new people. In so doing, one learns about the culture and the language

of the host country. It is inevitable that some adaptation takes place, as well as some giving up or reviewing of those beliefs and values held for so long.

The healthiest way to deal with such situations and not to allow them to overpower you is through a process of positive identity formation in which the stigma is seen for what it is, society's view, and therefore robbed of its poison (Lee 2001). One of the dimensions this adds to the helper is the skill to guide such a process and to promote group work as a natural means of helping, mutual support, and empowerment.

Eventually, after my first job in First Hospital Panamericano, I became Preceptor in the U.S Navy, and a consultant in the AIDS Program of the University of Puerto Rico. I taught in the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, I gave a large number of seminars and conferences, and I established my own private practice. Except for the U.S. Navy, the other institutions hired me out of necessity. They could not find Puerto Ricans with the preparation and experience required because of accreditation and legal or academic requirements. And, of course, they gave me a lower salary and a heavier work load.

Cultural Sensitivity

There are differences among people in gender, language, age, color, class, race, and sexual orientation. The major differences are not even visible, but they are there. Differences can separate only if the person allows it. The separation is manifested by use of power. Some people, by virtue of being part of a group, exert a lot of power. They have access to jobs and job security, to housing, education, representation in government, and participation in civic life.

To have power in a society can be a good thing. The problem is when the power is obtained at the expense of others. The power is often translated into discriminatory practices. Kivel (1992) says that it is crucial

for one's survival to know where one stands on the scale of power. It is crucial simply because if one has less power, one is vulnerable to harassment, verbal abuse, poor health care, job discrimination, police abuse, and many other types of discrimination and even violence. I learned that discrimination goes way beyond not liking you or liking you but not your group. People, in general, are not aware of the damage discrimination can do to a person, to a group of people, and to society itself.

Social workers are expected to change and to educate themselves to meet the needs of their "majority" and "minority" clients. However, they must be clear about themselves and their own feelings on these issues. Models of culturally sensitive practice stress cultural awareness of the social worker. Lum (1999) discusses the culturally competent practice model, focusing on four areas: cultural awareness, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and inductive learning. I encourage social workers to think also about the distinct cultural aspects of the client, to do more reflecting on their own experiences with different clients from different cultures.

Schön (1987) advocated that professionals be reflective practitioners so they can grow and develop expertise. The reflection puts one in contact with the subject of reflection as well as with the inner feelings of the professional. Knowledge and information, once acquired is put into perspective, and the existing gap that appears to exist between valuable information that is being published and the application of that knowledge (Sotomayor, 1991) can be bridged by this type of exercise.

Puerto Ricans and Dominicans share the same Latino ethnic and cultural background. However, there are many issues related to poverty, political status, immigration, and history that distinguish these two groups. Being in the position of the service provider as a Dominican, I had only one choice: to

work out my feelings. I knew I could not blame or target the Puerto Ricans or to return the discrimination. I left Puerto Rico as a foreigner, which is what I was, and have been able to continue my involvement with Puerto Ricans in the island as well as in the States. Since then, I have reviewed my feelings about the Haitians and other groups that experience discrimination, and concluded that one's nationality or color of skin is a mere accident. We must learn to accept one another the way the Creator formed us.

As an educator and service provider, I found my experience in Puerto Rico to be a training on sensitivity and diversity. In most schools of social work, students are requested to take a diversity class. They look at their past and present experiences as related to the diversity in their geographic areas. It is not easy to develop a program for educating social workers to be effective in today's society. The development of a culturally sensitive and competent professional requires specific knowledge and skills, as well as community experience. Students prepared this way can be of service mainly to members of oppressed and marginalized groups. If, as a teacher, I manage to encourage awareness and valuing of all individuals, groups, and cultures, and if I am willing to make changes to my own attitudes, I will be teaching and learning at the same time. The students and I will be engaged in taking the journey towards the roads less traveled: the inner self. (Asamoah, 1996)

Culturally competent attitudes evolve out

of having an open mind and heart and a willingness to increase awareness about one's own cultural identity and to truly learn the cultures of others. Cultural competence is a dynamic attribute that as a helping professional, I strive for. In reflecting on my own experiences of discrimination and in meeting the challenge to develop knowledge of myself and other groups, I have deepened my knowledge and skill. Now I can teach and practice what I have learned.

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UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES: A WORKER'S JOURNEY

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An awareness of professional boundaries can be obtained through formal educational training, a review of the literature, and practice experience. For this author, an introduction to boundaries resulted from a relationship developed with an adolescent in a residential treatment facility. A professional's reflection on boundaries is shared, highlighting such areas as dual relationships and boundary confusion.



The phone rang early on the first Saturday morning that I had off in a month. It was Holly, a fifteen-year-old adolescent whom I worked with in a residential treatment facility. I immediately felt a knot in my stomach—I could tell by the tone of her voice that she was in trouble and would be requesting my assistance. How did I know this? Past experience. Over the course of the past several weeks, I had spent hours of time, patience, and money trying to assist Holly in utilizing the skills I observed while she was in the treatment facility.

Weeks prior to this phone call I was committed to do whatever I could to help Holly. After all, she was a good kid who just demonstrated poor judgment by displaying physical aggression towards a family member. However, at 8:00 a.m. on my only day off to sleep late, I felt resentful and emotionally drained by Holly's requests. I briefly stated options when Holly told me that she had nowhere to live. Through tears she begged me to let her come and live with me. When she refused to listen to me tell her that this cannot happen, I informed her that I was hanging up, and I did. Emotions overtook me—I was glad the phone call was cut short and at the same time felt horrible that I was so cold hearted to a kid I truly cared about.

A professional boundary "is not a

figurative line in the sand or any other kind of apparent demarcation but a metaphor for the rules and limits—if not the unspoken rituals—that are supposed to govern the social worker client relationship" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 435). Professional boundaries are meant to safeguard interactions predicated by client interests (Peterson, 1992). My attentiveness to and appreciation for boundaries has been challenged and strengthened through years of working with youth. Because workers are frequently not trained in the area of boundaries (Richmond & Padgett, 2002), the impetus to my self-awareness and growth in the area of professional boundaries resulted from my interactions with Holly. Sharing of my pilgrimage helps to keep me ever mindful of the importance of boundaries in the helping relationship. Therefore, it is with humility that I offer what Holly taught me about boundaries.

When I began working as a counselor, admittedly I was very uneducated about what the term "boundary" meant. For example, my understanding of the word meant that workers should ensure that no youth was physically or sexually abused. When I was hired at the treatment facility, it was stressed that no personal information about the worker's life, past or present, was to be shared. The focus of interaction and discussion with the adolescents was based solely on their issues and on assisting them toward progression of a healthier lifestyle. It was fairly easy to adhere

to the strict guidelines because it was the norm of the agency. And, because my frame of reference regarding boundaries was mistaken, I was accepting of how I was instructed to behave in my interactions with youth. Moreover, an incident occurred shortly after my hire where a counselor disclosed personal information to the adolescents and then lied about what she had divulged. The adolescents rebelled against the counselor, which ultimately resulted in her leaving the agency. The experience of my coworker engaged my attention—I should always keep the focus on the client.

By the time Holly was admitted into the treatment facility, I had been a counselor for several years and was considered “seasoned.” Engaging with teens, using a strength-based approach during interactions, setting firm limits, and maintaining appropriate boundaries became a customary way to work. However, whether or not a counselor was seasoned, Holly’s temperament made it especially easy to interact with her. She was polite, receptive to feedback, would take responsibility for wrong doings, and was invested in her treatment progress. It appeared that substance abuse was the basis for the aggressive behaviors Holly had demonstrated prior to entering treatment. Holly’s sobriety fostered her kind and gentle self. As a result, Holly and I quickly established an effective working relationship during the months she was in treatment.

