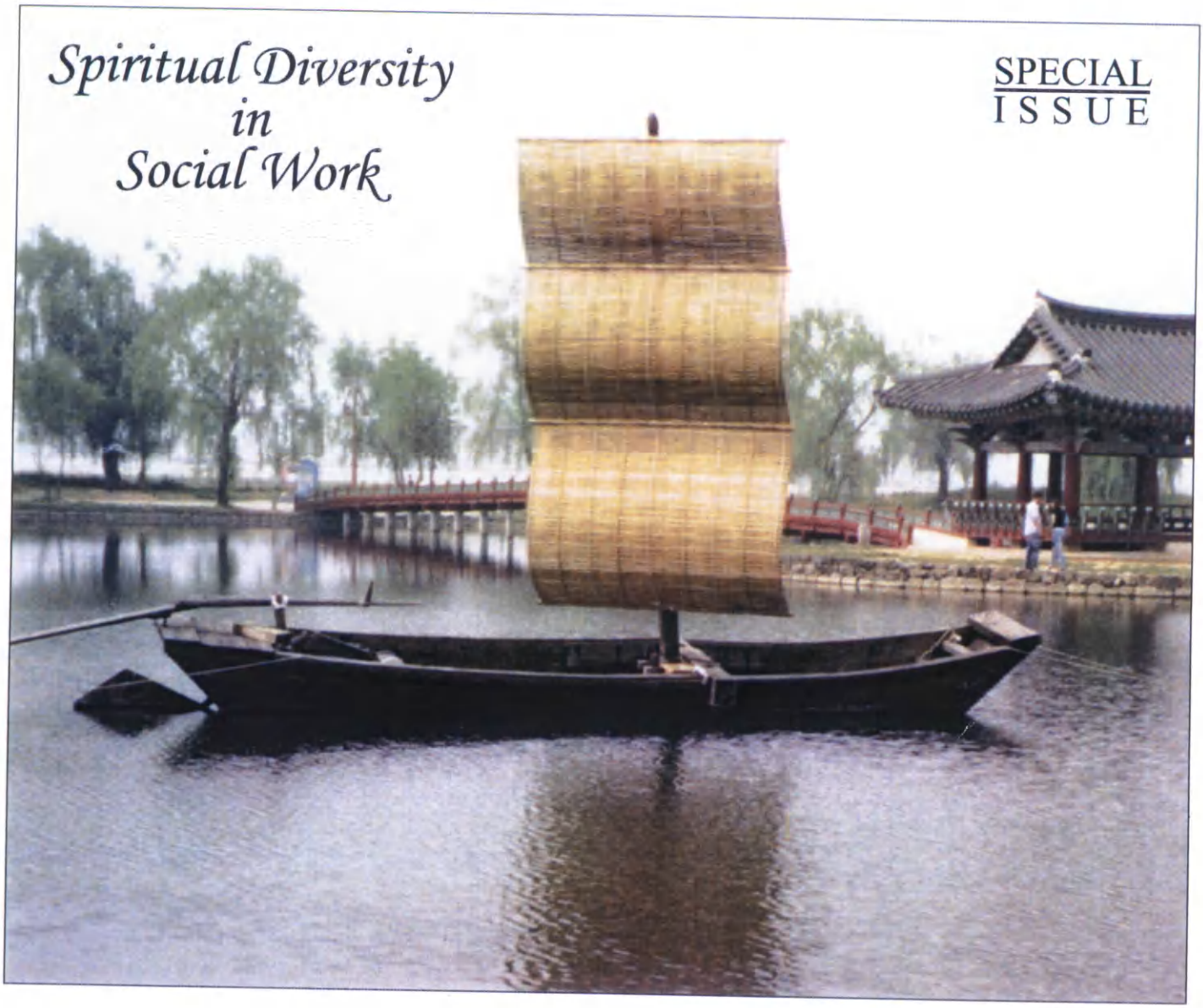
REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Spiritual Diversity in Social Work

SPECIAL ISSUE



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REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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REFLECTIONS: Narratives of Professional Helping
California State University, Long Beach
Department of Social Work

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.
Editor

October 3, 2005

Dear Reflections Subscriber:

Due to printing errors the previous copy of *Reflections* that we mailed you was not the final corrected version. Because this issue on Spiritual Diversity in Social Work is so important to our readers, we are sending you another corrected version of the Summer 2005 issue of Reflections edited by Edward Canda.

Jillian Jimenez
Editor

1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840-0902
tele: (562) 985-4626 fax: (562) 985-5514 email: reflect@csulb.edu
website: www.csulb.edu/depts/socialwk/reflections/call.htm

REFLECTIONS
NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Volume 11 **Summer 2005** **Number 3**

Special issue on Spiritual Diversity in Social Work
Guest Editor Edward Canda, Ph.D., University of Kansas

Cover photo by Edward Canda. "Traditional Boat, South Chungcheong Province, Korea", June 2005. Original artwork by Daniel Jimenez

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Reflections From the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

I am very happy to offer this issue on "Spiritual Diversity in Social Work" edited by Edward Canda, to **Reflections'** readers. Professor Canda is a renowned scholar whose book, *Spirituality in Social Work Practice* brought the social work profession back to its roots of spirit-filled compassion and resolve—a vision forged by people of faith. With this work, Canda acknowledged all the complaints that a secular society has heaped at the door of religion, at the same time calling for an understanding of spirituality as "the heart of empathy and care, the pulse of compassion, the vital flow of practice wisdom, and the driving force of action for service"(xv). Canda continues to remind us that our spiritual dimension is inextricably tied to the ontological questions of existence and essence and that it has driven our collective search for meaning throughout our history on this planet. It is impossible to deny the importance of spirituality in the short lives we are given, and certainly not good professional practice to ignore its meaning in the lives of clients. Yet that is what the social work profession sought to do for much of the twentieth century. In the struggle for professional legitimacy, social workers sought a false objectivity by valorizing scientific empiricism and secularism. It was as though disavowing our spiritual roots was crucial to our sense of ourselves as professionals. Yet the social constructivist position has revealed the limits of empiricism and objectivity, as well as exposing the ineluctable drive for meaning that characterizes our humanity. We can now re-own spirituality as a legitimate field of practice and inquiry. For this we have Professor Canda to thank, along with others, like the authors in this issue of **Reflections.** They have allowed us to look at our own professional history with both dispassion and compassion, urging us to complete the circle and to embrace a vision of the meaningful life that our spiritual dimension offers.

Reference

• Canda, E., & Furman, L. (1999). *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice.* New York: Free Press.

Call for Papers
Special Issue

Social Work Practice with Southeast Asian Populations
Guest Editor: Brian Trung Lam

This special issue focuses on the resilience of Southeast Asians in social work, allied human services, and helping professions. *Reflections* seeks narratives that encompass experiences in teaching, personal histories, professional practice as well as the design and implementation of successful interventions related to South East Asians.

Narratives may address but need not be limited to the following:

- Experiences or studies that illustrate, in a traditional professional helping context, the differences between help- seeking behaviors of Southeast Asian populations and the help- seeking behaviors of the mainstream population.
- Experiences or studies that explore resilience in research or clinical practices related to Southeast Asian populations.
- Experiences or studies that illuminate immigration histories, cultural norms and beliefs that are sources of resilience, or serve as a source of empowerment to either the practitioner or the client.
- Experiences or studies that report how cultural blue prints have been integrated into clinical practice, macro practice or social work education.
- Experiences or studies that address ethical dilemmas, particularly those uniquely associated with Southeast Asian populations and how these dilemmas are resolved.
- Experiences or studies that reflect the narrator's personal struggle in understanding social justice and equality issues.
- Experiences or studies that reflect the narrator's personal history and how that has impacted him/her professionally.
- Experiences or studies about the process of acculturation that had an impact on the narrator's professional development.
- Experiences or studies about the importance of various networks of social relationships within the community and how the involvement with these networks influence worldviews and coping strategies among Southeast Asians.

Mail manuscripts to: Brian Trung Lam, Ph.D.
Department of Social Work
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd., CA 90840
(562)985-4625 or email: blam3@csulb.edu

Manuscripts are due by: September 30th, 2005

Introduction by the Guest Editor: Fish in Trees

Edward R. Canda[1], Ph.D., University of Kansas

The guest editor, Edward R. Canda, Ph.D., is a Professor and Chairperson of the Ph.D. Program in Social Work at the University of Kansas. He has more than 100 publications, most dealing with connections between spirituality and social work. He is especially committed to international networking and collaborations that further understanding of spiritual diversity in social work. His virtual Spiritual Diversity and Social Work Resource Center offers numerous resources for social workers and other professional helpers via www.socwel.ku.edu/canda.

Reflections Beside a Pond, July 2005

Spotted carp and goldfish glide through the branches of trees
And leap among clouds.

Water hyacinth lift up their leaves from murky water
Like palms slightly cupped in prayer toward heaven.

Rushing waterfalls
Obscure the sound of traffic from just beyond a fence.

Memory of my brother's recent death
Enters my reflections.
Suddenly
All of this takes on a tint of sadness.

So, a solitary falling leaf
That ripples the surface of the pond
Is not just a leaf
But also a sign of loss.

Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion
Sits across from me
Slightly smiling.
Her equanimity is never disturbed
While her reflection wavers continuously.

As I notice this
The fish in trees reappear.

When the fish are hungry,
I spread a handful of food upon the water.

Photo by Edward Canda

Reflections on this Special Issue on Spirituality in Social Work

This is the second special issue of the journal **Reflections** to focus on spirituality in social work. In the first editorial (Vol. 1, issue 4, Fall 1995), I pondered at the reflecting pool among national monuments in Washington, D.C., regarding large matters of politics, peace, and truth. This time I reflect beside a small pond in my own backyard, regarding personal peace of mind and the loss of a loved one. Reflections at both places and times share the question: how can we understand the images and representations we have of ourselves, the world, and our clients, in such a way as to be of genuine service? The authors in this issue help answer this question by telling stories and sharing viewpoints that reflect how

they connect spirituality with social work in various venues of teaching, research and writing, and direct practice.

Some authors state that their standpoints are shaped by a particular religious perspective (e.g. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam). Some combine multiple religious influences. Others do not state explicitly their own spiritual standpoint. And others address spirituality without specific religious affiliation. This illustrates some of the spiritual diversity within our profession. Some accounts are primarily personal narratives and some rely more heavily on ideas from professional literature or the stories of students and colleagues.

The first four articles focus on the challenges, rewards, and spiritual growth of teacher and students that can arise through teaching about spirituality in social work degree programs. Letendre, Nelson-Becker, and Kreider discuss how their spiritual backgrounds blending Christian upbringing with Eastern spiritual insights affect their teaching about spirituality in courses related to clinical practice, aging, and human behavior. They reveal personal feelings and lessons learned from both mistakes and successes in the classroom. Lay discusses the importance of being genuinely and fully oneself as a teacher, in part by sharing stories of personal spiritual import with students. As illustration, Lay recounts her own moving story, in response to a student's question, "How did your parents respond to your being gay?" Weaver's brief self-reflective essay conveys her musings from meditative walking and preparing to teach a retreat style course on spirituality in social work practice. Nadir gives an account of how she decided to develop a course about Islam for social workers, including three students' self-reflective stories, and valuable insights she gleaned from this experience for herself and other educators.

The next three articles focus on research and scholarly writing within the authors' spiritual and academic journeys. Sanger tells the story of his personal experience of continued connection with a deceased loved one and how that intersected with his dissertation research and academic presentations about how social workers respond to clients' accounts of communicating with the deceased. Banerjee explains how her Hindu upbringing in India has shaped and been reshaped through social work research encounters with low income women in micro enterprise programs in India and the United States. Hodge presents his motivations for scholarly work, some of which has been highly controversial, along with his sometimes painful experience of people's reactions.

The last two articles address direct practice. Mili discusses her personal ambivalence about the empowering and disempowering impacts of Christianity on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons in relation to macro practice and social policy. Finally, Bigard recounts the way that her recovery from vicarious trauma as a social worker was helped by the spiritual practice of walking a labyrinth as well as applications of this spiritual practice in social work.

An unplanned but distinctive theme of this issue is inclusion and exclusion concerning spirituality. For example, Lay and Mili reflect on obstacles and breakthroughs as lesbians in a society and in religious contexts that often practice discrimination and moral condemnation regarding people who are not heterosexual. Hodge, who has advocated for more inclusion of conservative religious voices in social work, discusses his ideas and feelings about being ostracized by colleagues. Sanger portrays dismissive or discouraging attitudes of some social workers regarding his explorations of clients' experiences with deceased loved ones. Banerjee and Letendre and colleagues illustrate how they seek to connect with clients, students, and research participants who may have spiritual views very

different from or even in tension with their own. Nadir discusses the need for more social work education about minority religious groups, such as Muslims. Her students' stories show how they came to face discriminatory attitudes and behaviors of themselves and others. All of the authors in some way address inclusion of spirituality within professional social work settings that have often neglected or excluded the topic.

While the articles vary in topics, perspectives and writing styles, they share the insight that careful reflection on self, others, and relationships is crucial for connecting the topic of spirituality with social work. As you read these articles, I suggest that you first just perceive each author's representation of what is real for her or him. This exercise is helpful preparation for 'starting where the client is' (or student, research participant, colleague), in spiritually sensitive social work. As editor, I have little idea about the so-called objective accuracy of the authors' descriptions of personal experiences. Nor do I agree with everything said. But I appreciate the experiential realism and sincerity that all the writers demonstrate.

The authors present their perceptions of their realities within the times and contexts of their stories. Some of their views may be congruent with each other and some may be in tension or conflict. Can you enter each author's world and empathize at least for a short while? Notice your own reactions. What are your immediate feelings, thoughts, sensations, and intuitive insights? How do the author's words and your responses interrelate? What is it about you that predisposes you to these responses? What does this tell you about your strengths and your limitations? By reflecting in this way, what can you learn about yourself— wisdom you have attained and wisdom to which you aspire? How can this learning enhance your teaching, research, writing, or direct practice in a spiritually sensitive manner?

After this exercise of perceiving what is real for the author and how you respond, I suggest that you evaluate the contributions and limitations of each author's writing in terms of stylistic quality, ability to engage the reader in the story, accuracy and fairness in use of scholarly literature, balanced presentation of differing viewpoints, depth of self-reflective insight, and congruence with professional values and your personal values. This can yield additional guidance about ways you may or may not wish to incorporate spirituality into social work.

Fish in Trees

This journal challenges helping professionals to be self-reflective and to share narratives that are self revealing. It seems only fair that the editor do the same. So I would like to tell a story about a spiritual healing process I have been going through during the editing process.

As I prepared to write this editorial, I sat by the pond in my back yard, which encloses a small meditative space. Sitting there quietly observing 'just what is' helps me to clear my mind. It helps me open to the words and meanings of the authors and to creative inspiration for writing. 'Just what is': fish in trees. But it has been hard to focus on this writing and I would like to explain why.

Each of the past three summers, my wife Hwi-Ja and I have taught a Study Abroad course on spiritual diversity in Korean social work for a small group of students from the University of Kansas. Our colleague and friend, Dr. Seung-Hee Park of Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, works with us in a teaching trio as we travel around South Korea. Every year, when we happened to visit a lovely pond at a palace or temple, Professor Park enthusiastically said to the students: "Look at the water! See the reflections—aren't they beautiful? Fish are swimming in the clouds! What is real? What is real?"

I recently returned from two months of travels for teaching in Korea and Japan and visiting my family. While I was in Korea for this Study Abroad course, my eldest brother, Frank, died suddenly. My parents called me with the terrible news. We teachers and the students were just getting ready to climb into a van for an all day ride and visit to a huge Catholic social service center and college called Kkottongnae (Flower Village) outside Seoul. My wife and I felt stricken by the news, almost struck down. But we had to continue with our plan for the benefit of students. So I just went along for the ride, sitting in the van, crying. 'Just what is': grief. The students were empathetic and considerate. It felt like a blessing that I could just cry and not worry about it.

The tour of the Flower Village was amazing both due to the scale of the facilities and the loving kindness that staff displayed with residents who have been outcast from ordinary society due to severe disabilities and poverty. But it also seemed surrealistic. The juxtaposition of my inner grief, feelings for my family so far away in Ohio, going through the motions of the tour, and teaching made me feel oddly dissociated and poignantly connected to the moment all at the same time.

During the tour, we stopped at a chapel. Our tour guide offered a time of prayer for my deceased brother. The time for prayer was especially appropriate since my family of origin is Catholic. Most of the students were not Catholic, but they all chose to respectfully observe for my sake and that of my wife. It was serendipitous that we went to a Catholic agency just at the time that news of my brother's death reached me. This helped me feel connected to my family though still so far removed. Later, at the time of the funeral in Ohio, Professor Park and I set up a simplified Korean style memorial table and bowed in respect and appreciation for my brother.

This surrealistic state of mind has continued to the time of my writing now. A recent visit with my family to have a memorial at my brother's grave helped with the bereavement process. I have been able to focus better as the days go by. But it is still sometimes difficult to see the fish in the trees, to perceive clearly the authors' words, or to be open to inspiration for writing.

However, the responsibility and privilege of being a social worker, and having work to do during this time, raised the challenge of focusing in the midst of bereavement. The challenge is not to ignore or delay bereavement, but rather to go with the flow of the bereavement process while traveling, working, and resting, sometimes seeing the fish in the trees and sometimes only seeing grief.

The statue of Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, which sits by my pond, depicts a poise of quiet equanimity with compassionate awareness. The Bodhisattva's image in the water continuously moves. Both quiet compassionate awareness and movement: this is a fine ideal for spiritually sensitive social work. Noticing this, something became clearer. Fish in trees *and* sadness *and* quiet awareness *and* hungry fish *and* writing deadline: all of this together in this moment is 'just what is'. No problem, just natural. Finally, I could finish writing this editorial.

Dr. Canda can be contacted at: School of Social Welfare, Twente Hall, The University of Kansas, 1545 Lilac Lane, Lawrence, KS, USA, 66044-3184.

[1] Special thanks to Dr. Jillian Jimenez and Ms. Wendi McLendon-Covey for their copyediting, help, and patience.

Teaching Spirituality in the Classroom: Building Compassionate and Non-Judgmental Conversations with Students

Joan Letendre, Ph.D.,University of Connecticut, Holly Nelson-Becker, Ph.D., University of Kansas, and James Kreider, M.S.W., University of Kansas

This narrative describes the experiences of three social work professors whose lifelong interest in the spiritual realm guided their presentation of material in the classroom that engaged conversation about spiritual and religious beliefs. Specific skills for students to understand and work with their own spirituality and that of clients are reviewed.

There is increasing awareness amongst social work educators and their students that spirituality and religious belief are important domains for understanding the ways that people give meaning to their lives, cope with problems, ask for guidance and make decisions in daily life (Canda & Furman, 1999; Nelson-Becker, et al, in press). Spirituality is the search for meaning and purpose that lies beyond the self but includes relationships with self, others, and/or ultimate reality or ground of being (Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, in press; Canda & Furman, 1999; James, 1902/1961). Religion involves a community's formalized institutional patterns of beliefs, practices and values that focus on spiritual concerns (Nelson-Becker, Nakashima & Canda, in press). Religious and spiritual values about the worth of human beings and duty serve to influence decisions about vocation and guide many of our students into social work programs. The interest in the spiritual dimension of being, as well as the current focus on religious and moral values in the public domain, has led to a renewed interest in understanding how to use religion and spirituality in the education of social work students.

The social work profession is beginning to recognize and accept the meaning of living in a climate of spiritual and religious diversity. CSWE standards now emphasize the importance of including religion when one discusses diversity and populations at risk (Cascio, 1998). Assessment and treatment planning often include material on religious affiliation and spiritual beliefs. Faith-based programs for providing social services abound. Politicians beckon to their constituents using the language of faith. Yet the majority of social work professors have had little experience in discussing a topic that formerly was considered outside the realm of appropriateness in classroom discussions, especially in public universities. The authors of this paper believed that graduate students in their social work program might have the need to discuss these complex but highly personal issues that impact their work with clients.

Each of the authors has long held an interest in personal and collective spiritual practices and was motivated to help their students expand an awareness of the role of spirituality in their own lives and that of their clients. Guided by their own beliefs in the importance of spirituality, the profession's emphasis on cultural competence, and a recognition that many of their students professed a spiritual connection and/or an affiliation with church communities, these professors embarked on a journey to address the spiritual dimension in the classroom. The authors are all affiliated with traditional Western and Christian religious faiths and

incorporate Eastern religious practices into their daily life to varying degrees.

Many of the students, all of whom were in either first or second year of their graduate studies in social work, were from small towns and rural areas of a large Midwestern state. There was little cultural diversity amongst the students and the majority was from Christian denominations although some were also exploring other religious practices. As we listened to students, we heard some of them identifying themselves as "Christians" and expressing conflicts between conservative religious beliefs and the values of the profession, mainly around reproductive choice and affirming practice with gay and lesbian persons. Other students expressed interest and confusion about how to integrate their personal spiritual beliefs and practices and wondered how religion and spirituality could be used by clients in their daily lives. Students reported that they did not always feel comfortable expressing their religious beliefs and concerns, but given an accepting attitude by the professor, they felt they could discuss their conflicts in the classroom.