Holly quickly progressed through the treatment program. Simultaneous with Holly’s pending discharge, I was preparing to leave the facility because I had accepted other employment. It was during this transition that my strict boundaries began to falter. The clinical staff that supervised the counselors within the agency changed. With the new modification came a shift in the agency philosophy regarding the implementation of boundaries. Consequently, counselors were expected to shed their one sided interactions

with youth, interactions primarily based on reflective listening. The new mindset was to use the relationship developed with the adolescent to facilitate change. As a result, counselors could share some personal aspects of their life, such as their marital status and if they were in recovery. In addition, with the transformation in daily interactions with youth, it was permissible to give gifts to celebrate accomplishments. Because I felt a connection to Holly, I went against what I was initially taught and bought a small gift for Holly to recognize her upcoming discharge and achievement. As if it were yesterday, I remember the trepidation when I handed Holly the gift, because I felt as if I were violating the strict rules of interacting with adolescents. However, since I did not have a clear understanding of professional boundaries, I was not skilled at articulating or differentiating the uneasiness that I was feeling and acting upon.

By the time Holly was ready to go through the graduation ceremony at the treatment facility, I was settled into my new counselor position. Holly’s therapist had contacted me indicating that Holly wanted me to speak at her graduation. I felt special, and gladly accepted the invitation. How could I not feel good? Holly was a bright young woman who had worked through her issues and was now ready to tackle life with a new perspective—I had been part of the change process. Around this time I had a discussion with a therapist at the new facility where I was working. Considering taking Holly to lunch, I asked the therapist her opinion. The response was it is okay to get together with former clients as long as you do not have sex or engage in illegal behaviors. Still skeptical, I spoke with another helping professional who confirmed that there was nothing wrong with remaining in contact with former clients as long as it was done responsibly. With two positive responses, I was convinced that Holly and I could get together outside the realm of the



professional relationship.



Having lunch with Holly rejuvenated my desire to stay active in her life. My thought was that I could serve as a mentor, coaching her to use the skills she had been taught in the treatment facility. Holly seemed amenable as we planned to get together again soon to talk. In retrospect, this was the turning point where the lines of professional boundaries were crossed. From that day on, Holly and I spoke frequently; we would go shopping, to the movies, or out to eat. I was her cheerleader to obtain good grades in school, to show respect to her family members, and to use her conflict resolution skills when she was angry. Holly's parents seemed pleased with my new role. For example, a couple of times when Holly was grounded from leaving her house, she was still allowed to stay at my home for the weekend so I could use my positive influence to redirect future decision making.

For several months the mentoring relationship was successful. Yet, gradually Holly's progress began to deteriorate. She showed signs of disrespect towards her family stopped interacting with friends; her grades began to decline, and she was not as receptive to my feedback as she had once been. And then the day came. I received a phone call from Holly stating that she was about ready to "lose it" with a family member. I implored her to go to her bedroom and wait quietly until I arrived at her house. By the time I entered her home there was a warrant out for Holly's arrest—she had been physically

aggressive toward a family member.

The months after Holly's arrest I was overly involved in trying to help her make some necessary changes in her life. I spent money on hotels when she had nowhere to live. I drove many miles transporting Holly to places she needed or wanted to go. In addition, I spent hours speaking with Holly and her family members, attempting to help them to mend their broken relationship. Ultimately, I reached my limit: I was emotionally drained from the neediness of the relationship and I severed the connection. Regrettably, I offered no room for discussion or closure.

Self-awareness and reflection are necessary in order for professionals to understand their actions and to make essential changes that impact clients. I was cognizant of how important it was for me to understand the relationship with Holly and, as a result, my journey began. My journey has been a painful one. I was embarrassed that I had acted unprofessionally and at the same time I was not quite sure where I had gone wrong—after all, I just cared about a kid. Also, I was angry with myself for going against the strict guidelines I had been taught. Plus, to make matters worse, I felt as if I were the only professional who had been in this circumstance.

If the professionals who guided me to continue a relationship with Holly had probed, they may have offered different advice. For example, the man I had planned to marry had a substance abuse problem just like Holly's. When my efforts to help him refrain from substances were unsuccessful, I focused my energy on aiding Holly. Clearly, I had fused my relationship difficulties with Holly's issues. As a result, entering into a dual relationship with Holly provided me an inordinate amount of boundary confusion. For instance, I maintained boundaries by not allowing Holly to live with me, and I did not share with her that my partner had a substance abuse

problem. But, acting as Holly's friend, I was available all hours of the day and night to talk, transport, or "loan" money that I knew would never be repaid. And, my efforts to act in a parental role were at best very inconsistent and thwarted with mixed messages. Still, for me, the attempt to balance the differences in the boundary expectations was stressful and in the end unsuccessful.

Soon after I terminated the relationship with Holly, I returned to college to finish my undergraduate degree. With time to reflect on my relationship with Holly, I had returned to a strict approach in all interactions with clients. I was pleased with myself for understanding how precious the helping relationship was and how easily it could become tainted. My goal became to educate as many professionals as I could about the importance of strict boundaries. Although I thought my boundary journey had been mastered and was over, I was just beginning. Not surprisingly, I did not give my boundary journey any more consideration until I entered graduate school. While working on my master's degree in social work, my advisor consistently challenged my "rules" about boundaries. She constantly provoked me to rethink my position and had me "keep reading." As a result of my graduate advisor's persistence and my commitment to develop a deeper understanding of boundaries, my journey has matured. Consequently, I have become more comfortable working amid the uncertainty of boundaries, no longer encapsulated in a rigid definition of "rules."

When I reflect on my experience with Holly, it is not surprising that the relationship failed. First, I did not have a clear understanding of the term boundaries, particularly as they relate to working with emotionally disturbed youth. Second, I did not have adequate supervision to provide consistent feedback regarding my interactions with Holly. Third, I did not establish with Holly what the boundaries would be in the second

relationship. Fourth, there was no clear rationale as to how the relationship would benefit Holly. And finally, I did not have a clear stance on when a professional relationship was over. For example, some workers adopt the viewpoint that the professional relationship ends "at the time services are terminated" while others foster the standpoint that "once a client, always a client," (Mattison, Jayaratne, & Croxton, 2002, p. 58) suggesting that the professional relationship is never over. Based on my experience with Holly, I now conclude that I embrace the "once a client, always a client" perspective (Mattison, Jayaratne, & Croxton, 2002, p. 58). As a result, if I had to do it all over again, I would not engage in a second relationship with Holly.

Perhaps one of the greatest learning experiences that I gleaned from my encounter with Holly is the importance of not working in isolation. Without a doubt I believe that when feelings begin to emerge within a worker about a client, it is essential to consult with a supervisor and/or trusted colleagues for guidance. I had a strong desire to nurture Holly and serve as her protector. At the time I was wrestling with the emotions, I was not being provided with consistent supervision. And, because I was uneducated about boundaries I did not request assistance from my supervisor nor did I speak openly and honestly about how I was drawn to wanting to care for Holly.

Although I have not seen or heard from Holly in almost a decade, she has made an imprint on my professional career. When Holly was tangled in my personal life, I had crossed the line of professional boundaries because of my lack of knowledge pertaining to personal limits. Now that I have a broader understanding of boundaries and a deeper self-awareness, I do not engage in dual relationships with clients. However, without question, my previous interactions with Holly have provided me practice wisdom that I am happy to share with other professionals. For

example, years later while working as a supervisor in a residential treatment facility I was afforded the opportunity to share reflections on my relationship with Holly. Two common discussions with counselors centered on issues such as gift giving and taking kids to their home. Because I am now in a doctoral program, my boundary journey has moved to another level. There is a scant amount of literature addressing the issue of boundaries within the youth work profession. Presumably, my future research will focus on ascertaining the most prudent way to assist workers in understanding, recognizing, and articulating boundaries (D. Padgett, personal communication, 1997) so they can proceed with their own boundary journey.



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UNFINISHED MISSION

Sidney Becker, retired police officer & teacher, New York City

This author illustrates the impact that one person can have on larger policy changes.

My adventure began on the morning of November 3, 1999. As an 81-year-old retiree who had devoted his entire adult life in public service in the employ of the City of New York, which included two full-blown careers (the first as a member of the uniformed force of the New York City Police Department, the second with the New York City Board of Education as a teacher of socially maladjusted youth for several years, and later Supervisor of Classes for the Emotionally Handicapped), I was taking a brisk walk in a clearly marked pedestrian lane on McLaughlin Avenue in Hollis, Queens, in New York City, and facing vehicular traffic.

McLaughlin Avenue, which is virtually devoid of sidewalks, is noted for its many sharp turns, and includes an entrance to, and an exit from, the Grand Central Parkway. Obviously absorbed in his conversation over a hand-held cellular phone, a motorist was attempting to maneuver out of a particularly sharp turn. When he finally noted my presence, the motorist panicked. He hurriedly dropped the cellular phone, over-compensated his steering, and headed uncontrollably in my direction. I dove out of the way, but the vehicle nonetheless succeeded in brushing my outer garment. In short, I came within a breath of losing my life.

As I lay prone on the pavement, unable to read the number of his automobile license plate, the motorist regained some measure of control and took off like a bat out of hell.

On several occasions during my first ten years with the NYPD, when I was assigned to one of the most crime-ridden precincts in the borough of Manhattan, I had looked down the barrels of loaded revolvers. But this episode was by far the most frightening I had ever experienced. I believe that I shall never be able to erase it from my mind. Moreover, I couldn't help but wonder about the terrible fate in store for other innocent people, less agile than I, who might one day be exposed to similar experiences.

Upon returning home, I vented my anger by writing an article, "Chatty Drivers Put Lives At Risk," in which I described my terrifying experience. I also expressed a conclusion I had reached many years earlier as a result of my ten years of experience with the NYPD when I was assigned to the Traffic Division. Namely, a motor vehicle is a potentially lethal weapon when placed in the hands of a motorist who is distracted from concentrating solely on operating his or her vehicle safely. On November 25th my article was published by the *Times Ledger Newspapers* of Queens, New York, in all 13 different newspapers published by the Times Ledger Organization.

In early October 2000, I learned that legislation banning the use of hand-held cellular phones while operating motor vehicles had been passed by the Suffolk County legislature in New York State. However, there appeared to be reluctance on the part of the Suffolk County Executive, Robert J. Gaffney, to sign



the measure into law. I wrote to the sponsor, including a copy of my article and offering my services. When Legislator Cooper subsequently phoned me, I told him that I was partial to a ban on all types of cellular phone devices, hand-held or otherwise, while operating motor vehicles. Legislator Cooper responded that a ban on hand-held devices lent itself to easier enforcement. Reluctantly, I agreed. He then invited me to testify at a public hearing scheduled by Mr. Gaffney for October 16th.

Soon after I arrived for that meeting,



about a dozen other witnesses drifted in, along with members of the print and broadcast media. Each speaker was allotted 10 minutes for his or her presentation. When my turn arrived, Mr. Gaffney's aide briefly described my background. I prefaced my remarks by stating that I was not opposed to the use of hand-held cellular phones, provided that they were used judiciously and did not imperil the lives of others. I then described my frightening experience and concluded by requesting that the legislation be signed into law. In the course of my presentation, I studied the faces of all the people in the room and was gratified by the rapt attention being accorded me.

The following day CBS radio news repeatedly broadcast my presentation verbatim, and a few days later Suffolk County Executive Robert J. Gaffney signed Resolution # 1755-2000 into law, thus making it the first such measure in the nation.

In early April 2001, I learned that Assemblyman Felix Ortiz of Brooklyn had introduced a bill in the New York State Assembly banning the use of hand-held

cellular phones. Wanting to help, I phoned Assemblyman Ortiz, who suggested that I contact the Committee on Transportation and apply to attend a hearing scheduled for April 17th in New York City. I complied and subsequently received an invitation to appear as a witness.

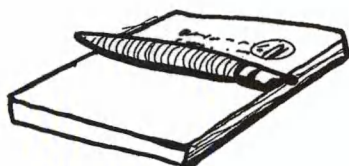
At the hearing, the six-member Assembly panel efficiently questioned each witness so that a consensus could be reached regarding the advisability of statewide legislation banning the use of cell phones by motorists while operating their vehicles.

The panel was noticeably disappointed—and voiced such disappointment—when a representative of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration maintained that his organization, in studying the distraction factor inherent in the use of cell phones while driving, had not arrived at a conclusion regarding the effect of such distraction upon safety. Nor did it expect to arrive at a decision in the immediate future. But no one in that assemblage was more disappointed than I, for based upon my ten years of “hands-on” experience within the NYPD’s Traffic Division, the distraction factor was the key element to be considered.

The testimony of representatives from eight telecommunications companies revolved around their introduction of an assortment of cellular phone devices. Such devices attached to vehicles, rather than having to be hand-held, thereby requiring only momentary removal of one hand from the steering wheel in order to activate them. But I failed to hear a single reference regarding the distraction factor inherent in engaging in often heated cellular phone conversation and the role of cellular phones in car safety. And here, too, I was sorely disappointed.

My testimony was similar to that which I had delivered to the assemblage in the Suffolk County Chief Executive’s office. Individual members of the Assembly Committee questioned me about whether the enforcement

of a ban on cellular phone devices, which were attached to vehicles, might prove to be more difficult than the hand-held type. I responded that such might be so, but that it was incumbent upon government to protect the public at large and that the distraction factor would inevitably have to be addressed.



It was not until June 25th that an event occurred that permitted me to experience some satisfaction. On that date the New York State Assembly passed the bill that had been introduced by Assemblyman Ortiz. This passage occurred several days after the New York State Senate passed the companion measure. Following passage by the Assembly, Governor George Pataki announced that he would shortly sign the measure into law, effective November 1, 2001.

On June 27th I received a personal invitation from Governor Pataki to witness the signing ceremony scheduled to take place the following day at Chelsea Park on West 23rd Street and Eleventh Avenue. And so I did, and was treated to the conversion of the recently passed measure to Chapter 41 of the New York State Laws of 2001.

It is my fervent hope that at the very least the example set in New York State will induce other states to follow suit. Perhaps the United States Congress might even consider nationwide elimination of this insidious practice in a more comprehensive form that far more realistically reflects the danger of the distraction factor. Were such to occur, I would consider my mission successful. I would derive considerable satisfaction knowing that my efforts have served to avert incapacitating injuries and the loss of lives of many innocent people.

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

Special Issue: Forthcoming In 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

In celebration of 50th anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which desegregated public schools, and the 40th anniversary of the landmark federal Civil Right Act of 1964, which desegregated higher education, *Reflections* will publish a special issue on past and contemporary accounts of the struggle to achieve social equality within the helping professions—including their educational and training programs, agencies and professional associations as well as within external communities and organizations, including host universities and colleges. Narratives should focus on the struggle to achieve desegregation, civil rights, racial equality, and nondiscriminatory practices within the helping professions. Original narrative articles and oral history interviews are welcome.

Manuscript submissions should be sent to special issue editor:

John Kayser, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver
2148 S. High Street
Denver, CO 80208

Deadline: September 2, 2003.

"WITNESS PROTECTION" OR "I'M A SEAGULL... NO, THAT'S NOT RIGHT."

Gregory D. Gross, M.S.W., College of Saint Rose, Albany, New York

A person can spend twenty-some odd years teaching social work practice and almost forget those not-so-painless memories of life in the profession (or in the trenches). Then real life intrudes. Face to face with a public display of child abuse and a semi-private enactment of arrested mental illness, the witness meets up with real life and discovers his own social work.



I kept the car radio off for over an hour. That's how I knew that The Incident had hammered me into some kind of numbness, the kind that requires a soundless ride home. Somehow news, weather, and top forty seemed unbearable to the ear. The Incident required no soundtrack; the screaming made background music unnecessary, and my own head, snapped back by what it saw, could endure no music—or any sound—whose source came from outside my own head.

I always play music in the car. The music spouts out full blast, often to keep the sound outside the car at bay. After The Incident, the music became a part of this outside world and that world, too, had to be kept outside. Sound became an intruder to a place that could abide no intrusions. Like offering drink to the drowning man or cheesecake to the retching, the possibility of radio jingles threatened my ability to tolerate my own thoughts. That's how awful it was. No thirst and no appetite, just a numbness that needed to remain that way.

Just to get it out in the open, I'll state here what it was. A man in the street beat up his daughter. The details will come later, if you'll stick with me. But first I want to write about the hockey game I attended on the night of The Incident because it was that hockey game that disturbed that numbness so that I could feel again.