Although the social work program at our public university provided a popular elective course on spirituality that examined diverse religious and spiritual practices, we recognized that not all students had the interest or space in their schedules to enroll in this class. In response to the students' voices we, individually and collectively, began to plan and discuss different ways that we might invite our students into conversations about spiritual and religious topics in our classes. Our approaches differed according to our interests and what we envisioned as the goal of the learning experience. One professor had a practical focus. She wanted to understand how to help students with service issues around choice and affirming practice with gay and lesbian persons when their religious beliefs were in opposition to the profession's code. A second professor sought to help students uncover both personal spiritual meaning and client religious and spiritual supports. The third professor led students through an exercise to help them to develop an appreciation of their own spiritual journey, to experience the sacredness of others' life journeys, and to practice listening with compassion and acceptance in the face of diversity.

We had two main goals for our endeavor: first, an exploration with students of core religious and spiritual beliefs and then second, developing their ability to work within a spiritual framework when appropriate with clients. Other objectives included addressing the duality surrounding spirituality issues: assessing whether spirituality/religious faith is a strength or a source of difficulty that prevents optimal growth and functioning. We recognized that students who consider themselves questioning, agnostic, or biased against religion also need to have a forum for discussion. Setting a tone for openness and acceptance of a range of beliefs was crucial. This article highlights the experiences of three social work professors who chose to discuss spirituality and religion in their clinical practice classes. Overall, in this article we hope to provide guidance to other social work educators in how to integrate discussions of spirituality in both foundation and advanced level classes.

Deep Listening without Judgment - Joan Letendre

I earned my Master's degree at a prominent graduate school of social work in a large Midwestern city, 27 years ago. Discussions of diversity—cultural, religious, and spiritual—were absent from our "excellent" curriculum. Yet I had learned to be comfortable, non-judgmental, and for the most part affirming and embracing with cultures that were different from my own white, working class, and Catholic roots. As someone who is innately curious about other cultures and belief systems, I have sought out

differing experiences in religious practice throughout my lifetime. My early Catholic education had left an indelible imprint on me which was a lifelong search for religious rituals and practices that brought meaning to life, gave solace and hope in times of suffering, advocated for social justice, and provided a sense of community with persons who had similar spiritual practices and beliefs. I have attended many different denominations of Protestantism, Catholic churches of varying degrees of social justice and conservatism, synagogues, mainly for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and Buddhist groups that followed the traditions of different Asian teachers. I embraced the traditions that preached social justice while strongly rejecting those that condemned a woman's right to choose or condemned full inclusion of gay and lesbian church goers.

As a New England Catholic, I had grown up hearing that one did not talk about religion with others. Religion was private. Yet, students in my classroom began to challenge this cultural rule. I remember the day that two students introduced themselves as "Christians" and said that they were getting their MSW degrees to be able to help their husbands with pastoral ministry. Failing to ask what that meant, I made the assumption that their Christianity was of the conservative "evangelical" variety, since public disclosure of religious affiliation seemed in keeping with this religious group. Surprisingly, I had no curiosity about how the religious beliefs of these students intersected with their professional goals but instead made an assumption that they would not be supportive of either women's rights to choose or affirming practice with gay and lesbian persons. This, in my way of thinking, was a clear cut professional issue. If you could not help a woman with all her options for an unplanned pregnancy or provide service to a gay or lesbian client, perhaps you did not belong in the profession. Case closed! No conversation! No dialogue! I was passionate about my point of view, dogmatic, and frankly close-minded. Rarely did a student challenge me. He or she just shut up and shut down.

When my first academic job took me to a social work program in a large public university in the Heartland, I was faced with many students who hailed from small towns and rural areas, some of whom had religious beliefs that did not support choice nor gay and lesbian relationships. I recall a beginning generalist practice class where we were discussing social work ethics and values and I deliberately chose an example that included a gay client. The majority of the class reacted by citing the NASW Code of Ethics standard on competency which they felt precluded their work with gay and lesbian clients. Instead of exploring the students' discomfort, which might very well have led to a discussion on the challenges of working with difference, including integrating one's religious beliefs with core social work values, I determined that the students needed "exposure" to persons affected by GLBT issues. I called in a panel to "educate" the students.

Ironically, my outreach efforts included several parents from PFLAG (a parent group supportive of their GLBT children) and an elder couple with one member who had undergone surgery for gender change. The students were mesmerized by the discussion, although confused at times about the complexity of the transgendered issues. In their reflection papers, several students quoted a Biblical verse that condemned "homosexual" relationships. I was appalled by this "small-minded" thinking and reflected on this in the classroom (although I did not use these words). I told the students that one never knows who will come into their office for service or when a client may feel enough trust to share their struggle. "Will you then refer?" I challenged. It was quite a dilemma for students. I could see this but I was far away from helping them to deal with their

struggles. I wanted them to know how serious the social work mandate was to offer services to all clients.

In reflecting on my early days of teaching practice, I admit, with some discomfort as a social work educator, that I ignored the opportunity to discuss the highly personal religious beliefs and related values that students brought to my classroom. Instead, I engaged in what I now call "2 x 4" teaching where one coerces students into accepting a specified point of view (mine) instead of helping them to explore the complexity of their own beliefs and struggles. I, who had previously received strongly positive evaluations from students, now read comments that accused me of being disrespectful and biased. Such feedback troubled me greatly, not just because I wanted better teaching evaluations but because I believe strongly that my interactions with students in the classroom serve as a model for their interactions with their clients. My own spiritual practice, in a Buddhist tradition that encouraged "deep listening" without judgment, also challenged the ways that I was interacting with my students. My biased beliefs that religiously conservative students cannot and should not be social workers (strongly supported by some of my colleagues) were challenged as I read student papers and listened to their comments in the class. I saw that many of my conservative religious students were extremely caring and conscientious and that their "Christian" beliefs guided their commitment to serve populations that were marginalized in small towns and rural communities. I saw that students honestly struggled with the social work value that recognizes the "dignity and worth of every person" when their faith communities were condemning. For the first time, I became curious instead of condemning and committed to help students explore how they could integrate personal and religious beliefs with the value base and ethical standards of the profession. I finally realized that I must start where the student is.

My shift in attitude greatly changed my leadership in the classroom. On one occasion, as the class commented on a documentary where religious parents talked about their children "coming out," students were asked by the guest lecturer to comment on their reactions. Only one young woman said that although she certainly would respect the gay or lesbian client, her religious beliefs would not allow her to serve them. Her comments were accepted along with those of her classmates. (After class she told me that mine was the only class where she felt comfortable making this statement.) In an ensuing discussion the next week, we were able to discuss the difficulties any social work practitioner experiences when his/her value or belief system conflicts with that of the client (normalization). I asked, rather than challenged, the students to think who that client will be for each of them and how they would respond. I began to explore the issue of providing service when you don't agree with the way a person leads his/her life. How difficult it is for each of us when we are faced with a task that we feel conflicts with our value system and how much more difficult it would be for each of us if the value were reinforced by our religious community. What are the options? What if you are the only one who can serve? What will you do? How will you refer? What will you say to clients so that they do not feel devalued by your inability to work with them?

This was the beginning of many discussions on faith-based issues. With the help of supportive colleagues, I dealt with my own frustrations and slowly became an advocate for students to discuss faith-based concerns. I integrated such issues into the curriculum. I believed that my responsibility was to provide a safe environment for discussion and model an accepting but questioning approach to the issues. I

recognized openly that students' concerns around religious beliefs and the mandates of the social work profession were legitimate and that I welcomed such discussions within the class. I found literature that discussed conservative agendas and school social work (Gianesin & Bonaker, 2003) and this provided an "objective" lens through which to have the discussion. I continued to invite speakers who could speak from personal experience about GLBT issues. I encouraged students to dialogue with each other and not just with to me.

When a colleague lectured on Gay Affirmative Practice, a student shared how the discussion of the impact of heterosexual language and assumptions on gay and lesbian persons had a profound impact on her thinking with all of her clients. She was able to dialogue with classmates (both liberal and conservative) about her church-based religious beliefs that failed to affirm gay and lesbian persons and the ensuing struggle between her long held beliefs and the content and process of the classroom. In another school social work class, a lively discussion followed a film where gay parents and their school-aged children discuss the stresses that they experience in an environment where they are often vilified for their diverse family structure. One religiously conservative student challenged another's commitment to Christ by stating "Christ accepts all sinners. We are all sinners." Although I was disturbed by the language of "sin" which is so easily attributed to the lives of gay and lesbian persons, the student was able to explain that she was challenging her classmate's ability to follow the message of Christ's all-inclusive love. The confrontation by another student with similar religious beliefs had a strong impact on this student and she reported a greater comfort as she was "called upon" to advocate for gay and lesbian students and parents in the high school where she was interning.

Through my experiences with conservative Christian students, I have learned to know and understand and, yes, to really have a fondness for many of the students whom I rejected four years ago because I did not think that their religious values could interface with the profession. Given the opportunity, I found this group of students more than willing to discuss their concerns and conflicts because their faith commitments support providing good services to those who are marginalized in this society. I have found it essential to provide the space within my classroom community to discuss how one manages when a social work mandate conflicts with one's personal and religious beliefs. Providing such a safe place also facilitates a classroom discussion where peers can both support and challenge and is a far more effective way of giving feedback than if I, the authority, confront the issue by myself (Kurland & Salmon, 1998). By my modeling compassion, listening in a non-judgmental manner, and providing feedback that is honest but non-judgmental, those students who are committed to serving their clients as Christian social workers have more easily reflected on how they will do this in a way that is true to their profession, their faiths, and themselves.

Creating Spiritual Context: Building Constructivist and Positivist Knowledge - Holly Nelson-Becker

When I was young, about five to eight years old, I remember that Sundays felt different from other days. This was not just because they signaled a different routine in that my family attended church, but I learned to recognize this setting apart by a type of wave that would zing back and forth through my body in a downward direction whether I was at church or at home with illness. Though words as symbols are inadequate to fully communicate this subjective experience, I felt a warmth that quickly glided through the core of my body, leaving me with an inner peace

and a sense of relatedness to something Transcendent. I recognized it innately as a manifestation of Spirit. Even though I have had other types of spiritual experience in my life, this has remained one of my consistent connections to Spirit over time, though as with many things it has a pattern of ebb and flow. My life experience has shaped the way I engage spirituality in the classroom.

I was grounded in a Christian religious faith, one that had its roots in the 19th century American religious awakening, had a history of religious persecution, and believed in angels (say what?) and modern day revelation. Individuals in this faith tradition were encouraged to study and confirm their beliefs through prayer, spiritual ways of knowing, and critical thinking rather than accept religious dogma without challenge. In fact, there was a historical understanding of human imperfection by Biblical writers and the need for scriptural interpretation according to Setz und Leben (setting and life situation). Because of this stance, there were many members who had varying beliefs, yet still worshipped together. This taught me that people of faith can have different ideas but still support each other. Over time, this faith tradition matured in a progression along with others to what is considered now a liberal theological position. My love of other people and cultures has also brought me into deep connection with people who have other religious traditions including Eastern and spiritual traditions.

Unlike many peers in my generational cohort, I stayed connected to my early faith. In 1990, I was called to the ministerial office of Elder. While some ministers in my tradition are paid, many are bivocational and volunteer their time in service. Even before the formal invitation to accept this position came from my then pastor, I sensed the calling. My first response was to say, "No, God, don't even ask me. My partner was supposed to be the minister, not me." But as these things happen, I was asked. After discussions with my partner who works for a large Catholic archdiocese but with whom I share many common religious understandings, he was able to validate the call and I accepted. After training, I was ordained in 1992 and continue to function in this office today. This past year, as I began a practice of meditation and began to read Buddhist writings more regularly, I have been blessed by a series of coincidences and surprising experiences that have expanded my spiritual understandings in new ways. I have felt challenged to bring my sense of the spiritual together with my academic understandings; this has not been an easy journey, but I believe I have a unique contribution to make in the developing area of spirituality and social work.

Because I try to remain open to the presence of Spirit as it permeates all of life, it is important to me to open up this area for students at whatever point they may be and acknowledge the contribution of whatever faith background or other grounding they have. While my own bias has been that students from conservative religious backgrounds may be less open to spiritual discussions, I do respect the centering that their faith-based communities provide them and the often passionate motivation that keeps them invested in doing the often low-paying work of our profession. One of the points I have come to understand is that all voices are important in these conversations, even those who stand at the other end of the faith orthodoxy continuum. My coauthors and another esteemed colleague at my university have also helped me in the process of opening up spirituality in the classroom. They have offered themselves as resources and fellow spiritual travelers.

From the first class session I try to create a context that is open to many ways of knowing. Knowledge is transmitted through different methods and one of the most prominent ones in our profession is scientific validation and verification. This is important and powerful. But I find it essential to combine

this in my class with other forms of knowledge that are not deductive or inductive and do not represent scientifically communicated experience. Instead this other type of knowledge is transmitted through direct insight. It is subjective and may be intuitive (James, 1902/1961).

I share with students the story of how I came into social work in a way that suggests that it is a calling and that when they look back at their lives several years hence, they will understand more clearly how the pathway that led them to where they are at this point developed out of a sensitivity regarding their core gifts and life purpose. I hope that they will understand that this profession can engage all of their skills and capacities in ways that can promote their own growth as well as that of their clients. The frame I use with students is that their choice of social work as vocation is a calling.

I have tried approaches to highlighting spirituality that uses both scientific and intuitive ways of knowing. In my HBSE class when I discuss life span development theories, I, like the third author who will explain his method in more detail, use the technique of inviting students to draw their own spiritual timeline or spiritual map. I tell them it can denote any markers that have impacted their own growth or change, but may include significant life events and also mentors in that process. I suggest that this may or may not have spiritual components, but it should be meaningful to them personally. They then can discuss their map or something related to their journey with a partner. Many students indicate they have never done this before, and it has offered them new insight into their own spiritual development while validating the language of spirituality. Even if a student has a non-spiritual stance, he/she can also relate to the life story aspects of his/her own journey and participate fully.

In my aging course, I often write a "quote of the day" on the board. Often, these take the form of larger life understandings about the aging process. One quote that I especially like is by Rilke (1954):

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. . . Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer (p. 34-35).

Many of these quotes have a spiritual tone. I invite students to reflect on what this means for their own lives and also how it might be helpful in supporting their work with older clients. Much direct work with older adults involves dealing with questions of meaning in the face of chronic illness, debilitating pain, and other life losses. In order to effectively help older clients, I try to teach students not to fear (as I once did early in my social work career) engaging clients in ways that touch their deepest center of meaning. Like this quote, students do not need to have all the answers, but rather can learn to sit with clients in their life struggles and listen closely. Even if major life problems cannot be "solved," there is still much to be given in a helping context.

I also bring into the classroom the content of some of my research which has been about religious coping by different groups of older adults. We discuss how religion has the capacity to help or harm others and why certain individuals (especially Jewish Holocaust survivors I have interviewed) may eschew religion and embrace spirituality. We also talk about individuals for whom religious or spiritual coping is not important but who embrace other forms of personal coping.

In many of my classes I include spiritual assessment in a discussion of general assessment tools. I suggest that students ask clients what gives them meaning or purpose

and whether spirituality and/or religion are important to the clients. If so, I offer sample questions about 11 spiritual domains including beliefs, behavior, emotions, values, experiences, history, therapeutic change, social support, well-being, and extrinsic/intrinsic spiritual focus (Nelson-Becker, Nakashima, & Canda, in press). We look at quantitative measures of religion and spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 1999; Hill & Hood, 1995). Cases (Scales et al, 2002) that help illustrate difficult ethical and spiritual dilemmas that social workers and professionals encounter are useful and have prompted heated conversations as well as new insight for students.

When I close the course for the semester, I sometimes bring in a rainstick to use as a "talking stick." I model for students by thanking them for their participation in the class and sharing what I have learned from them. Then, if they choose, they each have an opportunity to make a statement to the class about what they have learned from each other. I am often surprised by the depth and positive tone of their comments. Several of my students have taken other courses that have touched on spirituality in some form including a course on spiritual diversity. They indicate that instructors approach the spiritual domain in various ways, so they enjoy hearing from them all. One common outcome is that they find themselves more accepting and non-judgmental and are able to be more compassionate. But students do not always feel comfortable enough with their knowledge to manage whatever surfaces from clients in this domain. For many students, awareness of spirituality is new and many express a desire to continue to expand their understanding beyond their MSW education.

What was the impact of these conversations on students? Although I haven't conducted formal follow-up, these classroom discussions give students the freedom to talk about the meaning of experiences outside the biopsychosocial realm of what is normally discussed in classroom contexts. While I hope to help students develop a deeper understanding of the variety of beliefs and practices surrounding religion and spirituality, I also find that these conversations change me. Over time I have become more willing to integrate my own spiritual side in teaching rather than keeping it separate and compartmentalized, something I had excelled at earlier. With my own integration and increasing sense of wholeness, I hope that I can become a model for students that also feel called to this work.

Teaching Connection with the Sacred in Life - James Kreider

When I reflect back over my own life's course, I can see the coherence and direction that was not obvious while living each day. This journey of discovery over time includes having considered following in my minister grandfather's footsteps with my life's work being church leadership. But for various reasons, I was very confused and conflicted about religion, which kept me from making that choice. The confusion I experienced, however, led to an intense quest for spiritual meaning and direction. The journey was difficult and often seemed incoherent, but in hindsight it was exactly what I needed. For example, studying Buddhism helped me more fully understand how to live my Christian root's mandate to "love one another." Studying indigenous spirituality helped me appreciate the interrelatedness of all life in the sacred "whole" of our existence. Studying energy psychology/medicine has helped heal the rifts between mind-body-spirit and between science and faith created by centuries of dualistic, western thought. I still identify as Christian, but now recognize that "When I was a child, I ate the food of a child." Now my faith is rich, robust, and complex in ways that can only come from a lifetime of searching

for personal meaning and relationship with the Creator.

My spiritual journey continues with the search for ways to help students prepare to assist clients with their own spiritual journeys. When I introduce the topic of spirituality in social work practice by asking students how many think of social work as a "calling" somehow reflecting a "spiritual" aspect to the work (as I do), the majority of hands in the room raise. I've been struck with the powerfully central role of spirituality in most people's lives, yet also struck with how difficult it is to live the ideals of being loving, compassionate, and accepting. For example, I've noted how hard it can be for students to talk about spirituality without getting anxious around differing beliefs, moving into judgments about what are "right" beliefs or practices: I note the same temptation within myself at times. In our classes with students whose identifications range widely, including Christianity (from very conservative to extremely progressive), Buddhism, Native American Spirituality, Islamism, Hinduism, agnosticism, atheism, New Age Spirituality, Wicca, and others, there is ample opportunity for tension around what is "right" to emerge. In addition, some students also struggle to reconcile their religious beliefs with social work values such as those related to reproductive choice for women or being GLBT affirmative.

Since my own spiritual awareness, appreciation, and "strength" has come from my journey of exploring the many aspects and expressions of the Divine, I began wondering about how to help students value their own unique spiritual journey of discovery while also opening themselves to learn from others' unique journeys. I was concerned about how students would facilitate spiritual discussions and exploration with their clients in a safe and open way if they had no experience of doing so themselves. In short, I hoped to help students *experience* the Christian message "love your neighbor as yourself" in the face of this rich diversity. I hoped to find a way to help them connect with themselves, each other, and the sacred in life rather than respond with polarizing judgment around spiritual and religious diversity. I wanted to help them experience something heartfelt that would take them beyond the intellectual conceptualizations that seemed so hard to translate into an attitude of acceptance and behaviors that embodied compassion. My prayer for guidance regarding these intentions resulted in the following class exercise.

Since the majority of students identify as Christian, we begin with a discussion about the meanings each of us make from the Bible verse: "Remove the log from your own eye before trying to remove the splinter from another's eye." The discussion continues with how that verse relates to social work's focus on self-awareness, respect for human diversity, and belief in the dignity and worth of all people. We also discuss the tendency to guard what we believe to be "true" when we feel threatened by ideas that question our own beliefs. The intent of this discussion is to normalize and "own" what often precedes conflict and judgment. Following this rich discussion, I suggest several assumptions to consider "or try on" for the remainder of the class: that we are all on a "sacred or spiritual journey" of sorts (whether or not we conceive of it that way) and that we learn and grow spiritually over time by stretching and expanding with various life experiences. Even though it is conceivable that someone might reject these assumptions, as yet that has not happened. Even students who identified as agnostic or atheist have accepted "sacred" or "spiritual" in their broadest sense to mean deeply felt, transpersonal or meta-physical experience that offers meaning, solace, and direction in life. Framing the exercise in the hypothetical ("...consider or try on...") probably also helps suspend judgments and objections. Several examples from my own practice describing client experiences that are

very diverse yet have spiritual significance for those individuals also help students see "spiritual" as a very broad and personal concept (for example, a woman severely physically and sexually abused finding a "spiritual" connection through nature). I also offer examples from my own life to model openness, self-disclosure, risk-taking, and self-acceptance on a journey that is clearer when looking back across time than when trying to envision the future.