But then again, it's not really about a hockey game but rather about containment. Surprisingly few hockey players ever get hurt despite the game's reputation for violence, a reputation well earned, one might add. The very language of hockey speaks to the game's violent nature—hitting, checking, forechecking, bumping, shooting, blocking, and, of course, the quasi-religious "saving." Virtually all the penalties, though, are designed to reign in violence; penalties for cross-checking, high sticking, kneeling, boarding, tripping, and, my favorite, slashing, assure that nobody gets hurt. Even in a fight with bare knuckles striking either face or solid helmet, neither face nor hand nor helmet gives out. Or so it seems. Which is probably the reason crowds love a fight on the ice. A man slips on a banana and gets up; that's funny. He slips and breaks his spine; that's tragic. Neither funny nor tragic, hockey violence is contained. Hockey has containment. Sixty minutes and no more; inside the oval rink and no further; under the watchful eyes of three officials or stranded in the penalty box. All this plus the ethics of fair play bring containment. At the corner of Brandywine Avenue and Odell Street, there was no containment and so I needed the radio off or a hockey game on to help me cope with what I saw. It was awful. Here goes!

Does it matter that it all happened on a

cloudy Saturday afternoon the weekend before the election, Roy Orbison on the radio, on my way to pick up my wife Judi's new skis, and all without a care in the world? Probably not. But there I was in the left-hand lane glancing at the right-hand sidewalk where a family of four was walking all in a line, Mom pushing a stroller, Dad pushing a little girl. At first, they seemed to be laughing at innocent and playful rough housing. Not sure, though, I watched a tad longer until they turned the corner up Odell where the father's pushes escalated and came into clearer focus. A quick U-turn in a convenience store's parking lot enabled me to drive up Odell Street to do what I could to stop the beating—the grabbing of a little girl's hair (or was it the back of her neck?), the pushing of a little girl, screaming, to her knees while he pummeled her from above with his free hand, mother and stroller nearby. By the time my car sidled up next to the family, the beating was over. The crying and the yelling continued, however, with him pursuing her down the street with long and angry strides, a stalker after his own child, full speed ahead, a man driven by a purpose up to no good. And it was awful!



Two pedestrians arrived at the same time. They scolded him and demanded he stop. "You can't do that to a child! You keep off her!" One of the men wore a head brace, one of those metal squares attached to head and shoulders designed to immobilize the skull. Courage incarnate, he served as my surrogate as I remained safe at the wheel, one finger on the button that with a single poke could raise my window and muffle my heart pound. I shouted agreement with the man who

unwittingly had stepped in as my mouthpiece. Small wonder that his headgear is called a halo, for that man was an angel on a mission. Somewhat secure that the public nature of the act and the public nature of the sanction would end it all, I began to drive away, hopeful that the incident had ended. But without so much as a tip of the hat to my training in social work and the code of mandatory reporting, I decided simply as a citizen to call the cops just in case. A half dozen fellow citizens were standing in the parking lot of the store—witnesses all—each shouting alarm at what they had seen. "Anyone calling the cops?" "Yeah!" At the edge of the lot we coalesced into an instant posse (a gang of five on ice) to demand intervention, justice, and punishment. A mob in the process of becoming.

We could all see a car stopped dead in the middle of O'Dell Street, and we could all see the fistfight that had spilled out from the family into the road where yet another Samaritan had tried to intervene, this time to the tune of slaps and groans and half nelsons. Minutes later we learned that the family's wife-mother had dragged a teenage girl out of a Toyota in order to stifle the teen's "Leave that girl alone!"

You see, there was no containment there. Not the public realm, nor parental love, nor shouting citizens, nor a one-ton Toyota could contain the violence which not only happened but also escalated and spilled-out, white liquid splashing from a broken milk bottle onto the gutter below, oozing its contents onto the boots of the onlookers. I admit I could barely contain myself. I wanted to join the mob. I wanted to grab and knee and shake some sense into the abuser. With these sensations building up inside, two miracles occurred. They weren't really miracles, but they did snap me into a state of perspective. First, a police car drove by, heading in what appeared to be the wrong direction. I ran parallel to it, shouting, "Officers! Hey, Officer!" These shouts enabled me to discharge some tension,

as did the very presence of the cavalry, so my fury became a bit contained when the second miracle—or should I say coincidence—occurred.

My daughter drove into the parking lot, out of the clear blue sky, a cavalry of her own. "What's wrong, Dad? Your car broke down?" She wanted an explanation for the sight of her father, arms flailing, flagging down a cop car. I heard myself censoring my language. Not wanting to lay on her even a hint of violent or uncouth speech, I traded decorum for accuracy. "Some guy beat the daylights out of a little girl." DAYLIGHTS! Hear that? "Daylights!" That's not the word that begged to rush across my lips. "DAYLIGHTS" doesn't do it. He hadn't beaten the "daylights" out of anyone. In my heart and mind—even in my own muscles—he had beaten the you-know-what out of her. I censor that word here as I did then, but thank heavens others did not. And that amazes me. Each witness used the same crudity that I had avoided to describe what had happened. The universality of the imagery used suggests that only one truth existed for The Incident: that man beat the s**t out of that little girl!! The pregnant suburbanite, the store clerk who had heard the girl's screaming from inside the store over the gas pump intercom, the street kids just passing by, all testified to the police with the same words: "He beat the s**t out of her, Officer." Yes, language creates reality but today reality created language.

We don't know the rest of the story. The police allowed the family to remain together at their home, the child denied the beating, a report was to be filed, a social worker called for our respective testimonies. Maybe the system worked. Yet, so far we don't know the rest of *my* story because it unfolds day to day, like all stories. I do know the phrase I used at home to describe the impact of the event: "It hurt me." That's what I took with me to the hockey game—a sense of hurt, of having been bloodied somehow. That milk

all over me. I no longer know what "innocent bystander" means for I feel neither a bystander nor an innocent. So leave the radio off so that quiet can do its job of containment. Got hockey?

Prologue

This prologue stands out of place but, then again, this whole affair seems out of place. That is to say, I can't decide whether I was in the wrong place at the right time, the right place at the wrong time, or the right place at the right time. All I know for sure is the fact that this incident was not the first one to have occurred and in the same week. The previous Monday Hillary Clinton—First Lady, New York's most recent immigrant bypassing Ellis Island to a multimillion dollar mansion near the Hudson, campaigning or carpetbagging her way to the Senate (depending on one's political persuasion), and eventual victor for Pat Moynihan's vacant seat—had swung by St. Rose to rally one last time in the state's capitol. Long after she left, a lone supporter and a stranger on campus sat solo in the faculty lounge. Well dressed in her wool camel coat, buttoned to the top for the hours she sat, a woman of indistinguishable age (forty-ish?) stared at two Polaroids that she held in her hands. She smiled at me each time I brushed through the lounge, and we began to expand on the pleasantries with each brush through. "Hi" became "How ya doing?" which became "nice day" until we began to talk. She was eager to show me her Polaroids, and she did. They were most remarkable in their unremarkable-ness. The first photo captured Hillary at the podium. The candidate had raised her right arm, no doubt to punctuate some rhetorical instant. The photograph was not so much out of focus as out of kilter. The woman had tilted the camera, surely by accident because no artistic slants resided in the frame, just a mistake slight enough for the viewer to wonder, "What's wrong with this picture?" But it's the second photograph that



haunts me still.

For the second, the camera had caught Hillary's vacated podium. The "ghost" of Hillary must have remained behind because what struck me was the podium's headlessness. The podium was half-empty. Right in front of the podium stood the photographer herself. That no expression graced her face created the visual impression that she too, like the podium, was a piece of furniture, resting as foreground and implement to the podium-throne. One would think the addition of a person within the frame would humanize the picture or at the very least would fill the frame. It didn't. The photograph remained fully empty. But not to her. She stroked each photograph with childlike pride or perhaps with wide-eyed fascination that these were hers. No, her incessant soft smile didn't betray pride but rather something deeper, something from inside percolating to the top to land in a Polaroid moment. "I'm a photojournalist," she announced. Amidst her life story that included "training" in photography in Portland, Oregon, and homelessness here in Albany, New York, she explained that she was waiting in this lounge to find out where the college newspaper is located so that she could donate her Polaroids for publication—her gift to the school. "Yes, I'm a photojournalist."

Yes, I'm a social worker, although I deny it. My identity lies in 24 years of teaching, not in the profession I profess about and while this profession resides in the social sciences, it is in the humanities where questions of who I am get resolved. Almost any mention of identity raises for me my favorite play wherein Chekhov's Nina recites my favorite line: "I'm a seagull...No, that's not it...I'm an actress." So what is it here? Seagull? Actress? Photojournalist? Lost person? I'm not sure. But she is more than a "crazy lady" though her story contained more than a fair share of madness, to be sure, replete with medications, a string of temporary digs, and a male

caretaker of sorts whom she distrusts because he possesses an odor, she said, that stems from the wrong food unsettled in his innards, said foul vapors symptomatic of an unwholesome soul of sorts. Or so she said and I have no reason to doubt her. And I was glad she brought up the subject of smells because—how can I say this?—because...she smelled. All around her rested the whiff of rubbing alcohol, cinnamon, and something else. And I wondered if what a colleague had told me over 25 years ago was true—that people with schizophrenia have an odor. I had never believed that nor had encountered anything in the literature to confirm it, but on that Monday I remembered it and wondered once more if it were true because here before me, locked in conversation and care, sat a woman who smelled with what my colleague might have termed the scent of madness, not "the scent of a woman" but the scent of a woman gone mad—methanol and madness with a twist of cinnamon and something else.

Two months later at the height of hockey season, a January freeze hardened the city's park lake. With the summer ducks gone south, the lake seemed lifeless save for two solitary seagulls squatting on thin ice (not an uncommon sight; they are often spotted even on puddle ice in parking lots.) Still, they seemed out of place—stranded, lost, and every bit separated from their element. But were they? Only our expectations make them so. More likely, being stuck in Schenectady was merely one more resting place for their natural journey, a stop as natural as their flight.

No closing drama rests in that awareness; no epiphany from the two incidents either. No professional awakening from an ivory tower sleep or new commitments to client causes, though these do rest at the edges of what did strike me about all seagulls including my own. The striking thing is this: we must all cultivate our willingness to encounter whatever flies or floats before us. The seagull does not dip

down from one real world to another's ice, abuse or photojournalism, but rather takes on whatever life offers. Ours is a natural world after all, and it is the nature of natural worlds to act naturally—that is to say beautifully, cruelly, and unpredictably. Nature likes to tease containment, perhaps in part to see if we are paying attention. I want to pay attention now. If social work is a calling, I no longer want to just wait for the call. I might have some calls of my own to make. In any case, I must cultivate my readiness and my eagerness to act naturally in this social world.

(I am a seagull. No that's not right... I am a social worker.)



LIBERATING THE BEE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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The author's encounter with a former student is presented along with a related classroom vignette about liberating a bee. The link between liberating the bee and transformational learning in social work education is discussed and demonstrated by narratives from the social work classroom.

I recently attended a statewide social work conference, where, once a year, I have an opportunity to visit with students whom I have taught and who are now working as professionals in the field. At the conference this spring, I was speaking with a student who had been in M.S.W. classes with me five years ago and who was now a social worker in child protection. I remember her as an unusually sensitive and kind person who was eager for knowledge that would help her work effectively with her clients. I recall that she wept in class over the suffering of a client and that she met individually with me several times to begin to filter her own life experiences through the practice theory we were learning in class. After a few moments of catching up with each other at the conference, she looked at me and said, with a big, warm smile of appreciation on her face, "What I remember most about your class is the bee." I felt uncertain and must have looked at her quizzically and she said, "You know, when you liberated the bee."

Then I remembered. One warm fall day a bee had flown into the classroom. Several of the students began to chase the bee to kill it. I was sitting in a circle with the students and I asked them to wait to see if I could just take it outside and set it free. Just then the bee landed on the floor right by my water bottle and feet. I put my hand down and the bee crawled right into my hands. I cupped my hands together and got up and walked outside with the bee crawling on my hands

and placed it in the grass. When I walked back into the classroom, the students were smiling for reasons that I suspect ranged from thinking that I was crazy, to a kind of bemused appreciation of their strange professor. As I sat down at my place in our class circle, a male student said, "The course is over then, you just taught us all we need to know." We laughed a bit and settled down to finish the class.

I initially felt taken aback when my former student told me that the bee incident was what she remembered most from my classes. She had been in my classes for two semesters. In that time we had studied social construction and phenomenology as foundations for a multicultural practice as well as engagement, assessment, and practice with individuals and families at the advanced level. The discrepancy between my perception of weeks and weeks spent together working with complex material and her shining memory of a moment spent liberating a bee was worth exploring.

In the months that followed, I continued to teach with the awareness of the salience for this student of the bee incident. I began to contemplate the ways in which liberating the bee is a metaphor for teaching. What I believe now is that, for this student, the liberation of the bee was an image that condensed and symbolized aspects of learning that the class and I shared during the two semesters that we were together. In this paper, using examples from the classroom, I will explore



learning as liberation in social work education.

Transformational Learning

I think it will be helpful to ground my discussion of liberating the bee in the social work classroom in a brief discussion on the literature on transformational learning in the field of adult education. In writing about the humanistic approach to education, Carl Rogers (1969) described two types of learning: one is primarily cognitive, and the other experiential. Rogers thought that the role of the teacher was to facilitate experiential learning and thereby encourage personal change and growth in the student. More recently, Jack Mezirow (as cited in Imel, 1998) has expanded upon Rogers' theory of learning and describes transformational learning as a process by which learners change their "meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions)." Mezirow (1991) emphasizes the role that critical reflection plays in liberating learners from their assumptive constraints so that they can create new, more expansive understandings.

Robert Boyd (1989; 1991) has offered a critical response to the emphasis on rationality in Mezirow's work in which he suggests the role that intuition, creativity, and emotional awareness play in transformational or emancipatory learning. From Boyd's perspective, transformational learning challenges the student to move beyond a primarily ego/cognitive engagement with class material into the realm of the heart or soul. Boyd suggests that the process of transformational learning is psychosocial in nature and requires the learner to recognize the authenticity of alternative perspectives. Students are then to engage in a process of modifying and even relinquishing old perceptions and old constructions of reality that are no longer useful while moving to construct more integrative ones. With this background, I would like to move on to narratives of learning as liberation in the social

work classroom.

Liberating the Process in Social Work Education: Beginnings

The first opportunity for liberation in the classroom group presents itself the moment the students and I settle into the classroom the first day of the new semester. I begin immediately to sense the tone of the group. Are they excited, bored, resentful, open, closed—a bit of each? Each group of students has a distinct feel. Then I get in touch consciously with my own reaction to what I am experiencing in their presence. In the first class of the semester, I find that intense feelings of appreciation for the students arise in me and I speak to them of my respect for their choice of social work as a profession. I have done this with students at all levels, from B.S.W. to a new doctoral level class. I may sense that several members of the class are resentful for having been, for example, required by their employer to proceed with a graduate-level education after years of working in the field. In that event, I express my gratitude to them for working in a profession whose very existence is a reflection of the forces in the collective that have the courage to turn toward rather than away from people who are suffering. That they, as students of social work, have chosen to be a force of caring and healing in this world continues to move and astound me. Sometimes, when I share this with the students while looking at each one of their faces, tears well up in my eyes. I ask them to work with me to create a classroom that becomes a holding environment—an environment of safety that will support the difficult work of filtering what we study and learn through our own diverse life experiences so as to increase our open-heartedness towards self and others. I let them know that I hope that learning for them and for me in this class becomes personal rather than impersonal and conscious rather than dissociated, as is so much school learning.



In my first years as a professor, I was embarrassed and reticent about being so open with the students about how warmly I felt toward them. However, my reticence vanished as, in class after class, I continued to experience the profound nature of each student's commitment to being a force of healing in this world, and as I received feedback from students that their natural instincts were supported by my emotional openness. I am also clearly offering the social work students a parallel between my feelings of welcoming and honoring them and their approach toward the new clients they will soon meet in their field placements. The core characteristic of this offering is the genuine versus the prescribed surfacing of feelings of respect and acceptance. Rather than modeling a predetermined set of behaviors, the students sense my attitude toward them in my tone of voice, body language, pace, and silences.