Each student is then given a large sheet of paper (14x17), colored pencils, and crayons to map out their own unique spiritual or "sacred" life journey. Directions are quite simple: have a beginning point, then draw the path to where you are now, and continue that path to where you want to be at the end of your life. Include people that were (or might be) influential along the way (either helpful or hurtful) and events or experiences that were (or might be) turning points in your journey. Students are also encouraged to include beliefs or practices that guided or sustained them along the way, and beliefs or practices that they grew beyond or discarded as they learned and grew. Students are invited to use colors, symbols, pictures, as well as a few words to represent their journey.

After the students complete their drawings, they form into small groups so self-disclosure and connection with others might make it feel safer and easier to share. Directions are to share as much of their journey as they are willing while also noting their thoughts and feelings as they do so. Those listening are encouraged to simply "witness" each person's journey as empathically as they can, which includes trying to understand the significance of each person's unique journey *for that person*, while also attending to their own thoughts and feelings that arise as they listen. The person to the right of the speaker then reflects back to the speaker what the listener heard the speaker say, without advice or interjection of personal ideas; the intent is to acknowledge and validate the speaker's story by simply "witnessing" the unfolding journey. All are encouraged to be aware of when they feel compassion or connection with others in the group, as well as when they find themselves tempted to do something that might interfere with really hearing, understanding, accepting, and connecting in a heartfelt way with the other person (e.g., judge, criticize, or correct). An obvious intention is to help students become more self-aware so they can practice removing "the log from your own eye" as part of connecting with others in an open, caring, accepting, and compassionate fashion.

Once the small groups complete sharing, we re-form for a whole class discussion about what students experienced while sharing their journeys, as well as "witnessing" other's journeys with compassion and acceptance. This generally involves wonderful realizations about the "sacredness" of *everyone's* unique path, about the vulnerability we often feel when exposing our spirituality, about how difficult it is to listen without trying to direct or educate or otherwise "fix," and about how powerful it is both to share our sacred stories with "witnesses" and to hear others sharing their sacred journeys as well. Following this, they return to small groups to assemble a list of guidelines for spiritually sensitive social work practice. My only suggestion for this part of the activity is that even though we all struggle to "remove the log from our eye," we all also have elements of spiritual wisdom, so collectively we can create a "whole" that is greater than any of us can offer alone. I collect these guidelines from each group, type them into a list, and return them to the students the next week as their collective wisdom to guide their spiritually sensitive practice. I am generally touched by what students write, but even more moved by seeing them connecting with each other and excitedly creating these

guidelines. It is gratifying for me to "witness" their experiencing in a heartfelt way how diversity is "sacred soil" that enriches our own and others' lives.

The response from students to this exercise has also consistently been very positive. I think one reason is that everyone experiences connecting with others around the sacredness of life, using symbols and personal stories to touch the seeds of compassion, humanity, and divinity that are within each of us. Judgments and dualistic thinking seem to dissolve when students have this shared experience that stretches beyond the words, labels, and categories that often separate us from each other and from that which is spiritual. After this experience, one student realized how significant his church experience had been to him as he grew up, why he left it because of hurts he'd experience there, and how he'd grown beyond those hurts to be ready to return to church in a way that allowed him to both give (sing and play his guitar in worship) and receive (support, guidance, inspiration).

Conclusion

Because of our own unique spiritual and religious sensitivities, we, as authors, have felt the need to help students learn to engage in relationships with clients that are non-judgmental and that promote care and compassion. Because the work required by our profession is often all-consuming and can be personally exhausting, we know it is important for students to develop their own reservoirs of strength. If we turn away from exploring the nature of the sacred in our own world and the world of our clients, we are ignoring and indeed failing to honor a resource that may be as important to clients as the biological, sociological, and psychological supports we teach to students as the hallmark of our profession.

In this narrative we have discussed our own backgrounds so the reader can view both our own spiritual limitations and our gifts. We have also offered some of the tools we have developed and, in some cases, the process by which we found them, as a way for social work educators to learn different perspectives on teaching about spirituality and religious beliefs in the classroom. We have found it refreshing to think of the opportunities that we have had to broaden our students' understanding of how spirituality and religious beliefs influence the work that they are "called" to do in their respective communities. We do not always have the opportunity to learn how our students use the skills that we taught them in the classroom, but it is our belief that by exposing them to a non-judgmental classroom experience where they might safely explore existential and/or spiritual/religious questions, they might be better prepared to bring this dimension to their work with clients. In future work with students, we hope to be able to help students to become more comfortable using these skills with clients in the field. We hope our tools and methods may add to the range of possibilities for exploring the vast terrain of spirituality and religion, and that increased compassion and openness on the part of both teacher and student may be the result.

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Holly Nelson-Becker, Ph.D., LCSW, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, School of Social Welfare. Fellow author James Kreider, MSW, LCSW, is a lecturer in the same department. Joan Letendre, Ph.D., LCSW, is a professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be sent to Dr. Letendre at: Joan.letendre@uconn.edu.

Transformative Events—Transformative Stories

Kathy Lay, Ph.D., Indiana University

In this narrative the author reflects on how events meld into transformative stories and how being out in the classroom is a political act that invites a spiritual response in that it requests the learner to acknowledge presence, understanding, and inclusion of others. The story is told in the classroom to bring lived experience to the learning process, constructing the possibility of spiritual reflections on dominant discourses, thus creating space for human relationships to take precedence.

"When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing." (Rich, 1986, p. 199)

Rich powerfully articulates the experience of exclusion. As a social work educator, I have a responsibility to be inclusive of all people. One way I am inclusive is by being transparent in the classroom. Freedman and Combs (1996) define transparency as "explaining enough about our situation and our life experience that people can understand us as people rather than as *experts* or conduits for professional knowledge" (p. 36). I am a lesbian who is "out" in the classroom. There is no event, such as an announcement: I simply am fully me. This full identity means that I openly discuss issues that might reveal my orientation and I refer to my partner when appropriate.

The Classroom, Politics, and Spirituality

The Council on Social Work Education sets certain expectations as to what is to be included in syllabi with regard to core social work values. Values pertinent to this discussion include social justice, the worth of all people, and the value of human relationships (NASW, 1996). Exercises, media, lecture/discussions are all ways to facilitate the understanding and acceptance of these values. However, classroom activities often fall short of the desired goal for students not only to understand the relevance of these values to social work practice, but, at a deeper level, to embrace them. Perhaps this difficulty in embracing social work values is because learners find this content to be in competition with dominant cultural discourses, which frame stories about people's lives in ways that are in conflict with social work values. It is not sufficient to simply articulate these values as additive to content. I, like many of my colleagues, strive to construct learning experiences that bring people's lived experiences up close and personal.

This dynamic is all the more reason to make one's own lived experience come alive for learners. Being out in the classroom is a political act that invites a spiritual response in that it requests the learner to acknowledge presence, understanding, and inclusion of others. The personal is the political and, I would add, the spiritual. Spirituality, for me, requires stretching the boundaries of one's personal experience and self-reflection in relationship to the experience of others.

Coming out, whether in the classroom or elsewhere, is a gift that keeps giving. The presumption of heterosexism has a sort of "deadly elasticity" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 68), bringing the possibility of new walls springing

up with every new encounter. One never knows what people's responses will be. This dynamic is particularly true given the current political climate.

Social Constructions and Real Effects

Some have the power to construct social narratives that may not represent *truth*, "but that doesn't stop them from having real effects" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 36). In the past decade, a public debate has emerged regarding the rights for gays and lesbians. In an effort to roll back gains and block future privileges, rhetoric of hatefulness has ensued, promoting certain "truths" and creating a climate for certain stories to promote a paradigm condemning gays and lesbians. Trent Lott, who was the Senate majority leader at the time he made this statement, said, "You should try to show them a way to deal with [homosexuality] just like alcohol...or sex addiction...or kleptomaniacs" (as qtd. in Lacayo, 1998, p. 32), and he went on to suggest that gays are "sinners" and he got his views from the Bible. Pat Robertson, of the Christian Broadcasting Network stated, "...the acceptance of homosexuality is the last step in the decline of Gentile civilization" [and Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council (FRC) has encouraged] "...waging the war against the homosexual agenda" (as qtd. in Lacayo, 1998, p. 32).

In September of 2004, hate crimes protection aimed at gays and lesbians was attached to a bill that passed in the Senate, and the House of Representatives passed a motion to keep in the protective language; however, the language was then stripped in conference even after what appeared to be bipartisan support (D. Fenwick, personal communication, June 2, 2005). Many believe this was strategic politics at play, but at the expense of gays and lesbians (Allen, 2004). And then in November of 2004, eleven states voted to define marriage as a union of a man and woman, thus banning the right for gays and lesbians to make their commitments legal by marriage. The current President reiterated that his agenda will promote an amendment to the Constitution of the United States defining marriage as between a man and a woman. Meanwhile, public discourse sets the stage for this exclusion to take place. It is a discourse of discrimination.

Gays and lesbians are at times portrayed as demons that add to the social and cultural ills of society. Narratives are strategically constructed and pose as truth. These narratives are not even "...*partial knowledge* masquerading as general, even universal" (Minnich, 1990, p. 178). They are full of errors that are representative of what Minnich refers to as "faulty generalization...circular reasoning...mystified concepts [and]...partial modes of knowing" (p. 178), all of which are used to perpetuate exclusion. However, they present a challenge to the understanding of social work values. How does one begin to transform knowledge of this nature—i.e., powerful narratives constructed by dominant culture posing as truths?

The rhetoric that constructs this knowledge is destructive to individuals, families, and society. I believe this kind of rhetoric is responsible for incredible acts of violence, such as the death of Matthew Shepherd. Also, I believe it is responsible for the estrangement I experienced from my own parents who, for several years, behaved as if I did not exist. It is so easy and attractive to think this kind of hatred is perpetuated by "bad people," but the discourse that portrays gays and lesbians as evil circulates amongst us all, including "good" people.

Events and Stories

During a discussion of marginalized groups, a graduate student asked me, "May I ask you a personal question and you don't have to answer it if you don't want." I smiled and replied, "Ask, then I can decide." She continued, "How did your parents respond

to your being gay?" "Not well," I replied. "What happened?" she asked.

For a moment I reflected as to whether I wanted to share my experience. But, because it is one of struggle and hope, I believe it is an important story. Stories bring lived experience and voice to the classroom that sometimes is otherwise not heard. I am their teacher. I am in a certain position in relationship to the learner. Relationships can be transformative and facilitate the understanding of the personal as the political. Personal stories encourage this understanding in unique and powerful ways.

Here is my story. But, like all individual stories, it has stories within stories—layers of revelation and interpretation constructed from life events by multiple participants. These stories weave myriad truths into both the mystery and the substance of spiritual knowledge.

I came out to my parents in the mid-1980s, at the age of 35. They responded with surprise and anger. This response is a common experience for many gays and lesbians in that surprise is indicative of not noticing; anger is indicative of being forced to notice an alternative story about their world. Both of these emotional responses are supported by dominant discourses. My parents said many harsh things to me personally and rejected my partner in the rudest, meanest imaginable ways. Their hateful and cold ways of being toward me were a reflection of the political discourse. Knowing that they were caught up in the ignorance of their fundamentalist upbringing provided no comfort, however. Their own rhetoric mimicked the tripe of their fundamentalism, as—standing on what they referred to as religious principles—their exclusion claimed holiness and righteousness.

Politics are personal with very real effects. After coming out, my relationship with my parents became increasingly difficult and distant. I requested and eventually demanded they treat me, my partner, and our relationship with respect or forfeit my relationship with them. They chose the latter for many years. My father would call occasionally and pretend all was well, and I even joined him in the charade on occasions. He tried to hide the uneasiness in his voice and I tried to hide the hurt. I rarely talked with my mother, but when we did, anger always erupted. She would make some hateful, perverse statement and I would come back with what she called a "smart mouth." My brother was appalled by their behavior, but not surprised. He kept his distance from my parents in solidarity. His solidarity was a gift, as for many this sort of sibling support is not the norm. Families stay divided for years and I really thought mine would do just that, except an unpredicted turn of events brought us together.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, my cousin told her mother, my maternal aunt, that if my partner and I were not invited to Christmas dinner, she would not come or she didn't want my mother to come. She, in fact, told her mother to tell my mother that she had to stop destroying the family. My cousin, due to her age, seems more like a niece. She often recalls times together when I was the teenager who drove her around in my VW Beetle, letting her eat jellybeans to her heart's content while listening to ABBA. My cousin made her demand in the fall of 1993.

My father came to talk to my partner and me on an autumn day that same year. I remember the day vividly. Brilliant red and orange leaves swirled in the breeze. It was chilly enough to require a jacket. My father stood in our kitchen with his coat on the entire time we talked. I can still see him leaning against the kitchen counter, arms folded, not so much in defiance, but in what seemed more like fear. He said he wanted to talk about his relationship with us. He stood there and claimed his lack of worldly experience and education were at fault, but he wanted to change. I really couldn't bring myself to be empathic. I pointed out to him that many had

experienced the same sort of poverty of experience but yet did not display poverty of spirit. He offered no apology, but said he wanted things to be different. I told him he would have to bring mother along in this journey. He claimed he had no control over her, and we parted ways with civility but little hope of change.

Weeks followed. I heard nothing. No calls or invitations. Hope for some reunion seemed remote and unrealistic. Again, I began to find solace in sameness of the past and the probability that nothing had changed. My goal: just accept it. Some things don't change, I thought. Two weeks before Christmas my mother called to extend an invitation to attend the traditional holiday Christmas gathering held at my aunt and uncle's home. I asked if my partner was included. The answer, much to my surprise, was "okay," with a sigh.

In spite of my reluctance, and warning my partner of what was possible, she insisted we accept their invitation. I had in fact shielded her from some of my parents' hatefulness. I knew exactly how they could behave. We accepted because we had always said we would accept invitations that included us both, but I was not looking forward to the occasion. My aunt and uncle live in a small town about an hour and half drive from where we lived. My mother said that my partner and I could ride with them. "No need to take two cars," she said. I thought to myself, only if you don't need an escape plan. "Lovely," I said to my partner sarcastically, "Trapped in the car with the enemy." We accepted the offer.

On Christmas morning my stomach ached like a little kid who wants to avoid the test at school. We arrived at my parents' home and, just as my mother promised, coffee was on the table with freshly baked blueberry muffins. We had the stiffest conversation imaginable. I don't remember the content, but I do remember how stilted it was. I remember thinking that I could not believe my partner and I had given up being with our friends for this charade.

Much to our surprise, a light blanket of snow covered the ground while we sipped coffee and picked at muffins. The snow had not been predicted and it covered the roads, making them quite slick. If we had realized just how treacherous the driving would be, we would have stayed put. Reflecting back on it, I think we were distracted by the beauty of freshly fallen snow as a counterpoint to the tension between us. Some twenty miles before reaching our destination, we crested a hill to find two cars askew in the left lane and two other cars stopped. An accident had just happened moments earlier. A man approached the car and my partner asked, "I'm a nurse. Can I be of help?" "Please come," he responded, "There is a little girl not doing well. She is gurgling and I don't know what to do."

Without hesitation, Peg went to the car. She had been an emergency room nurse for years and was accustomed to critical injuries. I, on the other hand, had in previous years worked psychiatric triage in a city emergency room but had never developed a stomach for trauma. However, I followed her to the scene of the accident, even though my mother told me to stay in the car. I turned to her and said, "I'll be okay. I have to help Peg." My father pulled off the road and got out of the car. He followed us, took one look at the wreckage, and decided he was best suited to direct traffic around the accident scene.

"Has anyone called for an ambulance?" Peg asked. The man who had approached our car answered, "Yes, there is one on the way." Feeling helpless, I turned to Peg and said, "Just tell me what I can do."

She replied, "Just be here. Ask the people in the other car if they are okay." I did just that. I could smell alcohol as I peered into their vehicle. They were conscious and did not seem to have serious injuries, but were

sealed in their vehicle due to the impact. I reported back to Peg, "They seem okay."

"This is not good," she replied. The car with the family was twisted and crumpled. All doors were sealed and windows broken by the impact. The parents, in the front seat, were in and out of consciousness and their two daughters were in the back seat. We later learned that one girl was sixteen and one eleven. The eleven-year-old, "Dana," was not doing well. Peg could barely get to her through the broken window. She turned to me and said, "I can't hear her breathe—I don't want her to die here because her airway is blocked." She did a jaw thrust while stabilizing Dana's neck. Immediately, we heard a deep breath and another. They were not steady, but they were supplying air.

"We are going to need access to this car," Peg said, while continuing to attend to Dana. The older sister said, "There are keys in my mother's purse." I reached through the broken passenger window and took a handbag from the front of the car saying, "I'm going to get in your purse to get your keys." Dana's mother did not acknowledge. Riffling though the bag, I found an extra set of car keys that enabled me to open the back of the hatchback.

Large flakes of snow continued to fall, blanketing the ground in beauty and in silence. Snow has a way of making time seem still and muffling sounds. Even though we could hear a siren in the distance, it seemed we heard it for hours. I got the hatchback open and sat Christmas presents in the snow to make room for the EMT to get in the back seat of the car. I will never forget the vision of brightly wrapped presents sitting in the snow. They represented hope for a day filled with the possibility of laughter, sharing, and love.

Dana was dying. Peg had cleared her airway, but the trauma to her head was so severe that breathing only gave her moments. Upon their arrival at the scene, Peg assisted the EMTs by providing some information about her assessments. One EMT rushed to the back of the vehicle and turned to Peg, requesting some items. She rushed to the other EMT, requested the items, and raced them back to the scene with the precision of an emergency room nurse. Peg and the EMT attending Dana made brief eye contact. The non-verbal communication was momentary, but unmistakable. Dana was dead.

Another ambulance arrived. Peg was thanked and we left them to do their work. As we moved toward my parents' car, Peg and I held hands. Tears and snowflakes mingled wetly on our cheeks. I remember the face of a man sitting in a van. He was the same man that had come to the car and asked for help. He looked at us with such depth of concern and compassion. It was in his eyes. We had shared a moment with him that was not articulated; yet, in our common human experience of caring and tragedy, we came together in an inexpressible spiritual encounter.

My mother asked, "Is she going to be all right?" Tenderly, Peg answered, "I don't think so." We were all silent in that moment and for much of the day. It was meditative. When we arrived at my aunt and uncle's house, we told them what had occurred. But, it seemed to be a hollow story. Just the facts of the incident could not reveal what had transpired. At that point in time the transformational nature of the experience had not been fully felt. It seemed disrespectful of Dana to acknowledge anything but her passing. Yet, I knew at some level that the relationship with my parents had changed forever. As one family struggled with grief and loss through the death of a child, another experienced the birth of hope for new relationships.

In the days that followed, my parents, my partner, and I recalled the story. Over and over again, we narrated the event to one another from our perspectives, debriefing from trauma. We talked about it over the phone, over coffee, and over dinner. We told it until our being together took on new

meanings, and new stories emerged. If anyone had told me that my parents, my partner, and I would have the relationship we have had since that day, I would have told them: "Impossible!"

The event recounted above qualifies for the kind of experience that inspires what Miller and C'de Baca (2001) refer to as quantum change. These are external events that cannot be fully articulated in any theoretical sense, but produce transformative change. Others watching the events unfold have no idea what is taking place. Yet, a kind of spiritual change happens that clearly goes beyond individuals and labels. A change of this nature brings a spirituality representative of "wholeness of what it is to be a person-in-relation" (Canda, 1998-1999, p.13).

Stories, Change, and the Classroom

Let's return to the classroom where the student asked about my personal story. I could have continued the class on the assigned topic, without sharing my story. Students would have learned important information. However, information, e.g., course content, about people's lived experiences sometimes falls short of facilitating understanding of those who are "different" from the dominant group. As a social work educator, I strive to bring alternative, diverse stories to the classroom. Stories evoke connected knowing—connections to human lives and multiple meanings.

Through an event that happened on a cold, snowy, sorrowful day, a shift in relationships took place and the story lives on through changed lives. My parents, my partner, and I lived the story and came together in the telling of it. Events told and retold by those who experience the event and by those who hear and tell the story challenges to move beyond individual differences and intolerance. Stories have a way of bringing people in relation to one another—transcending differences that dominant discourses construct to divide.

As with the first time I told my story to students, each time I tell it silence follows. It feels meditative. Perhaps it is a meditation for loss and perhaps for hope. Stories provide a human face to people's troubles and ask us to respond human-to-human in "compassion and solidarity...not by appealing to some general notion of goodness, but encouraging people to respond to specific human lives" (Loeb, 1999, p. 120). By telling my story, I model transparency. When I tell my story, I teach students how to "look in the mirror" and see fuller visions of inclusion, hope, and possibility. Perhaps through these spiritual reflections, dominant discourses and the personal lives mirrored in them can be transformed into wholeness.