Respect, acceptance, and empathy become the ground that, I believe, transforms course reading material, case material, class discussions, and assignments into an experience of learning as liberation. When the material of education is approached within a container of empathy and respect, the learning experience benefits from the cognitive/emotional/cellular integration that characterizes embodied learning. "Transformation" and "liberation" describe the effects of a classroom process that involves a widening of contexts in which to experience and interpret self. One effect of such self-expansion is the experience of empathy—a softening of the heart through which to engage and embrace oneself and the world beyond self—a palpable quickening of our inborn resonance to the world (Macy & Brown, 1988).

Recently, a student challenged me in a way that resulted in a mutual empathic softening and expansion that affected the entire class. In the first class session of a course, after welcoming the class, I began to speak about the political nature of social work practice with reference to the short-term treatment timelines dictated by for-profit managed-care companies. A male American Indian student raised his hand and in a very hostile and defiant voice said, "Define political." I was somewhat shaken by the angry tone of his voice but commended him for wanting clarity on meanings. I stated that, on one level of analysis, I used the term "political" to refer to power, but then suggested that we talk about what the word means. He began talking about welfare and how he thought it made people dependent and lazy, thus decreasing their sense of power. Other students began to disagree vehemently with him. As the course proceeded, this man often made statements that were delivered in a hostile tone and seemed to have little relevance to the topic under discussion. I could see the other students raising their eyebrows and shifting in their chairs, and I sensed the beginning of a process of rendering him a scapegoat. In my analysis of the situation, I believed that the class was too newly formed and the student too vulnerable for me to undertake an in-class discussion of the group dynamics. Acting on my intuitive response to the class dynamics, each time that this student spoke out, I made a conscious effort to slow down, track his comment, and explore with him its relevance to the current class topic. He and I often traveled a winding road to connect his ideas to the current topic. However, we usually succeeded in doing so, often with great benefit to the level of class discourse as he was obviously well-read in disciplines such as political science and sociology. At times, though, I could see that the class was impatient with my reaching so hard to include his ideas into our discussions.

The first assigned paper in this class was on engagement with clients. The students were asked to demonstrate a working knowledge of the core conditions of relationship, e.g., respect, empathy, genuineness, and congruence. This man turned in a paper that was, to me, alarmingly judgmental of his client who was a 20-year-old woman whose baby had been removed from her due to neglect. The student's apparent lack of empathy for his client worried me, so I asked that he meet with me so that we could go over the paper. He came into my office three times, and we went over each contact that he had with his client with the goal of developing an empathic feel for his client. I asked him to rewrite the paper with the purpose of developing and expressing empathy for his client. He did quite a good job on his rewritten paper, and, with the first glimmer of interpersonal warmth that I had observed, he spontaneously reached out to shake my hand and thanked me for taking time to work individually with him.

Over time, the student began to speak more in class, and eventually I felt that I did not have to reach so far to connect his comments with the classroom topics. In the second semester of class, he chose to present on the "humanist/experiential" models of practice and did a superb and quite critical presentation covering the history of this approach, its major principles, and their translation into practice. Over the months that I tried to bring this man into the flow of the class, he and I engaged in a process of expansion and inclusion that was more complex but ultimately more integrative for the entire class than if we had succumbed to judgment and exclusion and the temptation to squash him. The inclusion/exclusion dance was particularly charged when considered in the light of the societal marginalization of American Indians. In retrospect—like the unchoreographed experience of liberating the bee—a fundamental teaching of the first semester for the students and me resulted

from this student's challenge to us to create room for him until he was able to relax into the flow of the class.

Diversity

Diversity textbooks often focus on multiculturalism as content rather than process. M. Knowles (1984), an expert in adult education, articulates a theory of andragogy in which she suggests that adult learners benefit from a shift in the educational emphasis from content to process. In my teaching experience, paradigmatic epiphanies occur in the classroom when the content of cultural diversity gets spontaneously transformed into an *in vivo* experience of the process of diversity. During such an experience, the students are propelled beyond ego/cognitive engagement with the class material into the mythopoetic realm where their imaginations and hearts come alive. Lesson plans and didactic material can actually inhibit such paradigmatic epiphany by filling up the empty spaces of uncertainty and not knowing from which it emerges.

At the university in which I teach we are blessed with a multicultural student body that usually includes members of several American Indian tribes. The Indian students continue to raise my consciousness both about the cosmological (worldview) biases inherent in social work literature and practice and about the radical curricular alterations required to transform the often lifeless pedagogy of diversity into a personal, experientially based transformation of self. The student who recalled the liberation of the bee was in a class composed of about ten people self-identified as Hispanics, about eight people of non-Hispanic western European ancestry, three traditional Navajos from the reservation, and one traditional Apache. Our multicultural treatment textbook that year had chapters on the characteristics of numerous ethnic groups. The class had discussed methods of cultural genocide used on the American Indian tribes

and current reverberations of such genocide in the incidence of alcoholism and family stress on reservations. We had also discussed the fact that, in our class, we had cultural descendants, if not actual genetic descendants, of people who had tormented and killed the original inhabitants of North America as well as the descendants of the people who first experienced the oppression.

One of the American Indian members of the class stated that she felt that the Spanish were as culpable as the Anglos for the Indian genocide. An Anglo (non-Spanish western European background) man spoke up and expressed that he was sick and tired of being blamed. An Hispanic man said that he thought that the Anglos were far more responsible for Indian torture than the Hispanics and that Anglos have since oppressed Hispanics. In almost every discussion such as this, students who feel that they are being portrayed as perpetrators of violence become defensive and begin to express their resentment either verbally or through emotional withdrawal. I believe, and often remark in class, that this defensiveness reflects our individual and collective terror of feeling emotions stimulated by grief and guilt. In this particular class session, I remained silent after the discussion of blame. Then a middle-aged American Indian woman, Mae, who was usually very silent in class, asked to tell her story.



Mae described being taken from her family one day when she was five years old and being placed in a boarding school run by the federal government. She remembered her mother standing at the door crying, not being able to understand the English language explanation of why her little girl was being

taken to a school that was inaccessible to her parents. Mae believed that she would never see her mother again. She described having her long hair cut off and being forbidden to speak her native language with the other children. She told of her stomach aching with homesickness so that she couldn't eat and thought she was going to die. She cried and cried at night for her mother. She worried about her mother and how much her mother missed her. She reported that nothing was ever the same—of the lifelong effects of having to harden her child-soft heart in order to survive. Her survival brought with it the reality of biculturalism that then prevented a seamless return to her origins. She reported that she never again felt a oneness with her Indian-ness or with the world of her parents. Her homecoming into the arms of her mother and the communal ethos of the reservation were from that moment tainted with her identification with the other, the oppressor. She had internalized the “badness” of her language, the “inferiority” of her culture. Mae was weeping and could not continue to speak.

Many of the students began to weep, as did I. After a silence, an Anglo student spoke of imagining Mae as a five year old as she was talking and that the pain of that was almost too much. Other students expressed what it would have felt like to them to be wrenched from their mother, father, and culture at five years of age with no understanding or expectation of reunion. Several of the female students pulled their chairs near Mae to offer comfort. The prior class focus on constricting our engagement to the cognitive dimension addressed by the textbook and on defending ourselves from feeling the devastating effects of our national policies toward Indian tribes was transformed into a direct experience of sorrow, empathy, and humility. We now understood that the quiet beauty and strength of this woman, with whom we had been in class every week, incorporated such loss and sorrow. When the

class was over, Mae continued to weep, as did several of the other students. No one left the classroom. I thanked Mae for sharing her story. I stated that it took courage for the students to move from their defensive position in relation to oppression to softening in light of the sorrow of it.