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Kathy Lay, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor at the Indiana University School of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be addressed to kalay@iupui.edu.

Walking the Path, Cleaning the Gutters, and Hearing the Voice

Cynthia J. Weaver, ACSW, Marywood University

Metaphors taken from a country walk provide a backdrop for educational and spiritual preparation as an instructor moves the teaching of spirituality and social work into the innovative modality of a retreat class setting. The intensity of such a setting demands that the instructor not only prepare to "talk the talk" (lectures), but more importantly spend time in preparation to "walk the walk" (centeredness).

The day is early; the walk is similar to ones taken many mornings since our move to this home over eight years ago. This home is my retreat, and a retreat for others. This home came our way during a time of difficult transitions, yet walking through the doors a peace was felt and a vision seen. The vision was the large, adjoining room providing a safe and secluded setting for my private practice, uninterrupted time to prepare for teaching at the graduate level, and solitude to write.

Today I write about my walk, for indeed the walk this morning was different, even though the path was the same. During the past twenty-four hours a northeastern storm came through, bringing torrents of rain and wind and shaking autumn trees of their remaining leaves. My walk always takes my feet down a quiet, winding country road. The beautiful scenery takes my mind from the stretching my legs encounter as I walk the gradual sloping hills. I intentionally chose this path for exercise and meditation.

Today, however, the walk is not quiet, for sounds of a rushing stream fill the air. The gutters at the side of the road have overflowed, spilling rainwater onto the roadway so that I need to weave in and out to avoid wet feet. The walk is not peaceful, but calculated, as I must use caution not to slip on the fallen leaves under foot. I do not hear the forest sounds of birds, chipmunks, and deer, for the animals have taken refuge from the storm. Although the storm has ended, the wind rises up occasionally to remind me of her mighty power. Ahead the country road is flooded, and I move to the middle of the road to keep my feet dry and to continue on my journey. I look to the side of the road and see streams that were not there on previous walks, streams that have formed from the overflow of rainwater rushing down the side of the hill.

Life is much like a morning walk. I long for a morning walk of warm, refreshing air, a beautiful sunrise, and the sounds of nature as my symphony. Yet rushing streams, coming from nowhere, forcing one to the middle of the road to survive, often overrun life. Life can feel like a northeastern storm, cold, harsh wind and rain coming from an uncommon direction. Life takes deep concentration so one does not slip on the many obstacles on the path.

I think this morning of the life of my students, remembering my days of graduate schools and a doctoral program. What a slippery, harsh path that was for me. The path must be similar for my students. I see their anxiety, their fear, their insecurity, the juggling of school, work, and family, and I wonder what resources they have for their winding path. Perhaps my creative innovation of moving the class on Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of Social Work Practice into a retreat format will not only be educational,

but also provide a resource and respite for students on their journey.

My walk now takes me to higher ground, a flat, straight country road that passes beside a farm with a beautiful pond. Although the pond has over flown and puddles remain on the road, the walk is calm and quiet. The water here has run off and the level ground provides safety and security as I move my feet forward. A flock of wild geese have gathered beside the pond, finding strength and solace in each other's presence. In the distance is a lone mountaintop, and beyond the peak the skies are clearing.

My desire is that the retreat setting will be a time for students to experience some higher ground amidst their turbulent path through graduate school. I hope students will find some level ground for reflection, meditation, and how to help others in their work, for to bring peace and tranquility to others we must first have this for ourselves.

Returning home, I notice that my driveway is flooded. The water is rushing down *my* street, flooding into *my* driveway as the leaves inhibit the water from moving down the hill and into the nearby stream. I take my garden rake and pull the piles of leaves from the rushing water. I find I need to go deeper and deeper into the water to pull out clumps of wet leaves and place them into the nearby trashcan. Soon the water in the driveway empties out and continues on down the hill, emptying into the stream and rushing to an unknown destination.

My preparation as instructor at the retreat requires that I reach deep within, pulling out those clumps of wet leaves that might inhibit the work I can do with students. I need to examine the stale water in my life that has gathered from holding on to past storms. I need not only to understand the storms in my life, but also to allow the rushing waters the ability to carry the effects of the storm downstream and out to sea. Before I can be with others in their storms and help them find safety and quiet on higher ground, I need to have my own gutters cleaned.

My morning walk is *my* spiritual dimension to *my* professional practice. In the beginning of the walk the struggle is understood. The end of the walk the struggle is resolved. Each day the walk is different. Each day I must listen attentively to the Voice on the walk. Today, as always, the Voice is clear. Today I heard the Voice in the rushing waters, the clogged gutters, the overflowing driveway, and the slippery leaves. I embraced the Voice in the calm waters of the higher ground and the community of geese. I look forward to a retreat of calm waters and a community of students where together we can hear the Voice on the path.

Cynthia J. Weaver, D.Min., M.Div., ACSW, LSW, is an Assistant Professor at Marywood University School of Social Workin Scranton, Pennsylvania. Comments regarding this article can be sent to the author at: weaver@es.marywood.edu.

Reflections on Teaching about the Muslim Reality

Aneesah Nadir, Ph.D., Arizona State University-West

The author reflects upon her own experiences having taught a social work elective course about the traditions and experiences of Muslims living in the United States over several years. She also shares the narratives of three of her students as they convey ways the elective course transformed their thinking about one minority religious group and has convinced them of the value of learning about cultural, religious, and spiritual diversity as they pursue their own practice.

Introduction

Approximately six years ago I sat with my colleagues in the department discussing possible course electives. Some of us were feeling creative that day and in the midst of our brainstorming session, I suggested a course about the experiences of Muslims living in America. To my surprise, my chair and the rest of the faculty thought it was a good idea. So along with courses on the Gay experience, Hispanic cultures, and substance abuse, an elective on the Muslim population was developed and offered. I knew from the literature (Canda, 1989) that many social workers felt ill prepared to address matters of religion and spirituality. I was familiar with the stereotypes and labels about Muslims (Shaheen, 1997). The presentations I offered in the community and the reactions of students to seeing a Muslim female professor wearing a traditional Islamic headscarf provided anecdotal evidence that many social workers in the field and students in the classroom knew little about Islam and the Muslims. I was also familiar with the literature that pointed to Muslim's reluctance to seek the assistance of mainstream providers because of the bias about Muslims in society as well as their perception of social work as an agent of societal values that sometimes conflict with Islamic practices. When Muslim clients do meet with social workers who are not Muslim, they want a professional who is sensitive and aware of their religious traditions (Altareb, 1996; Kelly, Aridi, & Bakhtiar, 1996; Nadir & Dziegielewski, 2001).

I had no idea about what the response would be to a summer elective about this population. The first time I taught the course was in the summer of 1999. I took a break the next summer to study for my comprehensive exams. The second time the course was offered was the summer of 2001 just before the World Trade Center attack. Five classes and approximately eighty students later, I can say that offering this summer elective, "The Muslim Reality: Living in America," was an important step for me personally and professionally, as well as for our department and the students who took the course. It was an opportunity to develop my research focus in the area of religious and spiritual diversity in social work, at a time when our society and world had become keenly aware of the need to answer the many unanswered questions about Islam and Muslims, as well as the domestic and global impact of religion in society. It was an opportunity for students who took the course to develop their knowledge regarding the role of religion, culture and diversity in social work. It may have been the start of our department's effort to play a pivotal role in equipping social work graduates with knowledge about the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of their clients. In this

narrative, I hope that my reflections about the course as well as the writings of three of my former students will provide an illustration of the course's meaning and usefulness as regards effective, sensitive multi-cultural practice.

Course Description

Of the over one billion Muslims in the world, approximately seven to eight million live in the United States (Rashid, 1999). In "The Muslim Reality: Living in America" summer elective, students learn about the early history of Islam, basic Islamic beliefs and traditions, the history of Muslims in the United States (Nyang, 1999), and contemporary social issues facing Muslim Americans (Nadir & Dziegielewski, 2001). The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities for students to develop awareness, knowledge, and practice skills that prepare them to work with Muslim clients in various settings, as well as with members of other faith and non-faith traditions. It also provides an open forum for students to explore their concerns about religion and working with religious clients.

The course also sets a foundation and provides a framework for students to work with clients from culturally, spiritually, and religiously diverse traditions. The first unit focuses on the meaning of religion, spirituality, and faith within social work practice. Next, a basic overview of the early history, worldview, and beliefs and practices in Islam are provided. A socio-cultural-historical perspective of the life experiences of Muslims in America is discussed along with contemporary issues and challenges facing Muslims in America. Students learn about the demographic background of the Muslim community in America. Social issues that affect the human service experiences of Muslims in America, such as immigration, social readjustment, hate crimes, adolescent identity issues, family violence, and poverty, are identified. Students learn about culturally competent strategies for working with Muslims in various settings, such as schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, and social service agencies.

Assignments and activities are varied in consideration of course learning objectives and various learning styles. The first assignment asks students to reflect upon the place of religion and spirituality in their lives, past and present, and the ways their perspective may have changed over time. Students are asked to conduct an interview with a Muslim community member. This gives students an opportunity to actually meet and talk with someone who is Muslim. Most students indicate that they have never met a Muslim prior to taking this class and most students' image of Muslims is based on what they have heard from television, movies, and newspaper headlines. Students have an opportunity to experience Muslim traditions when they take a field trip to a *mosque*, a Muslim religious center. They begin the visit by dressing in clothing (a *hijab* or headscarf, long sleeves, ankle-length, loose fitting clothing for the women and a *kufi* or traditional cap and *thobe* or ankle-length shirt for the men) that is in keeping with Islamic traditions. They witness a Muslim prayer service, meet community members and eat at a local Muslim-owned restaurant that provides an opportunity for many of the students to taste Middle Eastern cuisine for the first time.

Later in the semester in a short paper, students explore a social issue of interest as it relates to the Muslim community. Topics include Muslim youth in the public school, hate crimes and Muslims in America, mental health issues among Muslims in America, and domestic violence among Muslims in America. Throughout the course, students learn basic Islamic concepts and language so that they become familiar with some of the words and phrases their clients may use such as *hijab*, *mosque*, and *AsSalaamuAlaikum* (peace be

upon you). Case summaries about fictional Muslim clients are discussed to help students critically assess problems clients experience as well as, spiritually sensitive intervention strategies. Students learn about the religiosity continuum as it relates to Muslims in America (Nadir & Dziegielewski, 2001). Graduate students are asked to develop a case summary and assessment based on a situation facing a Muslim refugee family. They develop a possible intervention plan, considering the resources as well as data they still need to formulate the plan. This information is presented to the class and critically analyzed.

My Reflections on the Course

Over the years student feedback, verbal and written, has indicated that the warm, open classroom environment provided during the course enables them to ask any question and test their preconceived notions about the Muslim community. I am still surprised when students share conversations they have had with friends and relatives about what they have learned in the first week. They speak about challenging stereotypes and correcting misinformation with confidence after one week of class. Students indicate that they begin to listen to the news and movies with a much more critical ear questioning messages they never did before. They begin to hear the generalizations about Muslims and they became more sensitive to stereotypes about other religious and cultural groups in a way they had not considered prior to taking the course. They begin to develop an appreciation of the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of their clients as a strength, a resource, and a challenge.

Learning to Ask Questions

The following student narrative demonstrates the impact of the stereotypes one is raised with. It also demonstrates how one social work student perceived the Muslim community, yet allowed her thinking about this group to be challenged as a result of taking the Muslim Reality course. It also reveals the effect awareness raising, contact with members of the community, and knowledge about the beliefs and the diversity of intra community behaviors can have on a social work student's understanding of the community and its experiences in America. This student went from being the bearer of a very clear belief that she knew all about the Muslims, none of which was good, to the recognition that much of what she knew was based on stereotypes and generalizations. She acknowledges the impact that her stereotypic beliefs would have had on her practice with Muslim clients and is now a strong advocate for diversity education about different cultures and religions.

Luana's Story

"Ever since I can remember, I always thought of myself as an incredibly open-religion minded person. It never occurred to me that I had a terrible misconception about a certain religious community. I was born in a large city in Romania called Timisoara, and because I grew up there I like to think of myself as very fortunate for I was able to gain a wide general knowledge. At a very young age I was introduced to several different religions. Being brought up as an Eastern Orthodox, while my grandparents belonged to two different religions, I was able to become a well-rounded person on the aspect of religion. However, while there were many other religions around me, there was one stigmatized as the "bad religion." This "bad religion" was the Islamic religion practiced by Muslims all over the world. No questions were ever asked as to why the Islamic religion was branded as bad. No explanations were ever needed; we all saw how they treated their women, making them cover their entire body as if veiling them from the world, locking them up behind dark, thick doors and throwing the key away where it may never

be found. And what about the luxurious notion the men had of having the right to marry and own up to four women. The followers of this religion were too fanatical and too suppressive. So why would we ever question these awful truths?

After coming to America, I began to see the media. The media only engraved what was already carved in me. Then, one hot, summer semester my very narrow mind was widened once again. A Muslim follower was offering a Muslim Reality course. The first day of class she welcomed us dressed in her hijab. At the time, I was sure she was wearing it to entertain us. Wrong. She wears it all the time, and it is not because she is forced to, but because she has respect for her religion. That first day I also made it clear to her that what I heard of this religion so far was not at all pleasing, but that I was willing to hear what her perspective was. She could tell that I was going to be difficult and ask plenty of questions so as to prove the horrible truth behind this "bad religion." Even to this day, it humbles me to think that such notions that were swimming in my head at all times were so utterly wrong. I was misled as I grew up, and I was never given the proper chance to formulate my own belief.

It is not easy teaching a course on religion with students pondering if there is some hidden agenda on secretly using classroom settings as the means of converting students to Islam, or any other religion. I, at least, always thought about that. We have become somewhat paranoid because of church and state separation. Looking back, I now feel guilty about my foolishness. Yes, it is a course on religion, but it is also on the Muslim life, traditions, and practices and, most important, on the stigma associated with being a follower of Islam. The stereotypes that have been pounded into us are laid down and dissected. I cringe at how wrongly we are swayed to think of Muslims. The world needs a scapegoat all the time; during slavery the blacks were victimized, during Hitler's rein the Jews, and now the Arabs, who may or may not belong to the Islamic faith, but nevertheless fall prey to stereotypical views. This is exactly why we need courses such as this one to open our eyes to other theories. Once we have both sides of the story only then may we make our decisions."

A Social Work Student Steps into the Shoes of a Muslim Woman

The narrative written by this student reveals what she learned while wearing a *hijab* or traditional headscarf worn by many Muslim women at work one night. As part of her experience, her coworkers and managers revealed bias against the Muslim community and a lack of knowledge about the community, which was Salina did not expect and which surprised her. While this activity was above and beyond the required class assignments, the student provided an additional learning opportunity for everyone in the class. The student and her classmates learned that the bias is real and very much a part of the experience of Muslims in America (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2002).

Salina's Story

"This summer while taking a class called "The Muslim Reality," I learned how important it is for us as future social workers to remember to remain open minded and continue social diversity training throughout our careers. While taking "The Muslim Reality," our professor lectured on discrimination felt by Muslims even at their jobs. I also met a young Muslim woman who indicated that she felt she had been discriminated against while trying to find work because she wore the hijab. I decided that I would like to wear a hijab to work. I wanted to learn what discrimination Muslims faced in the work place first hand. After discussing it with my professor, she gave me the go ahead, with the understanding that I had to get

permission from my work first. I also had to follow some definite safety guidelines.

I headed to work excited to get permission. I work at a local valley restaurant that has always been supportive of my schooling and volunteer work. The first two managers I talked to were my female Hispanic service managers. When I asked the big question on of them said, "But you're white." I said, "yes," in amazement. I was amazed that their comment demonstrated such a lack of knowledge. I then tried to educate them by telling them that Islam is a religion and doesn't have anything to do with ethnic background. I then explained my purpose for asking to wear the hijab to work. After about ten more minutes trying to educate my female managers, they finally agreed to call our corporate office to see if it would be okay. The corporate office immediately gave their approval. However, that wasn't my only challenge with a manager. I came to work the next day and my top manager (an African American male) began to lecture me about the Islamic religion. He talked about how during the civil rights movement African Americans everywhere rose up to say discrimination was wrong and against their beliefs, implying that Muslims should have done the same. Then once again trying to educate one of my managers, I told him how they do speak up but no one listens. The debate lasted twenty minutes and took lots of turns and twists. When he saw that I wasn't going to back down from doing this experiment, he walked angrily away. In his defense he did apologize the next day and admitted to feeling a little discrimination against Muslims.

Friday, my professor coached me about safety issues. We talked about not wearing the hijab while I was driving, taking it off before leaving work, and being escorted to my car after work. I never had to think about that stuff on a daily basis. I started to get scared. I did exactly what she told me. When I arrived I put on the hijab and walked into my restaurant. What I experienced when I got there was shocking. My co-workers made ignorant remarks like "towel head." Customers walked out of my station so they wouldn't have to be waited on by me. Another server mocked me by putting a napkin on her head and walked through my station. A customer said, "What is that thing on your head?" I did the best I could to educate my co-workers as well as my customers.

This experience gave me a chance to experience the discrimination felt by the Muslim members of our community. As professional social workers it is important that we continue to educate others and learn about diversity."

Considerations for Work with People of Other Cultures

The student whose narrative follows took the Muslim Reality course and later became my teaching and research assistant, aiding me with the analysis of my research with young Muslim women. As part of her graduate work, she has decided to explore the impact of taking this class on work with Muslims as well as those from other cultures and faiths. Her current focus is on the transference of knowledge about Muslim traditions and experiences to social work with other diverse groups. Participation in this class has fostered opportunities for her to begin to develop her own interests and ask important questions about the considerations for practice with this population, as well as with other populations.

Adriana's Story

"As a student in the Social Work program at Arizona State University's West campus, I soon became aware of the importance of cultural competence, awareness, and diversity. Every class I enrolled in touched on the subject of knowing your client's culture in order to help them effectively. I learned the variety of ways that our clients differ from each other

and from myself. I have always been intrigued by other cultures and aspects that make them unique. I was introduced to Islam during my first semester at my university when I entered a class and learned my teacher was a Muslim woman. My stereotypes were immediately confronted when she began speaking to the class, to my surprise, without an accent. I soon learned she was a Muslim-African-American woman who converted to Islam. In every class I have taken by this professor I have learned and been reminded of how a person's culture and religion can guide how, as clients, they react to an intervention put in place by professionals. I was really able to see how culture and religion can affect a client's treatment when I enrolled in the Muslim Reality class during the summer of 2002.

By this time I had taken two courses taught by the same professor and became extremely curious about Islam and Muslim people. I was curious as to how Muslim people incorporate themselves into society when, in my perspective, there seemed to be so many restrictions and obstacles. In this class I learned the basics of Islam, about prayer, societal norms, basic terms, history, and current issues. I learned that Islam is not only a religion but also a culture and a way of life. Muslims use Islam as a guide to how to live their lives, interact in society, with the law and in business. I learned how Muslims practicing Islam in America face obstacles within mainstream society. I learned that as a social work professional working with Muslims, I must also look to the role of Islam in my client's life when implementing interventions as I work with Muslim clients.

As I was learning about Islam and how it affects the life domains of a Muslim, I began to think about how other cultures and religions can affect people. I began to think about the life domains that people have and how culture and religion can affect them. As I learned how Islam guides its followers on marriage, death, societal interactions, family, and work, I began to ask myself how these domains are affected for people of other cultures and religions. I began to see that I would have to remember that the degree to which a person is acculturated would guide how much I would draw from their culture or religion as well.

This class taught me how to become familiar with Islam and Muslims. I learned how researching, interviewing, and asking questions about another culture help me as a professional to better work with my clients. Although I learned about Islam within in a classroom setting, the class gave me tools and techniques that I will be able to use outside of the classroom. I will be able to use these techniques to learn about a person's culture and religion and how it does or doesn't affect their daily living. I have learned how to ask questions and inquire about culture and religion without being offensive but showing a genuine interest."

Lessons Learned

Over the years of teaching the Muslim Reality course, I have learned a number of valuable lessons. One lesson points to the importance of providing a warm and open atmosphere so that students feel comfortable asking questions and exploring the images and stereotypes they have become familiar with. My philosophy has become "if not here then where." If I don't provide a place for students to ask the questions they have about Muslims where will they find the answers? Certainly there is an increasing array of publications on the subject, but part of my job as I see it is to provide a beginning place for students to explore their questions while directing them to the literature. In the process it is important to be as honest as possible about the strengths and weaknesses, the challenges and successes facing the community so that social work students can become effective, competent practitioners with this population. If not, the stereotypes and inaccuracies continue to be

their primary sources about Muslims and thus what their practice is based upon.

I have also learned the importance of challenging students to critically analyze the messages the media promote about minority groups, including the Muslims. Teaching our students critical thinking skills is one of the important curriculum objectives. In this course students are challenged to critically think about the messages they have received in ways they have not been challenged to think about in the past. Students have shared how humbled they are by the realization that they were not more critical of the messages they received about this and other minority groups before taking this class. They are amazed at how much they don't know about Muslims and how much of the stereotypes they came to believe as true.