Writing about educational process, Chris Bache (2001) describes transformational learning as being characterized by:

... precious moments of self-illumination, those rare times when students do not want to leave the room at the end of the class session, preferring to linger in the afterglow of some breakthrough.... An experience of transformational learning leaves the students feeling more real, more fully alive to life's possibilities." (p.3)

Writing specifically about learning and knowledge constriction in social work, R. Imre (1994) writes:

In social work as we find our way past that chunk of ice, the ubiquitous knowledge base concept in our driveway that has a tendency to freeze our brains as well as block our progress, the way is opened for new insights leading to new directions. (pp. 3-4)

An advanced social work practice class that I was teaching had an experience of knowledge base thawing that involved an Apache M.S.W. student who was presenting a case of a Navajo high school student with whom he was working. His client, a 16 year-old boy, had recently developed symptoms that included deteriorated school functioning, feelings of depersonalization, intermittent hallucinations, anxiety-producing dreams, social isolation, and deteriorated hygiene. The

psychiatrist had diagnosed his client as having schizophreniform disorder and had recommended antidepressant and antipsychotic medications. The social work student felt concerned by the treatment recommendations and, with the permission of the adolescent's school, contacted a traditional medicine man from the client's tribe. A time was set up for the medicine man to visit with the boy and to do ceremonies that involved a sweat lodge. After his visit, the medicine man reported to my social work student that, from his perspective, the adolescent boy's symptoms were characteristic of those of an incipient traditional healer.

Some members of the social work class expressed their disbelief of the medicine man's belief system. They expressed their belief that schizophrenia is a genetic disorder and that its victims should be medicated and that not doing so was an ethical violation. A Navajo student described that what Western society conceives of as schizophrenia can be, in her tribe's cosmology, the result of a person disturbing a specific animal habitat. The Apache student then spoke of his grandfather's life as a healer, which included doing ceremonies for all kinds of problems that in non-Indian cultures are treated with talk therapy and/or medications. Another Navajo student spoke of how her family had ceased treating her mother's diabetes with insulin in favor of treating it with ceremony. We were challenged to face a juxtaposition of belief systems such that the high school boy could be envisioned as being on the threshold of an initiation into the metaphysical mysteries of healing or on the threshold of mental illness. I remarked that making personal and interpersonal room for contrasting cosmologies is the mind-altering challenge of diversity. Experiences that soften the rigidity of paradigmatic certainty usually have an unbalancing and thus liberating effect in the classroom.

Liberating the Content in Social Work Education: Multidisciplinary Literature

Social work happens across cultural edges, whether those edges be ethnic, class, age, sexual preference, or gender (Rose, 1990). A primary challenge of teaching for me is to find reading material that addresses cultural edges from an open-hearted and compassionate stance.

I have often assigned a chapter from a book entitled "God is Red" by Vine Deloria, Jr. (1994). In this chapter, Deloria addresses time and space in American Indian cosmology and spirituality. He writes:

The question that the so-called world religions have not satisfactorily resolved is whether or not religious experience can be distilled from its original cultural context and become an abstract principle that is applicable to all peoples in different places and at different times. Context is therefore all-important for both practice and the understanding of reality. The places where revelations were experienced were remembered and set aside as locations where, through rituals and ceremonies, the people could once again communicate with the spirits. Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible and gradually the structure of ceremonial reality became clear. It was not what people believed to be true that was important but what they experienced as true. (p. 67)

One class in which I assigned this reading was composed of 23 people, ten of whom were self-identified as Hispanic, eight as

Anglo, four from various Navajo tribes, and one Apache. During the class discussion, many of the Anglo and Hispanic students stated that this article was difficult and incomprehensible to them. The Apache student began to explain that this article was meaningful to her. Then a Navajo student stated that much of the assigned reading in the class made little sense to her but that this one article addressed her experience. The other Indian students agreed. The Anglo and Hispanic students asked the Indian students if they would explain it to them, which the Indian students did. A few of the Indian students, who rarely spoke in the class, articulated beautifully the meaning of the article to their lives—especially in terms of the ways in which the nature and meaning of time and place in their worldview contrasts with that of western philosophy.

This recognition of difference was enlightening. No longer would the non-Indians amongst us who were in the numerical majority be able to assume that our belief systems were fundamentally similar to those of American Indians we might work with on the reservation or in the large cities. The experience offered all of us a chance to be liberated from potentially oppressive assumptions about "reality" and "truth." That the Indian students had to reach as far to engage with all of the other readings in the class as the non-Indian students did for the reading by Deloria (1994) has revolutionary implications for what a multicultural curriculum in social work actually entails. For example, could it mean that the advanced practice classes might include transpersonal theory and Sweat Lodge intervention and/or drumming ceremonies on an equal footing with cognitive theory and intervention? And, if that were possible, is it appropriate from the Indian perspective to share these healing rituals with outsiders? The goal would be to liberate the "multicultural" curriculum from its focus on an examination of the static content of culture to include multicultural experiences that challenge

us to recognize the relative nature of our ethnocentric assumptions about truth and reality. In such learning, what was assumed to be universal becomes just one cultural figure in a much altered and expanded ground.

Social Work Literature

After grounding a course in multidisciplinary material, I move to more traditional social work content that I choose, in part, on the basis of whether it challenges the students to engage in transformational learning.

In addition to textbook readings, I assign journal articles that give examples of relationship building from the field. One such article by Jeree Pawl (1995) presents a case in which the author worked as an infant/parent therapist over five years. In the article, the author proposes that babies who have received reasonable care develop a sense of being held in their caregivers' minds. Pawl (1995) writes, "When a child is held in mind, the child feels it, and knows it. There is a sense of safety, of containment, and most important, existence in that other" (p.5). The experience of being held in another's mind results in an existential sense of being personally intact and interpersonally connected. This existential sense of intactness and connectedness permeates a person's entire life course. Pawl describes how she had once remarked to a client that she had been thinking in between sessions about something the client had told her. The client was startled and then visibly moved that Pawl would have remembered between sessions that she even existed. Pawl makes the point that the opportunity to experience and provide the experience to another of existing in someone's mind presents itself throughout our lives, although if not experienced in infancy and childhood, reparation becomes more difficult. Pawl (1995) writes, "But this only develops if you truly are consistently in the mind of someone, so that you are noticed, spoken to over a

distance, rescued, protected, appreciated, and tethered across space and out of mutual sight" (p. 5).

In class after class, students express how deeply this article affects them and continue to bring up the central notion of "being held in another's mind" throughout the entire academic year. One student, who was also an art therapist, reported in class that she was working with a client who was basically mute. The client appeared for her weekly sessions, but felt too depressed to express herself through artwork and was unable to speak for complex reasons involving fear of not being understood and existential shame. The social work student reported that she was feeling frustrated and did not know if she could continue to meet with this client. Then she thought of Pawl's idea of emotional holding and began to breathe softly in tempo with the client. The student began to relax immediately and over a period of about a month, the client began to express her appreciation of the student's willingness to just "be" and to not make demands on her. Eventually, the client began to draw and talk with the student's ability to just be with her and not make demands.

Self-psychology (Elson, 1986) is an advanced practice theory for social work that draws upon the core conditions. Self-psychology integrates a theory of human development with a depth approach to social work practice. From a self-psychological perspective, optimal infant and child development occurs in an empathic environment in which the child experiences merger with caregivers who anticipate and tend to his/her needs and in which the child receives reliable and realistic affirmation of his/her worthiness. In such an environment, the child develops a sense of being seen and valued and develops into an empathic adult who is able to develop and express his/her talents in the world and find satisfaction in relationships. In every advanced practice



class that I have taught, the students are hungry for a practice approach that integrates a theory of human development. The phenomenological quality of self-psychology excites students in that it seems to explain what they already have experienced in their own lives and with their clients in the field. The students are relieved by what they feel is its basis in the commonsense idea that if you do not receive adequate nurturing in infancy or childhood, those needs will persist into adulthood and, quite likely, complicate life. This theory presents specific tools that social workers can use to help adult clients understand what they have lost and how to begin to come to terms with what they can never retrieve. Self-psychology offers a rationale for helping clients move through a grieving process within the containment of a corrective relationship so as to become free from the grip of the past.

Self-psychology challenges the students to move their practice beyond engagement and relationship building to help the client develop a level of self-understanding and self-acceptance that will encourage emotional growth and even spiritual development. In one advanced practice class, an Hispanic student gave a presentation on the parallels between the traditional healing practices of Curanderismo and the self-psychological notions of restoration of the traumatized self and the importance of grieving. Several students have noted the similarity between the notion of "soul loss" or "susto" familiar to Curanderos and self-psychological notions about the empty self that result from trauma and narcissistic injury. A Lakota student wrote a paper on the similarities between the developmental perspective of self psychology and the Lakota Medicine Wheel perspective on life-span development. These integrative efforts support the notion that theories that have a phenomenological grounding often have pan-cultural relevance.