It is amazing to see students willing to allow themselves to step outside of their comfort zone and become receptive of the idea that not all they were taught about Muslims was accurate. I have seen the puzzlement in students' faces as they considered what they were learning. As they learned Islamic language, met a Muslim for the first time, visited a mosque, tried on traditional clothing, and tasted food from various Muslim cultures, they explored aspects of Muslim life and began to consider a new perspective. The pace varied for different students, but by the end of the five weeks most students were able to say that perhaps the messages they received in the past were not applicable to most Muslims. Students in my most recent class were so impressed by the need for awareness about policy issues facing the Muslims that they are planning to develop an advocacy and awareness project during the fall semester. The good news for me is that I have been an eyewitness to their growth and transformation.

Over the years of teaching the course, my knowledge of spirituality and social work has also grown. As a result I have added material on many of the issues social workers are concerned about when it comes to addressing religion, spirituality and social work, like separation of church and state, the faith-based initiative, and the functions and dysfunctions associated with religion. I have also added a greater emphasis on spiritual competence as a foundation for the course. Students are encouraged to transfer what they learn about Muslims to their understanding of the broader topic and their work with other minority religious groups. Course content has been enhanced to include material on spiritual competence as well as a chart that enables students to look at the similarities and differences between the Islamic faith and other faiths. A semester long activity that encourages students to develop spiritually inclusive language, in addition to Islamic terms and language, has also been added to the course. So while students learn terms like mosque, hijab, and imam, they also learn to use terms like religious center, faith community, and religious or spiritual leader as part of the spiritually inclusive language list.

Finally, I am convinced of the importance of helping students discern the difference between culture and religion, as well as the diversity within religious groups. The Muslim community is a culturally diverse community representing ethnic groups and languages from countries all over the world, including those indigenous to the United States (Nyang, 1999). Too often the Muslims are seen as a monolithic group despite the diversity that exists among them, and religion and culture are interchanged as if they are one in the same. It is important that social workers recognize that culture may impact the way Muslims practice Islam and that some cultural traditions may not have anything to do with the religious beliefs. I have included some information about the diverse groups among the Muslims as part of a mock case review, but I plan to expand course content to include additional information about the diverse cultural groups

and experiences of the Muslims in the United States, to better prepare students as they consider intragroup diversity.

Implications

The narratives these students have shared illustrate their growth as they challenged their own and others misperceptions and prejudices. A seemingly new and very different world has opened up to them as they explored Muslim beliefs, traditions, and experiences in America in this course. As educators we rarely get to know what difference the things we teach and the information we share make in the lives of our students. I was given such an opportunity, however, as these students shared their stories and we worked together over the last few years. I look forward to keeping in touch with these women to learn how knowledge of the Muslim reality assisted them in their work with Muslims, as well as those of other cultures, religions, and spiritual traditions.

Based on the feedback I have received over the years, and the growing recognition of the need to educate social work students about religion and spirituality, I believe that a course like the Muslim Reality is beneficial in helping students learn about these concepts. This course provides an opportunity for students to begin to develop religious and spiritual competency (Hodge, 2004) by challenging their knowledge, as well as increasing their knowledge and awareness about a culturally diverse minority religious group that is experiencing oppression today. For many students these experiences become relevant as they realize they are not only about past experiences of discrimination but current ones as well. Traditional diversity courses tend to explore the breadth of diversity as an issue in society with a brief discussion about a variety of diverse groups in society. This course has enabled me to discuss the issue broadly as well as focus on the traditions and experiences of one group. In the brief five-week summer session, which is never long enough for a comprehensive discussion of all of the related materials and topics, "The Muslim Reality" course makes an interesting elective with lots of creative opportunities to increase student knowledge, employ critical thinking, engage in experiential activities, conduct research, and explore intervention strategies. This course also provides an opportunity for students to explore the ways knowledge about social work with Muslims may be transferred to social work practice with other minority religious and cultural groups.

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Aneesah Nadir, MSW, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at the Arizona State University – West Campus College of Human Services Department of Social Work. Comments regarding this article can be addressed to: aneesah.nadir@hotmail.com.

Call for Papers

Special Issue: The Beleaguered Administrator
Guest Editor: James J. Kelly, PhD

Beleaguer (bç lç' gër) vt. *1. to besiege by encircling, as with an army; 2. to beset, as with difficulties; harass.*

Are you a **beleaguered administrator**? If you are an educator, administrator or supervisor in the helping professions you may feel that you are.
Think of the challenges you face: impossible work schedules; conflicts between service goals and agency demands; ethical dilemmas; racial tensions; difficult clients and even more difficult co-workers; an abusive boss; budget cutbacks; agency funding demands; arcane and contradictory program guidelines; poorly trained students or workers. Any of this sound familiar?
In this Special Issue of *Reflections* we want to hear from you.
As you face the twenty-first century, you have learned how to confront and overcome the challenges of the beleaguered administrator. Perhaps you make do with the ways things are. Or, you change your work environment. You may decide to resign and move on.
In your paper, describe what happened to you. What administrative challenges did you face? Did you overcome them? What did you learn? Were there tragedies or happy surprises along the way? What advice do you have for those who follow you?

Manuscript Guidelines:
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Dr. James J. Kelly, PhD
Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
Professor of Sociology and Social Services
California State University, Hayward
25800 Carlos Bee Boulevard
Hayward, CA 94542-3012

Voice: (510) 885-2304 FAX: (510) 885-2425
e-mail: jimkelly@csuhayward.edu

"Only Don't Know" - The Spirituality of Social Work

Michael Sanger, Ph.D., Valdosta State University, Georgia

This narrative traces the author's experience with and study of communications from deceased loved ones. In the process of crafting this narrative the author realized that social workers, grounded theorists, and Buddhists shared a common belief in the power of seeing things as they really are, not as we think they are. This belief is based on realizing that when we allow ourselves to see the world as it truly is, the truth of each situation is free to emerge, and that emerging truth can reveal the meaningfulness of our world.

To begin in the middle of things, it was a little after 1:00 pm February 28th, the third day of the 2005 CSWE conference in New York City. Outside it was snowing, not the storm the weathermen had predicted, but hard enough to fill Broadway and 48th with a layer of slush. Inside, in an exhibition hall of the ballroom of the Marriott Marquis, I stood beside my poster presentation, the culmination of seven years of study summarized on twenty-some PowerPoint© slides, thumb-tacked to the cork board. A two-inch-high heading trumpeted my topic: "When Clients Talk to Deceased Loved Ones," which explored how social workers dealt with clients who felt they had received some kind of communication from a recently deceased loved one. I was proud of my work but concerned about how it would be received, given that the topic was a bit out of the mainstream. But people were reading the slides and talking with me about their experiences with loved ones who had visited them, which confirmed one of the findings from the research—that normal, healthy people in all kinds of life situations talked to social workers about being visited by deceased loved ones.

It seemed important that people not just read the findings posted on the cork board, but that they also have a chance to talk about them with me. For while the dissertation "findings" as presented on the cork board were valid, they seemed to lack "the human touch." My dissertation included face-to-face interviews with 21 social workers in which we discussed how they worked with clients who wanted to talk about communications from deceased loved ones. These interviews were full of compassion and concern for clients, mixed with ambiguity over exactly what these visits were. The interviews were full of heart. But the dissertation itself was based on abstracting concepts and themes from those interviews, and in the process of abstraction some of the heart was lost—the face-to-face vitality I experienced while interviewing the social workers and which the social workers reporting having shared with their clients.

In the midst of enjoying the give and take with the conference attendees who were stopping by, I noticed a short, distinguished-looking woman reading the slides. Eventually she turned to me and asked, "How did you come to this?"

Her eyes were half happy, half sad. I have noticed that people reflecting on continued connections with their deceased loved ones often display this bittersweet mix—the pain of the loss mixed with the happiness of the continued connection.

I told her the whole story. And as I told her the whole story, her bittersweet look changed to one that was more enthusiastic.

"You have a gift," she said.

"Receiving a visit like that is a gift."

"No," she insisted. "You have a gift. How you mixed the intellect and the heart. You should write what you just told me as a narrative and submit it to *Reflections*."

I was overjoyed by her compliment. And stunned. And scared.

I was overjoyed because the whole time I was working on the dissertation I had struggled with the formality of the format. I had always wanted to put more of myself into it, but the dissertation format required a more detached, objective persona. I wanted to inject more heart and soul, but the dissertation format seemed to require a lot of intellect and concept. Now I was being asked to tell my story.

I was stunned because I had come to the conference half afraid the academic professionals in attendance would tear my research apart. After all, the research concerned clients who talk to dead people, used grounded theory, and suggested that relying on basic social work values rather than on specialized spiritual/religious interventions was enough to create a spiritually competent social worker. So her enthusiastic acceptance of my work was stunning.

And I was scared because writing the narrative she was suggesting meant leaving the safety of "scientific rigor" and re-working my research using my heart as well as my head. This was what I had always wanted to do, but I didn't know if I was up to the challenge.

On the other hand, the woman standing before me was a real human being who had listened to my story and found it of value. In suggesting I share my story she had, in her own way, validated it. By validating my story and suggesting I re-examine it with my heart and my head, she pointed me towards a new understanding of the spirituality of social work. That understanding only emerged in the process of re-visiting my story.

The Story

In 1977, I started to study and practice a form of Tibetan Buddhism, a study and practice I continue to this day. The essence of this practice is being present to what is actually happening in every moment and seeing things as they are, not as we think they are. In 1985, I met Anne Elliot, a perky, feisty, thirty-two-year-old artist who occasionally remarked, when she wasn't teasing me or working on her art projects, how bittersweet our life was. We were married in a Buddhist ceremony September 9, 1989, and just two years later, in the autumn of 1991, she was diagnosed with an advanced colon cancer. After almost a year and a half of fighting the cancer, just before dawn on Tuesday, December 29, 1992, she passed on.

It may sound strange, but I wouldn't trade that last year and a half for anything. We both knew we had a limited time together, so we spent the time really being together. Much of that time she was weakened by the chemo and often she was in great pain. But despite our pain and suffering, or maybe because of it, we were closer and kinder to each other in those last eighteen months than we had been earlier. And while I wish she hadn't died, and certainly wish she hadn't suffered, as deaths go this seemed to be a good one.

Anne let go of her last breath in a hospice residential unit around seven in the morning, with her mother and her sister at her side. Her life force or energy or at least a sense of her presence stayed in the room for a good hour or two afterwards. Three days after she passed on, we held a Buddhist funeral service for her and after that she was cremated.

Two or three days after the cremation, I noticed a strange pattern on the inside left rear window of our blue Toyota Corolla. Nobody ever rode in the back seat, because it was always filled with books and papers and empty cans of diet Coke and sweaty workout gear. I used to smoke my pipe when I drove, so the back windows were kind of grimy, and a picture had been drawn in the grime on the inside of the window. It was a simple line drawing, in the style of a Zen portrait, looking very much like Anne on her deathbed.

Despite being a Buddhist, at the time I was pretty much a materialist; I didn't believe

in spirits or psychic energy or any of that woo-woo stuff. But the drawing was there, and the only living people I could think of who might have made the drawing denied having done so. So to my mind, and to those few friends to whom I spoke of it, this was Anne's last drawing, her final post-mortem gift. Probably. Even today I am not sure that this drawing was not made by some mischievous friend—my oldest niece being the most likely suspect. But no matter the objective facts, I found great comfort in this final "touch" from Anne. Over time the lines of the drawing began to smudge, and I tried to retrace them with a q-tip, but that just made the smudging worse. So with some Windex and a paper towel, I cleaned the window.

About a month later, a coworker was dilly-dallying around the office, not going home even though it was way past closing time. She started telling me about a "ghost" that had been hanging around her house the last few nights and said she didn't want to go home since her husband and daughter were both out of town, and she was afraid to be in the house alone. I asked her if the ghost seemed dangerous to her and she said "No," so I suggested she try talking to it. It never entered my mind that this could have anything to do with Anne.

Until the next morning. When Toni came running down the corridor at work, beaming.

"Michael, you'll never guess what happened!"

"It was Anne," I blurted out, not even thinking about it.

"Yes," Toni said. "I sat down on a chair in my bedroom, made myself calm, and told the spirit that if it wanted to talk, I would listen. I just sat there, and then the spirit came into the room and said it was Anne. She said she just wanted to tell us she was in a good place and was moving on to another good place, but that she wouldn't be able to contact us from the place she was going. She said she came to me because she knew you weren't sensitive enough to hear her."

Then Toni felt the spirit leave.

I didn't know what to do with Toni's story. If there hadn't been the drawing in the car window, I probably would have put it down to her kind and gifted imagination. But there was the drawing in the window. And five years later, there was more.

The "Ghost" Paper

In the process of Anne's dying, we had been greatly aided by the nurses and social workers from Hospice. In the aftermath of her death, I couldn't think of a better way to spend the rest of my life than to do for others what they had done for us. So six months after Anne died, I applied to and was accepted in an MSW program. Whenever possible, I focused my research papers on religion and spirituality, death and dying, grief and mourning. At the urging of a few faculty members, I moved directly from the MSW program to a Ph.D. and in my doctoral course work, I continued to focus on those issues, planning to do my dissertation on anticipatory mourning—those things we can do before a loved one dies to ease our pain afterward.

Then in the spring of 1997, five years into my social work studies, I stumbled across "the more." I was taking a course in Spirituality and Social Work, planning a paper that re-conceptualized the religion/spirituality split. After I presented an outline of this paper to my professor, she told me that her mother had died when the professor was in her mid-twenties and how almost every day for the next month, she felt her mother's nearly physical presence watching over her. Then the professor suggested that rather than writing about the re-conceptualization of religion and spirituality I write a paper about that kind of experience.

I found her suggestion amusing, for it seemed a strange topic to address in an academic paper. I had had my experience with

Anne's picture in the car window and her visit to Toni, but I realized that in all my courses and all my reading and all my studies this topic—receiving communications from deceased loved ones—hadn't been mentioned once. And as important as Anne's visits had been to me, it had never occurred to me that this was a topic social workers should address. So I started to research what I began to call my "ghost paper."

As I started conducting informal interviews with friends and acquaintances I was surprised at how many of them had experienced some kind of communication from deceased loved ones—a finding that would be repeated four years later when, in the course of my dissertation research, I found that more than 35% of adults in national surveys report feeling as if they had been in touch with someone who had died (Davis & Smith, 1997). I was also surprised that while everybody I talked with found the experience of receiving a communication from a deceased loved one comforting, many people were reluctant to talk about it for fear of being judged crazy. For example, two members of the Buddhist meditation center Anne and I belonged to had had "visits" from Anne shortly after her death but had never shared them with me until I had begun my survey. One of these friends, who had had several experiences like this when family members had died, was very explicit in wanting his confidentiality protected. He was afraid that people would think he was "a weirdo" and that it might cost him his government job.

Another example of a person relishing the experience but being afraid to discuss it involved a friend whose little dog had died and then appeared in her kitchen several times afterwards. Margie had told me the story several times of how good it made her feel to catch a fleeting glimpse of Pookie out of the corner of her eye. One evening I was having dinner at Subway with Margie and a mutual friend named Joe. A few days earlier Joe had told me about being visited by his mother after she had died. The three of us were talking about my "Ghost" paper when I suggested that Margie tell Joe about her dog.

Margie shot a glance at me that was designed to kill and shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "What are you talking about?"

"You know, about after Pookie died..."

She gave us another shoulder shrug and a confused look. I finally realized what was going on, so I said, "You know, the other day Joe was telling me that after his mom died, she came to him in a dream and it really felt like it was his mom – not just a dream."

"Oh," Margie said, suddenly realizing it was safe. "You mean when Pookie came back to visit me after she died..." and went on to share her story with great relish.

Truth Emerging

This combination of people finding the visits comforting yet being reluctant to talk about them was confirmed by the literature reviews I conducted for the "Ghost" paper and later for my dissertation. In a national survey, Grimby (1993) found that while most people find the visits themselves comforting, they are often reluctant to discuss this phenomenon for fear of being labeled crazy. Gotterer (2001) reported a similar reluctance with clients who wanted to discuss spiritual issues in therapy but hesitate to do so: "What clients see as a strength is often pathologized; frequently they cannot discuss their beliefs in therapy for fear of being judged as 'crazy'" (p. 188).

It concerned me that this reluctance to talk about the experience wasn't limited to lay people; it extended to social work educators as well. For example, several social work articles mentioned continued connections between the living and the dead, such as reminiscing about the deceased, keeping their belongings, or writing to them in a journal (Fast, 2003; Sormanti & August, 1997). This desire for a continued connection

was presented as just a normal part of the grieving process, but none of the articles explicitly mentioned visits from deceased loves ones in the list of valid continued connections. Though one article written by a social worker implied that a visit from a deceased loved one might be included in the category of continued connections, it did not say so explicitly. This was intriguing, given the reluctance of so many people to openly discuss it, so I telephoned the author of the article. The author confirmed that in fact some of the continued connections mentioned in the article had taken the form of visits from the deceased. When I asked why the visits had not been detailed, the author stated that it didn't seem prudent to include them since he was not yet tenured.

That admission, combined with a tendency in the psychiatric literature to view communications from deceased loved ones in a pathological light, referring to them as "hallucinations" with all the negative connotations that term contains (Matchett, 1972; Shen, 1986), eventually led me to take these communications from deceased loved ones as the topic of my dissertation.

I decided to focus the dissertation neither on the experience itself, nor on the clients who reported the experience. Rather I focused on the social workers themselves and on how they reacted to clients who brought up this experience. I also decided to use a grounded theory methodology, in part because of its similarity to the Buddhist approach to inquiry, i.e., being present to the moment and seeing things as they are without preconceptions.

Grounded theory is similar in that it is not used to prove pre-existing hypotheses, but rather to allow the truth to emerge from the data. Thus researchers are encouraged to 'bracket their biases' in order to be able to see things as they are so as to allow the theory that exists in the ground of the data to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These two traditions (Buddhism and Grounded Theory) share a faith in individuals' ability to see reality for what it is, beyond their preconceptions of what they think is true.

Resting in Not Knowing

In the course of my dissertation research, I interviewed 21 social workers about how they dealt with clients who reported being in contact with or receiving communications from deceased loved ones, including two students in a BSW program as well as several social workers with more than 25 years of experience. These social workers worked in school systems, hospices, hospitals, community agencies, and private practice. Their work was informed by behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, humanist, systems, family, and eclectic models of practice.

Some of those I interviewed thought the communications really came from deceased loved ones, some thought it was a normal part of the grieving process, some thought it was neural activity triggered by external stimuli, and some thought it was best to view this phenomenon simply as an experience that the client was sharing. But no matter how the social worker thought of the experience, and no matter what model of practice the social worker used, all the social workers dealt with their clients in the same basic manner, a manner they often described as simply "doing social work." Another way to say it was that the social workers all respected the dignity of the client and of the client's experience. As one social worker in the study put it:

> Who am I to tell my client what her experience is. Have I been dead and come back? I don't know what happens. What right do I have to tell [them] what is? And [how do I know] whether it is part of the grief process or whether there really is a [dead] person who does this ... I don't know, and I don't care.

I always asked the social workers if they thought this was really the dead person or

not, and if the answer to that question mattered. While their answer to the first question varied a good deal, there was almost unanimous response to the second question. The social workers didn't care if the communication was objectively real or not—what they cared about was the client's experience. They were concerned with normalizing the client's experience, validating it, and helping the client explore its meaning.

One aspect of grounded theory methodology is discovering common themes and assigning them codes. To this common theme of "I don't know and I don't care," I assigned the code "*only don't know*." That phrase comes from the Korean Zen master Seung Sahn.

Only don't know echoes one of Soen Sa Nim's favorite expressions that goes to the heart of his teaching. The knowing that he enjoins against is the mind's enraptured production of its opinions, judgments, discriminations and preferences, creating the confusion in which most of us live, and in its wake, our own and other people's suffering. Only don't know means choosing to pay attention. When we choose to just pay attention, this confusion is dispelled; just seeing, just hearing, or just perceiving the needs of others is the turning point for clarity and compassion (Sichel & Lombardo, 1982, p. x).

This echoes what I heard from many of the social workers. They focused on the client's story, and out of that arose concern and compassion. As one social worker shared, "It was almost a spiritual connection with these people and that we were—as wrenching as these sessions could be—we were almost privileged to be in that inner core of the depth of their bereavement."

I was no stranger to feeling privileged when people shared the core of their being with me, for this is what happened in many of these interviews. It often felt as if the process of opening and sharing that took place in my interviews mirrored the very process the social workers described as occurring between them and their clients.

There was an almost spiritual sense of connection between the social workers and me, a sense of union and of meaning that went far beyond what I would normally think of as "interviewing a social worker for a dissertation." I think that the topic of our conversation helped open us to that space. It seemed that discussing communications with deceased loved ones reminded both the social workers and me of the importance of communication, of openness, and of resting in that space of "only don't know."

Allowing Meaning to Emerge

When I began my dissertation, I was concerned that social workers might tend to pathologize their clients' experience of being in communication with a loved one who had died. I had expected to find that the social workers' responses to their clients would vary based on the social workers' views of whether it was proper to address spiritual and religious issues in practice, and of the social workers' own view of mourning, and of their models of practice. But this was not what I found. The overwhelming factor influencing how social workers dealt with their clients who had received communications from deceased loved ones was the social workers' respect for the client, respect for the client's experience, and respect for the client's interpretation of that experience. Social workers said their approach to clients who communicated with deceased loved ones was the same as their approach to clients in other situations. When I asked the social workers how what they did with clients regarding this topic differed from what they did with clients around other topics, they said "It doesn't. We do the same thing." They often framed their honoring the clients as "just doing social work."

Yet there is more here than "just doing social work." The act of honoring clients and their experiences is similar both to grounded theory's call to "bracket your biases" and the Buddhist suggestion to "only don't know." One does not bracket one's biases just for the sake of bracketing biases. One brackets biases so that the truth of the data can reveal itself. Similarly, one does not "only don't know" just to "don't know." One rests in the space of non-conception so that clarity and compassion can arise.

In the same manner, social workers do not honor the client just to honor the client. They honor clients to learn from them—to be available to their reality.

The social work ideal of honoring the dignity of clients and of the clients' experiences is at heart a spiritual ideal. When social workers framed their actions as "just doing social work," they were pointing to a very spiritual aspect of social work—if by spiritual one means seeking connection to and meaning in the universe. By honoring clients as the best experts of their own experience, by bracketing biases about the client, and by "only not knowing"—these social workers were opening themselves to connection with the clients and allowing meaning to emerge as it may.

Allowing meaning to emerge is the challenge of meeting clients on the ground of their own experience. As a friend who is not only a social worker but a more accomplished Buddhist than I recently said, "You don't have to know *what* [the experience] means, it is enough to know *that* it means."

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Michael Sanger, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Valdosta State University. Comments regarding this article can be addressed to: msanger@valdosta.edu.

Allah, Kali, Jesus: Reflections on My Own and Respondents' Spirituality

Mahasweta M. Banerjee, Ph.D., University of Kansas

While inquiring into the ways people cope with poverty-related issues, the author unexpectedly learned about the central role of spirituality in some respondents' lives. She reflects on the purpose, meaning, and significance of selected respondents' spiritual disclosures in relation to her Hindu beliefs and practices. It appears that despite religious differences, our belief in the guiding force of a protective power serves as a wellspring for resiliency, strength, and empowerment for us.

During field research, I was quite taken aback when Armina, a poor Muslim woman in India, very casually stated that she prayed to Kali—a Hindu Goddess—for divine intervention in meeting her basic needs, and when Brenda, a Christian woman in the U.S. who was striving hard to become economically self-reliant, referred to her Karma—a Hindu belief about work and its ramifications in this and other lives. Being a Hindu, I was both startled by and drawn to these respondents because of their references and allusions to Hindu religious and spiritual practices and assumptions in separate research projects that focused on micro-enterprise development and not on spirituality. I reflected upon the purpose, meaning, and significance of these statements. I wondered whether being cognizant of our differences, they were trying to build rapport with me by referring to my cultural and spiritual practices and beliefs. Also, feeling somewhat comfortable with me, were they providing me with insights into their spiritual beliefs? Were they alluding to the critical role of spirituality as a source of resiliency, strength, and empowerment in their lives? I do not know the answers to these questions from their perspectives because religion and spirituality were not the focus of our interviews.

It is worthwhile to pause a little and reflect on the relationship between spirituality and social work research-practice because religion can be both a unifying and a dividing force in society. Growing up in India, I have fond memories of annual religious festivities that brought families and friends together. I also have vivid memories and knowledge of much divisiveness between and among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians in India. Some prominent examples include the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu and Indira Gandhi by a Sikh; the independence of India from the British Raj at the expense of separating Hindus and Muslims by partitioning India into three entities: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; and since then the never-ending battles between Hindus and Muslims that have resulted not only in destruction of important historical temples and mosques, but also in death and disruption of citizens' lives.

Although I had imagined that life in the U.S. would be more peaceful in relation to the pervasive Hindu-Muslim and later Sikh conflicts in India, before long I realized religious fundamentalism exists here too, but expresses itself in other ways. Fast forwarding to recent times, I notice religious sectarianism pushing for institutionalizing marriage between heterosexuals only, defining reproductive health practices for women, and prohibiting stem cell research. Furthermore, President Bush's election, the September 11, 2001, attack, and President Bush's re-election to a second term together have changed the public discourse in this country. Many sense a moral dilemma with regard to our attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq. Others wonder how much of the 9/11 attack and the U.S.

counterattacks are rooted in religious-political differences between Arab Muslims and American Christians. And then, almost half the country was stunned by President Bush's electoral victories, not once, but twice. Voting pattern analyses by religious affiliation indicated that religious denomination and practice profoundly influenced his success. This is not surprising given President Bush's campaign rhetoric of "moral values" and "family values." However, since in office this rhetoric has disappeared and has been replaced with a new emphasis on fixing social security.

With regard to the relationship between religion and social services, Ehrenreich (2004) reports that during his first term, President Bush promoted public funding for faith-based organizations to provide social services. This maneuver strongly increased the already existing power of right-leaning Christian churches. As a consequence, these churches not only offer intangibles like eternal salvation through proselytizing and bearing witness, but also provide concrete material assistance. She writes that she has met poor people who reported that in these days of welfare reform and cut backs on public funding for social services, their best survival strategy is to "find a church" (Ehrenreich, 2004, p. 3). In exchange for faith conversion and prayer, such churches offer a variety of programs, such as soup kitchens, free clothing, job search tips, support groups for victims of domestic violence, childcare, after-school programs, ESL lessons, and occasional cash handout. Ehrenreich further notes that evangelical churches in red and blue states have become great places for networking. Such grassroots networking was one important factor in President Bush's re-election success. She states that the irony of this story is that at one time, it was the liberal left that provided "alternative services" in the form of free clinics, women's health centers, food co-ops, and inner-city multi-service centers. With liberals and liberal social workers shying away from vocalizing their faith and religion to maintain the separation of church and state, conservatives are swinging votes and moving the country towards a direction that is not in the best interests of poor, vulnerable, and marginalized populations for whom social workers work. I believe we need to think about and strategize our professional stance in the nexus of religion/spirituality-politics-and social justice.

My experiences, historical events, and current religious-political struggles hinging on "moral values" force me to stop and reflect on my own religious and spiritual heritage, as well as practices and my overall understanding of the role of religion and spirituality in people's lives. Here I will explore the question: if religious differences are such a strong force in keeping people, cultures, and nations separate from one another, how can I, a social work teacher, research-practitioner, and scholar who is a practicing Hindu, work effectively in the U.S. with people—students, respondents, faculty colleagues—who are different from me with regard to my religious background? I seek possible answers to this broad question by restricting the discussion to my role as an inquirer.

It is important to answer this question for various reasons. Like me, there are many social work practitioners and academics who have immigrated to the U.S. and have varied religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Some are fortunate enough to work with people from their country of origin and similar religious affiliations. However, after immigration, it is not always possible nor is it desirable to restrict oneself to working with people of one's own faith and national heritage only. In such instances, what are their options? Conversely, is it not desirable and sometimes imperative for social workers born in the U.S. to work with natural and naturalized citizens whose religious orientation is different from theirs?

Recently, there has been quite a burgeoning of literature that shows how gender and race/ethnicity matching affects working and researching with people of color (Kanuha, 2000; Lowery, 2000; Pinderhughes, 2004). This is helpful because it sensitizes outsiders about what to do under such circumstances. While much is known about how researcher-respondent differences have contributed to distorted findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, and Vidich & Lyman, 2000), in comparison very little is known about competent and effective research when racial/ethnic and religious background of researchers and respondents do not match. This silence is troubling because it could indicate concerns such as: a) when there is no match, people should not research "others"; b) when there is no match and researchers focus on "others" it necessarily results in poor research. Both these implications are disempowering for social workers who may have immigrated from other countries as well as for native born American social workers who work with people who are different from them with regard to their ethnicity/race, religion, gender, and other personal characteristics.

This narrative attempts to address this silence by presenting an alternative perspective to this dominant view of social work research-practice. Since living in the U.S. for about two decades now, I have consistently done research with people who are different from me with regard to my ethnicity and religion. Have I or have I not been effective in any of these interactions? There is no categorical answer in either direction. I have been effective in some interactions and not so in others. Here I will reflect upon my researcher's role with three non-Hindu women in India and in the U.S. where I believe I have been an effective researcher. But, I will restrict this discussion to the religious and spiritual components of our interviews. To this end, I will first present aspects of my spirituality that influence my work. Next, I will highlight segments of my interviews with these three women that focus on their spirituality. Last, I will draw lessons for myself and social workers by juxtaposing my spirituality with my respondents' spirituality.

My Spirituality

On reflection, three family members have played a key role in introducing me to Hindu spirituality. But my faith waxed and waned over time as my traditional beliefs and practices were questioned by Western science and education. However, eventually it evolved into a more stable guiding force in my daily living and practices. First, I will highlight a superficial tale related to spirituality, and then I will present my more deep-rooted spiritual beliefs and practices.

Chanting Rama, Rama ... Keeps Ghosts Away

At first it was my cousin and best friend who introduced me to spiritual practices. Although only a year older than I, she lived with my paternal grandmother and had learned many of our traditional practices from her. Perhaps when we were six or seven years old, she taught me how to incorporate prayers and certain spiritual practices into daily living to get strength, overcome barriers and fears, and progress towards salvation. One vivid childhood memory relates to trusting a higher power to overcome fear of ghosts. At that time I used to be afraid of climbing the stairs at night in my grandparents' home. Perhaps to keep a check on children in a large household, the elders had told us that there were ghosts on the tree right outside the house facing the stairs, and that the worst ghosts were those without heads and shoulders! We were also instructed never to go upstairs alone at night, and that if we were naughty, the ghosts would get us. Consequently, if for any reason I wanted to go up and get something, I could

not do it because I was afraid of the headless ghost twisting my neck to replace its own headlessness! Yet, my cousin could very comfortably go up and down the stairs at night. When asked how she could do it despite the ghosts, she told me that she chants the name of Rama, a reincarnation of Krishna, and ghosts never get her because they are afraid of Him. And, she told me that if I did the same, I would be protected too. Not fully sure how much to trust her against the adults, I still gave it a shot. Shivering with fear, I ran full speed up the stairs, got what I needed, and hardly breathing rushed down, repeating the name of Rama all the while! Did her trick work! It took me a while to trust her wisdom in this venture, but in the long run she turned out to be right. On reflection, chanting Rama, Rama enabled me to overcome fear of ghosts at an early age. As a more mature adult, chanting Om Namah Shivayah, or some other mantra, or visualizing a sacred symbol helps me to gain strength and overcome doubts about my abilities—another kind of ghost that haunts adults!

Another time, my cousin told me how she had prayed to all the Gods and Goddesses for four years and had completed her "girls' vrata" by feeding people, animals, and nature. Very likely she would attain "moksha" (salvation) and go to heaven, I fathomed. I was mesmerized by her tale and wanted the same for myself. But I could not as I did not live with my paternal grandmother. So, I told my mother that I wanted to do what she had done. My parents were not overtly religious at that time. They were busy raising three kids and keeping their lives going. However, my mother honored my request by making arrangements with my maternal grandmother, who lived in the same city as we did, to initiate me into girls' spirituality.

Four Years of Girls' Vrata, or Dedicated Worship

Between the ages of nine and twelve, for four years, during the first month of our New Year, my Granny initiated my sister, who was three years old when we started, and me into Hindu girls' spirituality. These were four very special years in our lives. We were to get up quite early in the morning, bathe and wear fresh clothes, keep a fast, and be in her Puja (prayer) Room by six o'clock. This room was on the terrace, fully dedicated to worship only, and had windows or doors on all four sides which allowed a lot of sunlight and fresh air to come in. By the time we arrived, Granny would have completed her own prayers, and together we would prepare for our worship. It was a lot of fun getting the room set for what we would do in the next hour. There were special silver, brass, copper, and stone utensils in which fruits, flowers, leaves, grass, and sweets had to be arranged in an order established by Granny. Additionally, there was sacred water—from the river Ganges—that had to be poured from a vessel, incense sticks and oil lamps lit, red and white sandalwood paste prepared, turmeric powder, oil, vermillion, and a host of grains, seeds, bells, and conch shells arranged. She also taught us to draw various symbols with sandalwood paste and other ingredients to depict varied deities. Then, with the morning sun beaming in, soft breeze blowing, fragrance emanating from fresh flowers and leaves, incense sticks burning, bells ringing and conch shells blowing to herald the start of a puja, the room transformed itself into a place perfectly suited for prayers to higher powers. (Living in an over-crowded metropolitan city, this was as close as we could possibly get to nature.)

Granny taught us to pray to different Gods and Goddesses—Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartika, Ganesha, and Kali, as well as any and every God or Goddess that may exist! Each God or Goddess had a prayer that we

memorized with Granny's help—some were Sanskrit mantras and others were Bengali chants. She explained the meaning of the Sanskrit mantras to us—their sounds were powerful as were their meanings. We learned that each God or Goddess also had a favorite flower, leaf, sandalwood paste color, and food. So, all these different dimensions had to be matched to please and pray to them for special favors that each had to bestow on us: strength, courage, steadfastness, truthfulness, relatedness, love, kindness, charity, mercy, humility, honor, justice, health, wealth, education, wisdom, peace and prosperity. But before invoking the Gods or Goddesses, we first prayed to the four sides of the earth—north, south, east, west—and heaven, ocean, sun, moon, sky, fire, air, mountains, rivers, trees, birds, animals, fish, flowers, and our ancestors. It took about an hour each day to complete the prayers. After cleaning up, we went down and first fed a calf before we ate the first morsel of the day. At the end of four years, like my cousin, we too invited family members for a meal, offered gifts to Brahmin males, and gave charity to people who were poor, as well as fed birds and animals in the neighborhood. This was one cherished accomplishment!

Truly, these were four fascinating and memorable years of my life. It was amazing that we had the power to invoke Gods and Goddesses, wake them up, praise them for their qualities and powers, pray to them for what we wanted, and then put them to sleep so they could rest a while from our mundane concerns! At that time, we had learned that these prayers were a way to teach us many desirable life qualities and how to live life, as well as what to value in this and other lives. As I reflect, I realize that these rituals and prayers taught us at an early age various virtues and traits of a good person and a good life: self restraint, cleanliness, and concentration (get up early morning, bathe, do not eat anything until prayers were over, memorize the chants); characteristics of a good person; ways of living and respectfully relating to humans, animals, and the environment; the difference between good and evil, just and unjust, kindness and hatred; ways to stay centered on good and forsake evil; power of Gods and nature to create, destroy, and maintain; importance of humility, gentleness, and respect within and outside the family. So in this sense, we learned that religiosity and spirituality are intertwined. In Sanskrit the word "Dharma" means both religion and duties of living. Accordingly, our homely practices taught no distinction between religion and spirituality—both are integral to living.

Between adolescence and some years of my adulthood, both my religiosity and spirituality fluctuated. There are many factors responsible for this de-centeredness from my spirituality. On the one hand, after I had prayed earnestly for something—as my cousin had taught me—but did not get the fruit of my prayers, my faith wavered. On the other hand, these were years of growing up when I was strongly influenced by a colonial education system that systematically tried to subvert and devalue my traditional heritage. Upon coming to the U.S., I was even more strongly exposed to Western science and its logico-empirical truth orientation which suggested that anything that could not be empirically observed and quantitatively measured did not exist—or was not valid. Also, among many other philosophers, I was intrigued by Marx's and Nietzsche's critiques and their criticisms of religion: God is an opiate for the masses and God is dead. Coupled with such amoral views was Weber's exposition of technical rationality. And, if these were not enough, then the American Protestant ethic of rugged individualism emphasizing competition, achievement, control, and productivity when contrasted against the more amorphous Indian values of inter-generational co-operation, complexity, and other-worldliness

were sufficient to make me reasonably de-centered from spirituality. I was deeply conflicted by what I had learned at home which strongly affirmed traditional values and mores with what I learned through my formal educational systems in both India and abroad, and especially so when I tried to configure the latter with my Hindu spirituality and the many other ways of knowing, healing, and relating to nature and spirituality that I had become aware of over the years. During this protracted struggle to make meaning of my life and my scholarship that made intuitive sense to me, something else from the Hindu tradition impacted me strongly.

The Gita, Meditation, and Yoga

After coming to the U.S., in addition to intellectual conflicts, I was faced with major personal life challenges. Not knowing how to cope, on my father's recommendation I turned to praying to our family deity Goddess Durga—the ten handed savior of the Gods—and the Gita to get peace, strength, resilience, and courage. The Gita has 18 chapters in which Lord Krishna advises Arjuna, a Hindu prince compelled to fight against his cousins and clan members, how to understand and live life—even how to reconcile to a just war! Each chapter is referred to as a type of yoga or union with something, such as Karma or action, Gyana or wisdom, and Bhakti or devotion. The chapters that continue to profoundly influence me deal with work, knowledge and wisdom, human nature, creator's supremacy and pervasiveness, and meditation and devotion. Here I will share a few facets on work and devotion discussed in the Gita. For example, Krishna offers various nuggets of wisdom about work, the most famous being:

Karmany eva 'dhikaraste Ma phaleshu kadacana

Ma karmaphalahetur bhur Ma te sango 'stv akarmani (Gita, 2/47)

You have a right to action only, not to the fruit thereof. You should not be guided by a consideration of the fruits of action nor should you feel drawn towards inaction (Ghosh, 1972, p. 43)

These are powerful ideas that the pro-capitalist world may have a hard time reconciling with: work but do not expect any outcome of your work! The Hindu notion of Karma has deep significance, not all of which I fully accept or can reconcile with, living and working in an American university. Other work-related ideas include: "It is better to follow one's own duty though defective than to go after another's duty carried out to perfection" (3/35). One's own duty means the relationship between one's outward life and one's inward being, the evolution of action from one's soul and inner law of nature, rather than action driven by external exigencies. This idea too is very hard to fully embrace given how institutions of higher education are choosing to respond to external funding opportunities and faculty accomplishments for ranking purposes. In the last and 18th Chapter, the Gita states that humans attain perfection by following their own duty devotedly—"as an act of worship to Him, who is the source of all beings and by Whom all this is pervaded" (18/45-46). Those who are fully non-attached, self-controlled, and devoid of desire attain supreme perfection by giving up the fruits of action. There are four types of people who turn to Krishna: distressed, knowledge-seekers, wealth-seekers, and wise ones. "All of them are noble," says Krishna, but "Among them, the wise one who is ever centered in the Divine, given to single-minded devotion, is the highest. For I am exceedingly dear to him and he to Me" (7/17-18). Last, Krishna says that wisdom merged with action is the best form of Karma Yoga.

Once I had a discussion with one of my American colleagues about how or whether I could explain the notion of dedicated work

without any expectation of the fruits of its labor. Indeed, it is a hard idea to live by especially in American academia that emphasizes research and scholarship productivity over quality. Over time, I have tried to make sense of the Gita's teaching related to right to work but no right to expect any outcome from work by pulling in another teaching from it. This idea informs that the best form of Karma Yoga is the union of wisdom and action. I interpret this to mean that wisdom requires careful thinking about the pros and cons of one's action and the steps required to bring one's action to fruition. Thus, for me it means that I need to stay totally focused on the process of my work. When I am completely focused and engrossed in my work process, generally it reaches fruition. In that case, I am satisfied with my work. So, while working I try not spend energy worrying about the outcome of my work. But, the truth is that when I have put in effort yet, did not accomplish the goal, I have been somewhat upset with the outcome. I imagine total calmness in the face of failure requires a much higher state of consciousness than what I have now. Nonetheless, the somewhat detached attitude that I have developed so far is helpful for me.

In these ways I strive to incorporate some teachings from the Gita into my daily life and work, but am very far from getting close to their kernel. The Gita also emphasizes meditation to still the mind. Over time I have learned to meditate, and every time that I am able to see a blue light at the end of several phases of breathing exercises, it feels like I have attained temporary bliss! At the same time, there are instances where I am especially disturbed and unable to remain calm in the face of troubles. At such times, I turn to the Gita and it helps me to re-evaluate the stressors and recognize what is important from a spiritual stance. I also seek divine guidance when I embark on new scholarship ventures such as micro-enterprise development and social justice. I lay the question out to divine power and pray for direction. When despite amazing difficulties they come through, I know they are my divinely sanctioned paths of action; if they do not come through, I know they were not mine. All in all, I am convinced that a higher power exists for me and with me. It has given me much more than what I have been able to give in return.