Conclusion

The class material that I have discussed is chosen to provide a foundation for a type of learning that is personal and thus has transformational potential. Just as the liberation of the bee that fall day in the classroom became a salient memory for my student, liberated learning is encouraged when students are challenged by classroom process and content to develop clarity of mind and a softness of heart in a learning environment that is both empathic and reflective. I would like to end with a quotation that I often hand out to my students. It is from a book by Chogyam Trungpa (1984) on the human condition and human potential from the perspective of a wisdom tradition of ancient Tibet. He writes:

When you awaken your heart in this way, you find, to your surprise, that your heart is empty. You find that you are looking into outer space. What are you, who are you, where is your heart? If you really look, you won't find anything tangible and solid. Of course, you might find something very solid if you have a grudge against someone or you have fallen possessively in love. But that is not awakened heart. If you search for awakened heart, if you put your hand through your ribcage and feel for it, there is nothing there except tenderness. You feel sore and soft, and if you open your eyes to the rest of the world, you feel tremendous sadness. This kind of sadness does not come from being mistreated. You don't feel sad because someone has insulted you or because you feel impoverished. Rather, this experience of sadness is unconditioned. It occurs because your heart is completely exposed. There is no skin or tissue covering

it. It is pure raw meat. Even if a tiny mosquito lands on it, you feel so touched. Your experience is raw and tender and so personal. . . You are willing to share your heart with others. (pp. 45-46)

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SENSEMAKING: DAS NARREN SCHIFF 2

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The title of this column was a toss up between *Ship of Fools 2* and the *Son of Ship of Fools*, so I settled on the above. The legendary *The Ship of Fools, Das Narren Schiff*, was a social welfare technology in the 15th Century used by some European communities to solve their problems with the poor, the emotionally disturbed or anyone else they wanted out of their territory.*

Community guardians put those persons on a ship, paying the captain to take them down river to the next town and drop them off. It may very well be that some of them may have been ditched somewhere before that town, particularly if the down river towns paid the captain not to unload them in their area. On the other hand, it was reported that people often flocked to the docks when the boat landed to have a jolly time poking fun at the passengers. My dilemma about the title choice was not a flippant decision, but rather it was a troublesome reflection and a grim reminder that this kind of human disposal was not some obsolete artifact of days gone by, but a human tragedy, one that comes back to haunt us repeatedly. Calling those persons fools was a labeling process, which haunted them and condemned them to ridicule, abuse, and perhaps death.

In later centuries, poor persons or others who were unwanted might be shipped off to penal colonies, or sent to be indentured servants to "colonies" away from the mainland. Some lived short lives, others became leaders and or ancestors of citizens of new countries. But those were the not so good old days, and things like that are now usually unacceptable, except sometimes.

Some of my readers might recall a point in our not distant past when "Greyhound Therapy" was a practice of choice by states in various parts of our country. Persons, usually those on welfare, were given a bus ticket to another state and sent off to be taken care of

"up-river." Not by ship of course, but by an Overland Cruiser. Usually those up-river states provided more adequate welfare provisions, so perhaps sending them there eased the consciences of those in charge, who might have prevented such expulsions. But of course the main goal was the same as in the 15th century: get them out of our territory.

Once again, we face programs that reflect the Narren Schip mentality. Two projected programs in New York are startlingly reminiscent of those schemes. Remember, the people on the ships were not fools. They were persons with problems that the communities either couldn't or didn't want to deal with. Likewise, those enduring Greyhound Therapy on the non-stop buses suffered from poverty, not from foolishness.

New York City, like other large cities, has numerous persons with emotional troubles, and numerous individuals and families who live there are citizens without homes. Some of the problems are the result of drug use, some a result of the sensible (at the time) emptying of institutions with the intention of serving those persons in the community, but the funds to do so were never provided. The social causes are varied, but much of the problem is due to the lack of affordable housing, even for the working poor. New York City has done much to deal with these problems, but two of their efforts carry the heavy shadow and burden of the Narren Schiff.

One of the shadows came with the announcement that the mayor of New York has been investigating a plan to house the homeless on converted pleasure cruisers to be docked in New York City. "Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's new idea for New York City homeless shelters? Retired cruise ships—the discos and bars removed—docked at the Hudson or East Rivers." The cities commissioner of homeless services said, "In many ways they are ideal" (Barbara Stewart.

New York Times. Nov. 24, 2002. p.4).

Another reminder of the Narren Schiff approach had already taken place with the transporting of numerous citizens who were emotionally disturbed to sites across the Hudson River to New Jersey (not on boats of course), and to points further up the coast. Putting these plans together has the remaking of the Narren Schiff approach to "solving" vexing social problems.

Now, I am supportive of searching for creative solutions for persons who are homeless, and I believe strongly in offering services that meet the needs of persons who are mentally disordered, but will just any program do? At what price to the person? Are we at a point in society where we have lost the meaning of community and understanding that a "home" is more than a temporary place to live? "Home" needs to be close to schools and shopping, and to all of the services that all of us need

I can't imagine what the problems of living with a family on such a boat might entail. Is it very different than living in a "camp?" What freedoms are limited? Certainly it would be warm, dry, and food would be available. Recreation, like baseball for youth, might be limited, and transportation to work might be a little more difficult. Would the gangplank be pulled up at certain times? Would there be difference between first class and windowless cabins? Yes, it may be better than being housed in jails as some earlier plans proposed. It may also be better than putting families on some of the Navy "Mothball" fleet, or a barge that might house thousands. "Housing idea: USS Homeless" (*San Francisco Examiner*, Dec 30, 2002 p.2). What autonomy and self respect is left the person?

In an interview with noted psychiatrist Dr. E. Fuller Torrey in the above mentioned *New York Times* article, he offered the following observation about the Ship of Fools: "It's the idea of a closed world, cut off from civilization and populated by outcasts." Patrick Markee, senior policy analyst for the Coalition for the Homeless said, "Putting outcast people

offshore; there's something punitive about it."

Should we add to the isolation of those in institutions by ignoring the value of family and friends being able to visit their loved ones in those institutions, without having to travel from New York to Boston to do so? Distance aside, you might say, these people need care. Will they get it out of state, out of view, out of earshot, out of the coverage by the *New York Times*? Let's see.

"New York Exports Mentally Ill, Shifting Burden to Other States" proclaims the headline in the *New York Times* (Clifford J. Levy, Nov. 17, 2002. p.1). The article goes on to report the extent of the problem. The city is unable to care for its mentally ill. There are investigations of deaths, mistreatment, and lack of care within the city's mental facilities. Yet it may be even worse in some of the places these people were sent to in New Jersey and Massachusetts. Some were sent to nursing homes that are "problem-plagued," many without mental health credentials, and some that had been "admonished by New Jersey officials for providing inadequate care." One place in Massachusetts was "deemed so violent and disastrous" that they were threatened with closure. Why did New York state have people sent to these places? To save money, of course.

People must speak and act against the *Narren Schiff*-type solutions. We are not only talking of the many hundreds in New York, but the thousands in the U.S. that all people, and certainly social workers should be rescuing. **Yes! Rescuing.** "Not what social workers do," you might say. **RESCUING!** When the ship is sinking, that is what those of us who can *need* to do. It's what makes sense. If not now, when? If not us, who?

* See for example Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in The Age of Reason*. New York: Random House, 1965.

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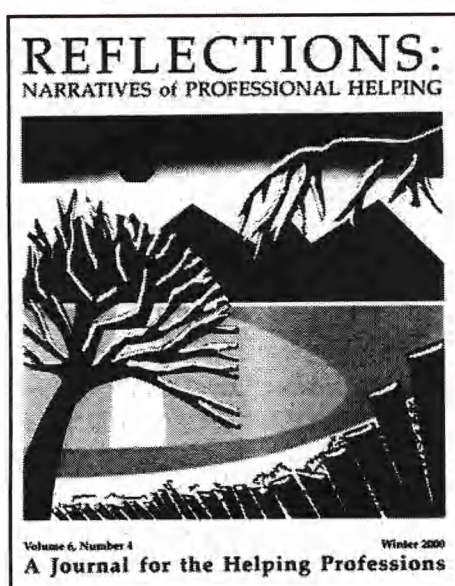
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