Reconciliation with Western Education/ Scholarship and Spirituality

The more regular and calm spirituality that I experience now took many experimental tours and detours over several years. While Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, it is followed by a minority of people outside India, and by now I have spent more years living outside than inside India. During the initial years of living abroad, I met many non-Indians who were attracted to Hinduism and especially Buddhism as also some Indians who turned to Christianity or Islam. Because of my father's openness to various Hindu sects, Brahmoism or reformed Hinduism, and other religions, I learned to be open to other religious and spiritual leanings but never felt the urge to convert to another religion to acquire peace of mind. Having lived in countries where Christianity or Islam was the primary guidepost for political economy, I have encountered people who tried to induce me to these other faiths. For example, when I was much younger, I knew a woman who was affiliated with the Assembly of God Church. Due to innocent curiosity about other versions of spirituality, I willingly accepted an invitation to attend her church services. After some time, I started to experience pressures to convert to her faith. Such a request, which later turned to pressure through inducements such as citizenship, job, and welfare benefits, was totally unanticipated. I thought through this provocation very seriously, and although very young, I could immediately reconnect with what my Granny and family members

had taught me about Hindu spirituality and easily and clearly articulate that I was very comfortable with my spirituality and faith—that I was unwilling to cave in despite my vulnerability in the areas where material assistance was promised. I lost her friendship but learned to discern similar people in the future. Since then I have had similar experiences but have learned how to handle such situations better.

Although I did not go to temples regularly when I was in India, I did visit them occasionally with my Granny and later with my parents. Such formal places of Hindu worship are rare in the countries I have lived. I miss them and often have been attracted to attending services at churches, synagogues, and mosques. However, my early experience taught me that I could mislead people by showing an interest in attending their formal religious services. Thus, I clarify my intent and only when I am certain that there will be no pressure to convert my faith, I attend such services. I have always experienced peace and union with others when I have attended these services. More recently, Hindu temples have come up in larger cities in the U.S. and I attend them occasionally. Unfortunately, temple services here tend to be more social occasions than times to relate to higher beings and powers. Being dissatisfied, I have created a space in my house that is totally devoted to worship and prayers. I pray, meditate, and do my yoga in this space. It does not compare in any way to my Granny's wonder-filled Puja Room, but I highly appreciate the empowerment that Granny instilled in me by showing me how to invoke higher powers. So in this space, by considerably simplifying her elaborate model of prayers, I relate to my Gods in my own way rather than rely on a priest to take me to God. I find this to be much more fulfilling than visiting a temple. Yet on special occasions I continue to visit temples in order to pray as well as to stay in touch with my community members living here.

Was there an intellectual shift from a logical-positivist model of science focusing on quantitative investigations that arrive at objective truth to post-modern models of science that validate qualitative ideographic truths during this protracted period of search? The answer is yes. After getting tenured, I was more free to explore intellectual territories that had been barred so far from the scope of so-called rigorous social sciences. I realized that there was not one unified Western mode of thinking and acting; instead, there were many critiques of this dominant discourse. As I delved deeply into understanding pre-modern, modern, and post-modern philosophy and literature, I found that the Enlightenment period was an essential response to the pre-modern mores, and modern science certainly has a place in today's world. Yet, unless I could subvert those aspects of colonial, modern scientific truths that were designed to exclude my existence, I could not embrace and affirm my own and other subjugated ways of knowing and being. From being able to think critically for myself, instead of accepting every other scholar's version as the Truth, I felt a sense of freedom and empowerment that I had not experienced so far. Additionally, I realized that in this alternative discourse there is a legitimate space for the sacred as well. Thus, though Rudyard Kipling had noted that "the East is East, and the West is West, and never the twain shall meet," it became possible for me to integrate Western academia with my Eastern values and spirituality.

One Aspect of my Work: Empirical Research

For about the past decade, my research has focused on micro-enterprise development as one avenue for gaining economic self-sufficiency. Micro-enterprise development or starting a very small business from one's own home or from a small storefront is a viable route to self employment for poor people in

developing countries (Banerjee, 1998; Counts, 1996; Raheim, 1997). The Grameen model (starting a micro-business among a group of peers with a small loan) gained much prominence in the U.S. after First Lady Hillary Clinton visited Bangladesh where the model originated. Because the model was tested in rural areas of a developing country, at first I traveled to India to assess whether and how it worked in an urban area of another developing country. Later, I obtained a state-funded grant in the U.S. to help poor women facing the welfare reform of 1996 start a micro-enterprise and move towards self-sufficiency. It was in these two contexts that I met non-Hindu women who mentioned the central role of spirituality in their lives as they attempted to cope with poverty or the stringency of TANF regulations.

Armina in India

My first recognition of the universality of spirituality came from Armina*, a young Muslim divorced mother of three children, who lived in a very poor community in India. This community had been recently gutted in a Hindu-Muslim riot and the residents had lost their material belongings. To help residents re-start life, various social service agencies provided emergency assistance. However, to help residents in a more permanent way, one agency provided local residents with a small loan to start or re-start their micro-businesses so they could become economically self-reliant. Armina was one of my respondents because she had taken out a very small loan to start a micro-business. The focus of this research was to inquire into the role of micro-enterprise development in poor people's lives and the strengths they employed to survive poverty (Banerjee, 1997, 1998). During this interview, when she first mentioned that she prayed to Kali, I did not pay any heed because it was irrelevant to our conversation. A short while later, with folded hands that touched her forehead, she again stated that she prayed to Kali when she needed strength and support to cope with life. She mentioned that because she was illiterate, sometimes it was difficult for her to earn enough to feed her three children. This time, I could not ignore it any longer. To ascertain I had heard her correctly, I asked if she had said that she prayed to Kali. I think she instinctively understood where I was coming from—my disbelief that a Muslim would pray to a Hindu Goddess. Armina said, "How does it matter if I pray to Kali—a Hindu Goddess? I am a poor woman. I pray to anyone who listens to me and helps me." I did not probe further into her spirituality as it was not the focus of my interview.

Dana and Brenda in the U.S.

Dana and Brenda were two among about 60 women I worked with while running the Micro-Entrepreneurial Training (MET) Program in the U.S. (See, for example, Banerjee, 2001; 2002; 2003). I knew all 60 women for at least six months as they went through the MET Program. With each woman, I held face-to-face, in-depth interviews inquiring about their experiences with poverty, welfare, welfare reform, and coping with life. Many of them related stories about the power of God/Jesus in their lives that helped them to turn away from undesirable life circumstances such as alcoholism and dysfunctional dependence on men to miracles happening when they needed food, clothes, or shelter to survive (Banerjee & Pyles, 2004). Here, I will share two women's stories related to spirituality that have had a profound influence on my understanding of spirituality.

Dana was an African-American woman in her thirties with two young children. When she participated in MET, she lived with her mother because she had recently separated from her husband and did not have a place of her own. Discussing her meaning of poverty, Dana said that "a life without God" is being poor. She went on, "If you have Him, you

*All names in this narrative are pseudonyms

can always get up and do whatever you need to do, and He'll supply you with your needs. But if you don't, now that to me is being poor because you can't do nothing without Him."

When asked how she copes with her life issues, she again related a spiritual story. It was a story about a very poor Black mother who believed that her young son could change his life through education. So she encouraged him to go to another state to study, but she had only enough to buy him his train ticket. With no money in his pocket except for the train fare and some home-made food prepared by his mother, the young man traveled to a city in the north and stood in line to register for college. There was a long line and he had no idea what he would do to pay for college. Suddenly, someone called out his name and informed him that he had full scholarship to go to college! The moral of this story, according to Dana, was that when people strive hard to change their lives and keep God in their lives, God makes things happen for them. Dana keeps this story at the core of her belief about life's possibilities and strives to change her life for the better.

Brenda was another divorced African-American mother of four children in her early thirties. She had worked on about "a million jobs" but could not keep them because of the "unacceptable behaviors and attitudes" of her supervisors, the work climate, or the work schedule. She quit her last well-paying job because of health issues. She had received welfare assistance for about eight years, "more off than on." Asked how she was faring with welfare reform, she said, "I don't care. They [case managers] could threaten me. I'm not even intimidated by them…They're not my provider. They just assist me with the help that God gives me." She believed that many case managers lack empathy because they have not gone through life circumstances similar to hers. Brenda has worked as a case manager and makes sense of her current life situation by saying, "Maybe God wanted me to go through things so I would never lose sight of my humanness." At the same time, she does not believe in lying low and taking it all in. She noted that in the Bible, Jesus required his followers to go to battle. Accordingly, she fought when appropriate and sought guidance from God about battles to pick or ignore. In the context of her experiences with welfare reform, she mentioned Karma. She said that her "good Karma" spared her of a lot of grief because "people have no mercy when circumstances are uncontrollable in your life." But her good Karma "always allows for some kind of opening or some kind of positive light to come through." Despite many negative experiences with her case managers, she mockingly said, "I'm not touching you 'cause if I touch you, God might get me."

Prior to participating in the MET Program and throughout, she prayed for divine guidance regarding her next steps. She got directions to enroll in the program and start her own graphic design business where "He's the President and I'm just a sales rep." As she initially started advertising her business, she experienced doubts from people who did not trust her ability to succeed in it. She again asked God for direction. "Then He would answer me that it's not you.… 'You're not off the mark.' He reassures me and helps me to keep going." Despite doubts from others that affected her self-esteem, she believed that some would buy from her because "God has a blessing for me and not just for them." At the same time, it was not a faith or a belief that God would magically make things happen for her. She realized that while others may not help her, she needed to fully focus on her work to succeed in it.

Brenda experienced many hurdles in her life and overcame them to the best of her abilities and circumstances. She virtually had no social support to rely on for help. When asked how she coped despite all the hurdles, she said it was her "spirituality that got me

up." For Brenda, spirituality was a personal relationship with God/Jesus. She was born a Baptist but left it. She said, "I'm just Christian." She continued, "They just water down what God is about. ... who's right and who's wrong, who's good and who's not. It defeats the purpose of what God intended it to be—for us to be unified." She added, "He's been working on me a lot. Stop trying to draw support from everybody. Let me give it to you... I've made you. I love you unconditionally." Over time, she learned to be "still" and to feel God's love. She believed that this understanding was a blessing from Him and allowed her to go on with life.

Lessons Learned and Suggestions for Incorporating Spirituality in Research-Practice

So, what are some of the lessons that I have learned from this reflection about religion and spirituality in general, my own spiritual beliefs and practices, and my respondents' spiritual disclosures? Overall, reflecting on and writing this paper has been a spiritual journey. Drawing lessons from it for a professional audience was initially extremely hard. I wanted to be authentic about the lessons and faced a tremendous professional-personal dilemma in doing so.

First, I recognized the great deal of tension I experience around my professional-personal self with regard to spirituality. While intellectually I subscribe to Canda and Furman's (1999, p. 37) definition of spirituality— "a universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human-the search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and moral frameworks for relating with self, others, and the ultimate reality...may express itself through religious forms, or it may be independent of them"— instead of Van Hook, Hugan, and Aguilar's definition of it (2001, p. 12)— "inner feelings and the experience of the immediacy of a higher power," I realized that my spirituality and the lessons from my respondents' spirituality are extremely personal. Thus, my professional barrier came up and I struggled to write this section.

While I enjoyed the process of writing about my spirituality and especially the early years of my spiritual training with my Granny, I realized that I experienced a great deal of discomfort in sharing it with a professional social work audience—colleagues, students, and others who may read this. I kept going back and forth—at times wanting to cut out a section completely and at other times wanting to keep it. In this process, I recognized my discomfort with revealing my spiritual beliefs and practices to others. It almost seemed like I had bared myself in front of others. And, at this time I also suddenly recognized my great unease in discussing spirituality with my research respondents. Now, I am certain that while these three respondents' spiritual disclosures made a significant impact on me, I could not follow through on these leads because of my resistance to discussing spirituality in a professional context that was not related to spirituality. It is likely there are others like me, natural and naturalized citizens, who may have a strong personal spiritual life. But like me, they may not share it with others and may be uncomfortable with research in this area because of the strict professional-personal boundary they maintain in this sphere.

Canda and Furman (1999) report that in their national study on social workers' use of spirituality in practice, many social workers reported that they were not taught about spirituality in school. And because of their strong grounding in separation of church and state, some do not openly discuss spirituality in their varied practice arenas. Consequently, spirituality gets shoved under the rug. Fortunately, now there is open acknowledgement of spirituality as one basic need of humans (Gil, 2004). And, as Canda, et al (2003) report, that with more than 700 publications related to social work practice with culturally and

spiritually diverse populations, now the social work literature is much more open and embracing about the importance of spirituality in professional practice. I hope this greater openness and acceptance of spirituality in social work allows people like me to come out in the open and share their varied spiritual beliefs and practices. Also, I hope there are others like me who will go back and re-read their transcripts to winnow out spirituality related discussion in their research endeavors and share it with others as well, rather than putting such data into the miscellaneous or junk pile, never to be used again. This would enhance the social work literature on spirituality and allow greater insights about it to emerge in research-practice.

Second, I learned that despite my strong attempt to keep my professional-personal lives in water-tight compartments, they leak—perhaps occasionally burst—and influence one another. I am certain that because these three respondents touched my own spiritual core in a very strong yet an unexpected way that I have remembered them for so long after the interviews and research projects were over. I learned some important lessons from each of these women. Armina taught me two inter-related lessons: the importance of forgiveness and tolerance together with unity in diversity. Armina's emphatic statement about Kali—a Hindu Goddess with very prominent features—in the context of a predominantly Muslim community—which does not worship any idols—that had been presumably gutted by Hindus made me realize that while there are significant differences in beliefs and practices among faiths, spirituality is something that is larger than religious differences. Spirituality allows us to be fully human—to recognize humanity in each other and forgive and tolerate others.

It was striking to note that despite the fact that her home may have been burned by Hindus, she still prayed to a Hindu Goddess and was open to being interviewed by a Hindu researcher. I reflected back on my own experiences of Hindu-Muslim riots and the fear associated with them and wondered how a poor, illiterate woman had transcended religious territoriality. I had believed that only some educated people were aware of Ramakrishna's teaching: Krishna, Allah, and Jesus are all one and the same. There is only one God irrespective of the names that we call Him by (Vivekananda, 1907). Instead, my own myopic understanding of religious differences and spiritual unity among people that allows forgiveness and tolerance to show through smacked right back into my face. I realized that while education is one way to expand people's understanding of spiritual relatedness among living beings, it is not the only way. There are many ways of knowing, and lived experience is a strong teacher. Thus, Armina could openly say in a Muslim community that she prays to Kali, perhaps implying that she derives strength from a higher power, no matter who: Allah, Kali, or Jesus. Brenda, too, highlighted this lesson through a wonderful statement: "They just water down what God is about. ... who's right and who's wrong, who's good and who's not. It defeats the purpose of what God intended it to be—for us to be unified."

Dana's statement, "a life without God" is being poor, was also eye opening for me. Being focused on poverty research and micro-enterprise as an avenue for economic self-sufficiency, I had not stopped to recognize the depth of Dana's understanding about poverty. Although Dana is Christian, Hinduism also teaches the same philosophy. A Hindu saint, Ramakrishna had said: "money is dirt and dirt is money." Dana echoed this same sentiment. What is economic self-sufficiency

if one does not have God's love and peace in one's life? When we are calm and centered, we are able to appreciate the truth of her statement: "If you have Him, you can always get up and do whatever you need to do, and He'll supply you with your needs." In my life, when I tend to forget this truth, sometimes I remember the wisdom in Dana's statement, straighten my shoulders, smile, and get ready to face and live life.

Without any probe from me, Brenda shared with me the great value of her spiritual relationship with Jesus. She talks to Him, listens to Him, asks Him for guidance, and trusts His blessings for her. Knowing the great hardships in Brenda's life since her childhood (See Banerjee, 2003), the depth of her spiritual faith moved me. I wondered whether I could have retained this depth of faith in my Gods or Goddesses had they treated me similarly. I know I had turned away from religion and spirituality when I did not get something I had prayed for. Perhaps I needed to hear Brenda's story to get a perspective on my life and the content of my prayers. After hearing Brenda's life story, I struggled with Marx and Nietzsche's critique of God also. I wondered how a loving God could allow such hardships to befall humans. And then I remembered Brenda had mentioned her Karma and had emphasized the good aspects of her Karma that allow the light to shine through eventually. This taught me the importance of gratitude and contentment with what we have.

Yet, Dana's and Brenda's deeply reflective understanding of poverty and spirituality is problematic as well, especially so in today's political climate. Their spirituality could be used as a two-edged sword against them and other poor people. On the one hand, it could be argued that if you are not spiritual or do not attend church, you deserve to be poor. On the other hand, it could be said that because you have such strong faith in God, you do not need anything from the state; pray to God for all the material assistance you need. Both these arguments would go against promoting more humane social welfare policies that promote social justice: "equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities"...necessary to enable all to "meet their basic human needs and to develop fully" (NASW, 1999, p.18).

Just as a large number of MET Program participants openly expressed their faith in a higher power to help them through troubled times, there were some who were silent about spirituality or religion. It is possible that some among this latter group may not have faith in spirituality for varied reasons—youth, life experiences, and so on that could have turned them away from faith or not allowed them to test their faith in a higher power. However, material poverty, even if potentially relative, is real: people either have safe housing or they do not; have a job that pays a living wage or does not, if they have a job; experience domestic violence that interferes with their ability to work or not; experience varied health, mental health, or substance abuse issues that incapacitate their ability to maintain a family or not. Whether or not people have God in their lives, those who experience hardships require public assistance. Consequently, social workers need to be wise in highlighting spirituality as a source of resiliency, strength, and empowerment among poor people in policy discussions. We need to acknowledge the presence of spirituality, like any other natural ability like intelligence or health, but when it comes to public funding for social welfare services, we should advocate for the maximum possible funding to meet all needs so that social justice can be enhanced.

Third, again in the context of leaks between personal and professional selves, it is possible that my deeply held spiritual teachings from my Granny at a very young age dripped into my professional relationships with these respondents. When I went to social work school many years back, the separation

of the personal and the professional was highly emphasized. We were taught how to be a professional and the techniques to employ in professional relationships: starting where the client is, non-judgmental listening, client self-determination, problem solving skills, connecting clients with resources and services, and so on. I wonder how much of these are also related to our spiritual heritage: kindness, gentleness, compassion, respect for self and others, virtue of helping others. As a beginning social work practitioner, I know I used to worry a lot about making sure I applied my newly learned professional skills in my practice. I wonder whether over time as we become more comfortable with our professional selves we allow our spiritual selves to emerge in our professional relationships. Consequently, as clients or respondents experience us more authentically, they are more comfortable in disclosing their spiritual beliefs and practices to us as well. Furthermore, while social work teaches professionals to be culturally competent practitioners, it is possible that our clients also strive towards cultural competency. Thus, Armina and Brenda may have referred to Kali and Karma to reach out to me, just as I had used other techniques to build rapport with them.

Before ending, it is important to clarify that while I experienced tremendous personal-professional conflicts in sharing my spirituality narrative, and had maintained boundaries while conducting research on topics not related to spirituality, it does not mean that such watertight compartmentalization of spirituality is required today by our professional ethics, or that researching into spirituality is not a legitimate topic. In fact, today the ethical principles of social work require that clients' spiritual or religious uniqueness and cultural differences be honored and valued, but that professionals not use their position of power and trust to establish dual relationships such as seeking to evangelize, convert, or proselytize clients or research informants when interacting with them from a professional role. However, being a believer and a social worker are not antithetical to each other. Thus, through this narrative I do not mean to imply that I consider researching into spirituality an illegitimate issue. In fact, I have personally conducted research on spirituality with some MET participants and have reported it elsewhere (Banerjee & Pyles, 2004). Here, I am merely recounting experiences with other research projects where I did not explore spirituality, and my conflicts in writing about it for a professional audience.

It is inappropriate to generalize from my limited experiences with a few non-Hindu respondents to what social workers could do in research-practice. All I can say is that for me spirituality is a bond that helps me to build bridges with some people who are different from me. It requires me to continuously strive to become a better researcher—person, teacher, colleague—without expecting success in each encounter with respondents, in each submission of grant proposals, or in each peer review of papers. However, I have a few modest recommendations for spiritually sensitive social work research-practice.

First, social workers may consider being more comfortable about sharing their spiritual beliefs and practices with their respondents when appropriate—not to convert others to their own ways of doing things, but rather to share their practices if others want to learn ways to deal with their personal issues. I would be comfortable sharing my meditative practices with respondents should they ask how to develop calmness and peace with oneself. Second, social workers may consider visiting others religious institutions and practices to familiarize themselves with others' spiritual ways. I have taken opportunities to visit Jewish, Catholic, and other services to experience their spirituality. In all cases, I have sensed the universality of spirituality, irrespective of the names we use to refer to

it. Similarly, I have invited my American colleagues to attend Hindu Pujas or to visit the Hindu temple with me to familiarize themselves with others' ways of worshipping. Third, based on my own experiences, it seems social workers—natural and naturalized citizens—could work effectively with some people from other religious groupings. Social workers are known for reaching out to others. So, when they are comfortable with their own spirituality, they could consider allowing this aspect of themselves to shine through in their relationships with clients-respondents of other religious or spiritual backgrounds. Last, social workers familiar with the spirituality literature and working in this area, such as Canda et al, may consider opening dialogues with colleagues and our professional bodies—NASW and CSWE—regarding our professional stance in the nexus of spirituality-poverty-social justice-and Bush's politics.

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Mahasweta M. Banarjee, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare in Lawrence, Kansas. Comments about this article can be addressed to: mahaswetab@ku.edu.

A Place at the Table: The Struggle for Spiritual Diversity

David R. Hodge, Ph.D., Arizona State University-West

The social work profession has repeatedly expanded its understanding of diversity throughout its history. The incorporation of underrepresented voices, however, has not been without struggle. In this narrative, the author relates some of his efforts to foster the inclusion of spiritual and religious perspectives as well as the guiding principles that inform his efforts in this area. He also chronicles some of the resistance his attempts to widen the profession's understanding of diversity have sparked. The article concludes with reflections on the topic of spiritual inclusion, as well as suggestions that may be useful for other advocates of spiritual and religious diversity.

Social work has an important history of expanding its understanding of diversity to include populations that are underrepresented in the profession. While remaining focused upon people who are poor, the profession has successively stretched its understanding of reality to incorporate diverse voices, including those related to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The emphasis upon inclusion is important for a number of inter-related reasons associated with factors such as pedagogy, service provision, and social justice. Exposing students to the reality constructions of various populations is part of the educational process, helping to acclimatize them to an increasingly diverse society (Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). Effective service provision is generally predicated upon developing an understanding and appreciation of a population's narratives, preferably narratives written by members of the population (Ginsberg, 1999). As the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) suggest, it is difficult to work with a particular group if one doesn't understand its norms and values. Similarly, the profession's belief in collaboration and participatory decision making suggests that, as a matter of social justice, voiceless groups should be actively sought and included in the profession's conversation (Wambach & Van Soest, 1997).

In effect, social work has successively pulled up a number of new chairs to the table, allowing previously voiceless populations an opportunity to share their perspectives and to participate in the construction of the profession's discourse. The ideal toward which we are striving, as Haynes and White (1999) stated, is a profession that represents the nation's underlying demographics. In other words, the demographics in the profession, including its administrative personnel, faculty, and students, should correspond with the demographics of the country.

As Wambach and Van Soest (1997) observed, however, attempts to expand diversity by including new voices are often met with resistance. The process of pulling new chairs up to the table often entails moving existing chairs to make room for new voices who may see the world differently. Since adding new groups to the discussion brings with it the potential of disrupting present power dynamics, opposition to the inclusion of new perspectives often develops (Guzzetta, 1996).

In this paper, I chronicle some of the resistance I have encountered in my own attempts to widen the profession's understanding of diversity in the area of spirituality and religion. My scholarship has been multidimensional, covering an array of issues ranging from measurement to substance use, from social justice to community practice.

A key component of my work, however, has been my efforts to underscore the need to incorporate the voices of spiritual minorities into the profession's discourse.

Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge that my own work is built upon the pioneering efforts of numerous other academics. I am indebted to other scholars such as Amato-von Hemert (1994), Canda (1988), Cnaan (1997), Derezotes (1995), Sherdian and Bullis (1991), and many others. In many cases, these individuals have also faced significant resistance for their attempts to raise the profession's understanding of diversity to the next level. My story is possible only because theirs preceded mine in time.

Beginnings

My decision to focus on spirituality and religion was largely accidental, driven by unanticipated events that transpired during my MSW program. When I entered my master's program, I had no intention of pursuing an academic career. Like many others, my goal was to enter some form of direct practice, preferably serving disenfranchised populations.

During the course of my MSW program, however, a number of key instructors encouraged me to consider academia as an option. Spirituality and religion were woven into the fabric of the predominantly Hispanic culture that surrounded my university. At the micro level, clients raised spiritually related issues in counseling settings. At the macro level, federally funded drug prevention agencies employed spiritual interventions at the community level to reduce substance use.

In contrast to the rich spiritual vibrancy I encountered in the field, my textbooks were relatively devoid of spiritual and religious content. As my studies progressed, I increasingly wrestled with the intersection between social work and spirituality. Building upon whatever pre-existing work I could find, I attempted to develop new frameworks for integrating spirituality and religion into social work practice in a manner that was respectful of the lived reality that existed in lives of individuals in the surrounding community.

A number of instructors commented positively upon these initial efforts. Perhaps due to my status as a first-born, their encouragement to continue my graduate studies played an instrumental role in my decision to pursue an academic career. With the help of often invaluable mentors, I refined my ideas during subsequent graduate and post-graduate work and sought to disseminate them in the larger social work arena.

Guiding Principles

Seeking to be as ethically grounded as possible, my work in the area of spiritual inclusion is based upon, and reflects, three primary sources: 1) the ethical principles enunciated in the *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999); 2) the constitutional rights listed in the *United States Constitution;* and 3) the human rights delineated in the United Nations (1948/1998) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Since these sources form the foundation for my work in the area of spiritual diversity, I will briefly review the relevant ethical principles and rights.

The NASW *Code of Ethics* (1999) lists four standards that explicitly mention religion (1.05c, 2.01b, 4.02 and 6.04d) and at least two standards that implicitly refer to religion (1.05a, 1.05b). In brief, the *Code of Ethics* calls on social workers to develop the necessary knowledge to engage in culturally competent, strengths-based practice, with people from different religious cultures (1.05a,b). Social workers are also enjoined to educate themselves about religious diversity and the oppression that religious groups experience (1.05c). In addition, the *Code* mandates a pro-active stance that reflects a commitment to social justice on behalf of people of faith. More specifically, social workers are instructed to work toward

preventing and eliminating religious discrimination against both individuals and faith groups (2.01b, 4.04, 6.04d).

The ethical principles discussed above are congruent with the rights delineated in the first amendment of the *United States Constitution*. Two clauses are perhaps most pertinent—the establishment clause, which prevents government from establishing a state-sponsored church or religion, and the free exercise clause, which prohibits laws designed to hinder the free exercise of religion. These clauses function to protect people of faith from various forms of discrimination by guaranteeing their rights to express their spirituality in an array of settings (Clinton, 1995; Esbeck, 1998; French, 2002; Hamburger, 2002; Paige, 2003). The establishment clause, for instance, ensures that instructors in state educational forums cannot impose a particular religion upon students. Similarly, the free exercise clause ensures that instructors cannot discriminate against content that contains spiritual themes.

At the international level, the United Nations (1948/1998) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides similar protections Although the *Declaration* addresses religion in a number of areas, the most relevant section is Article 18. Much like the free exercise clause provides a positive affirmation of the rights of spiritual believers, Article 18 sketches the contours of the concept of religious freedom. This article states that "everyone has the right to freedom of . . . religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance" (United Nations, 1948/1998, p. 18).

Working Toward Spiritual Inclusion

The fundamental point of my work in the area of spiritual inclusion is that the profession should treat people of faith in a manner that is consistent with the *Code of Ethics* and in keeping with the basic human rights listed in the *U.S. Constitution* and the United Nation's *Universal Declaration*. The Code of Ethics naturally serves as the primary basis for my work as a social worker. As implied above, however, my work is informed by other sources such as the free exercise clause and the *Declaration*. This stand is consistent with professional practice.

NASW (2003), for example, endorses the rights delineated in the *Declaration*. In addition, as an expression of social justice, NASW calls upon social workers to ensure that the basic rights delineated in the *Declaration* are respected across the globe. The *Declaration*, as well as the free exercise clause, assists social workers in understanding the parameters of human rights in the area of religion. These documents help social workers know what religious discrimination looks like as they seek to implement, for example, their social justice mandate to prevent and eliminate religious discrimination at local, national, and global levels (NASW Code of Ethics, 1999: 6.04).

Drawing from these documents, and the *Code of Ethics* in particular, I and other supporters of inclusion have called for an expansion of the profession's conceptualization of diversity. Key themes have included the importance of respecting client autonomy, including under-represented spiritual minorities in the profession, exposing practitioners to strengths-based narratives of various faith groups so that social workers can work with clients from those groups in a culturally competent manner, and eschewing religious discrimination manifested in, for example, attempts to exclude people based upon their religious beliefs.

Perhaps my most controversial work in this vein was inspired by a well-received article written by McMahon and Allen-Meares (1992) that appeared in *Social Work* entitled, "Is Social Work Racist? A Content

Analysis of Recent Literature." The content analysis conducted by these respected authors suggested that the profession still had room to grow in its treatment of racial minorities.

This article served as a rough template for my own article entitled, "Does Social Work Oppress Evangelical Christians? A New Class Analysis of Society and Social Work" (Hodge, 2002). Evangelical Christians, a term widely used to refer to Protestants who affirm traditional Christian beliefs, are the largest spiritual minority in the United States. Since some empirical data is available about this cultural group due its size, I used this population as a proxy for an array of likely under-represented faith groups for whom far less data exists. Standard, widely used, analytical tools were employed, such as a content analysis, neo-Marxist analysis of systematic power differentials between groups, and so forth. Theoretical frames and empirical data were used to illustrate that the profession had significant room to grow in its treatment of spiritual minorities. In other words, the article took the same basic analytical frameworks used in other areas of diversity (race and gender) and applied them in the area of spirituality and religion.

The key themes listed above were the central points of the article. For example, recognizing the importance of including narratives related to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, I called for similar treatment for the narratives of people of faith.

I concluded the article by suggesting that social work had the potential to play a unique role in the face of an increasingly multicultural and conflicted society. More specifically, I called for the profession to become "a broker for peace" by modeling a milieu "in which all cultures can coexist in an atmosphere of mutual respect" (Hodge, 2002, p. 411).

Encountering Resistance

Sadly, my articulation of these themes in various professional contexts has sparked significant opposition. It is also important to note that this opposition has by no means been uniform. Since entering the profession, I have continually encountered individuals who are sincerely committed to diversity. Indeed, I have had outstanding mentors, excellent instructors, and enjoyed many rich and rewarding relationships with my peers. Clearly, many if not most social workers are dedicated to an inclusive profession.

Concurrently, theory suggests that some with institutional power are likely to resist the inclusion of new voices. Wambach and Van Soest (1997) delineate a number of strategies that those with power use in an attempt to convince nonaligned actors that groups seeking a place at the table are unworthy of inclusion. Various strategies include humiliation, stereotyping, marginalization, and, where sufficient power exists, exclusion.

As various observers have noted, the dynamics are often subtle (Edelman, 1990; Gilligan, 1993; Gouldner, 1979; Kuhn, 1970). In many cases, actors do not consciously employ the strategies discussed above. Gilligan's (1993) work, for instance, illustrates how the exclusion of common female constructions of reality was not necessarily intentional. Rather the exclusion of female voices was the inevitable consequence of an academic environment dominated by males and their worldview.

If particular groups are not present at the table, then discourse is easily constructed in a manner that is unfavorable to those absent from the conversation. Without members of a group present to correct misperceptions, stereotypes, and other types of biases are easily formed and propagated, even by well-meaning people. Those in positions of power are often unaware of discriminatory patterns that become embedded in professionally dominant narratives.

Even in instances where actors consciously employ strategies designed to exclude, similar dynamics often exist (Edelman, 1990). In many instances, individuals sincerely believe they are doing the appropriate, morally correct action. As implied above, worldviews tend to be constructed to serve the interests of those in positions of power. The values of those with power are framed positively while the values of those without access to power are either ignored or framed negatively. These negative conceptualizations can become so widespread among dominant groups that they are mistaken for the "way things are." Widespread rationalizations, which serve to justify the exclusion of subordinate groups, develop. Individuals sincerely believe they are acting in the interests of some greater moral good while simultaneously employing strategies to disenfranchise minority voices.

As is the case with many others, I have experienced these strategies as I have attempted to expand the scope of diversity. Private communication has been publicly disseminated without my permission in an attempt to embarrass me. Similarly, some colleagues have refused to talk with me or to even acknowledge my salutations. Others have misrepresented my work, attempted to censor my views, and employed ad hominem attacks. Various efforts have been employed to sabotage my academic career, including pressuring administration personnel to rescind a job offer after I had accepted the position and begun to make plans to join the school.

One of the most powerful mechanisms for disenfranchising voices is to associate individuals and their work with disreputable groups and/or ideologies (Sayyid, 1997; Wambach & Van Soest, 1997). This strategy implicitly conveys the message that the minority voice is outside the bounds of legitimate discourse. Consequently, one is morally justified in excluding such minorities from participation at the table.

This approach was employed with the above-mentioned article I wrote, which called for the profession to act as a broker for peace by modeling the inclusion of all major cultural groups (Hodge, 2002). One academic, for example, took my support for a more open, inclusive profession and suggested to my Dean that I was advocating for fascism and "courses in the techniques of interrogation and social strategies for crushing dissent" (Personal email communication sent to my Dean, another faculty member, and me on 5/2/03). One educator wrote to *Social Work* to associate the theory I used with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* while another social worker suggested that the way to address the lack of inclusion I underscored was by creating a new DSM-IV classification and the subsequent administration of antipsychotic medication. In these latter two instances, the editors at *Social Work* decided to edit the letters in an attempt to raise the level of discourse. Nevertheless, I find it sadly ironic that an article contending some social workers lack sensitivity toward people of faith would engender such insensitive comments.

Since the academic literature plays an important role in shaping the profession's discourse (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Epstein, 2004), power is often exercised by members of dominant groups to suppress narratives that raise questions about the status quo and current power dynamics (Gouldner, 1979). As Wambach and Van Soest (1997) imply, various strategies are used to maintain invisibility, including exclusion, ghettoization, and tokenism. Exclusion refers to the process whereby disconfirming voices that question the presence of inequitable relationships are excluded from influential forums. Ghettoization refers to the process whereby disconfirming voices are relegated to separate, non-mainstream forums. Tokenism refers to the process in which disconfirming voices are allowed to appear occasionally in mainstream

forums. This token presence allows dominant groups to claim that alternative voices are included in the profession's discourse, thereby freeing them from having to address the underlying structural issues that perpetuate the ongoing exclusion.

Again, it is important to emphasize that these three processes—exclusion, ghettoization, and tokenism—are not necessary employed in an intentional manner. Perspectives that are congruent with dominant narratives tend to strike editors and reviewers as objective and reasonable (Gartner, 1996). Concurrently, minority perspectives that are unfamiliar are more likely to seem partial and ideological in tone (Kuhn, 1970). Research questions that reflect the interests of the dominant groups tend to be seen as important and valuable contributions, while research questions that reflect minority concerns tend to be seen as inconsequential and irrelevant to the advancement of the scientific project (Smith, 2000).

As might be expected, at least one study has found that some social workers unconsciously discriminate when assessing potential abstracts for publication, rating vignettes containing under-represented spiritual perspectives more unfavorably (Neumann, Thompson, & Woolley, 1992). Since I write widely on a number of issues, I have seen this dynamic played out repeatedly in the comments I receive from reviewers. When I submit manuscripts that address issues related to the inclusion of people of faith, reviewers often seem to evaluate my writing, methodological, and statistical skills less favorably. While I am the first to admit that my spelling and grammatical skills are not what they should be, it is interesting how these limitations seem to stand out to many reviewers when my manuscript addresses themes related to spiritual inclusion.

I have also experienced various instances of ghettoization, tokenism, and exclusion, although again, typically only when I address the issue of spiritual inclusion. Occasionally, I have been told that my work is inappropriate for mainstream social work journals and I should re-submit to non-mainstream specialty journals (ghettoization). On other occasions, I have been told that my research adds nothing to the literature since the subject has already been adequately addressed (tokenism). Sometimes reviewers even cite my own work as evidence that no further research on the subject is needed, even though my own work typically notes the limited scope of the existing research and emphasizes the need for more empirical work on the subject. Alternatively, I have had reviewers suggest that my research adds nothing to the literature because a vast amount of pre-existing work exists on the subject, although no studies are mentioned (a form of exclusion). Misrepresentations are common, as are methodology critiques. In one instance, reviewers simply refused to assess the manuscript after holding on to it for almost a year, even after receiving promptings from the editor.

Concurrently, I want to acknowledge that these experiences have not been universal. In numerous instances, I have had very positive interactions with reviewers and editors. Many reviewers have assessed my manuscripts fairly and provided helpful, constructive feedback. Indeed, I am deeply appreciative of the openness and support I have encountered among many editors and reviewers.

Reflections and Implications

From a quantitative perspective, it is essentially impossible to draw any conclusions based upon a sample size of one. Quantitative approaches, however, make a number of assumptions about the nature of reality that may not always be accurate (Lincoln & Guda, 2003; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). Qualitative approaches are based upon a different set of assumptions, which, in turn, often allow us to understand reality in a new light. Sometimes personal experience can be

instructive because it provides a new window through which to see the world in a way that quantitative methods are unable to offer. In keeping with this understanding, I sketch some reflections on the topic of spiritual inclusion and then offer some suggestions designed to foster a more inclusive professional milieu based upon my own experiences and relevant literature.

Is a Spiritually Inclusive Profession Possible?

Some have suggested to me that fostering a more inclusive profession is essentially impossible. According to this line of thought, expanding the scope of diversity is unlikely since groups with positions at the table often use their power to prevent or hinder the inclusion of new groups (Guzzetta, 1996). Those with power will not allow those who see the world differently to be seated at the table. Consequently, while ghettoization, and perhaps some degree of tokenism may be achievable or sustainable, full inclusion with the ability to participate in and shape discourse as an equal partner is not a feasible option. Those with the keys to the club simply won't let you in the door, let alone join the club as a full member with all the associated privileges.

In concert with theory, a number of voices support this perspective (Mohan, 2001; Ressler & Hodge, 1999; Ressler & Hodge, 2003). For instance, Mohan (2001) encountered significant harassment for his unsuccessful efforts to fight informal policies that excluded Jewish faculty candidates in one school of social work, including a ransacking of his office and threatening phone calls. Another faculty member at a different school informed me that prospective students who affirmed traditional religious beliefs were typically eliminated from the applicant pool under previous administrations. Similarly, Ressler (1998) chronicles the case of another school that implemented official policies which functioned to screen out prospective students from a wide array of faith traditions based upon their religious beliefs. Although the efforts of the ACLU and other civil rights advocates were successful in overturning the policy (Ressler, 1998), it is difficult to calculate the costs in human suffering of such illegal policies.

In comparison to many individuals, I believe that my experience has been relatively positive. Nevertheless, my sojourn in the profession has not been without costs. Although growing up as an ethnic minority left me with some mental defenses against actions and remarks that are intended to be injurious, the ad hominem attacks, caustic remarks, and belittling comments have often left emotional wounds. The emotional scars, in tandem with the professional and personal losses, have often left me struggling with depression, at times so severe that I have been unable to communicate with my spouse or daughter. At a minimum, it seems likely that those that seek to advocate for inclusion will pay some type of professional or emotional costs.

Concurrently, I believe that reasons for hope exist. First, the profession has successfully wrestled with issues of inclusion before. If the profession can address unequal power relationships in the area of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, then there is reason to believe it can do so again in the area of spirituality and religion. In short, a successful track record of expanding diversity exists, which in turn portents hope for the future.

Related to this factor is the fact that social work is populated with many individuals who are committed to the diversity described in the *Code of Ethics* and affirm constitutional and human rights. Indeed, I have been encouraged by interactions I have had with numerous individuals over issues related to spiritual inclusion and discrimination. Even in situations where differences in perspectives exist, I have had many mutually respectful, intellectually stimulating conversations. These interactions help engender a sense of

optimism that it may be possible to develop a more inclusive profession.

In addition, growing recognition also exists that spirituality and religion are often fundamental dimensions of existence. For many individuals, spirituality functions in a manner analogous to race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Haynes, 2001). Consequently, the rationales for expanding diversity in these latter areas, which I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, also apply to spirituality and religion. For instance, in a society that includes increasing numbers of Muslims (Hodge, 2004a), and Hindus (Hodge, 2004b), it is critical to familiarize practitioners with the narratives of these groups (NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice, 2001).

This latter point brings up perhaps the primary reward I have experienced. While those who advocate for inclusion will likely encounter some degree of hostility from dominant groups in the profession, it is also important to note that such efforts may also entail positive experiences. More specifically, I have received a number of letters from members of various faith groups expressing appreciation for giving voice to their concerns, for articulating their narratives in an unbiased manner. For example, one individual wrote to thank me for my article on Hinduism, noting that the manuscript was refreshingly free of western bias. Receiving feedback that I may be, at least in some small way, helping to create space in professional discourse for those who have been previously voiceless has been a significant source of encouragement.

Fostering a Spiritually Inclusive Profession

As society has become more diverse, I believe that it is critical that efforts be made to foster a more inclusive, representative profession. Perhaps the most important implication I have drawn as I have reflected upon the barriers that hinder the realization of this goal is the central role that power plays in exclusion. Power has been referred to as the secular equivalent of the Christian concept of sin (Bowpitt, 2000), although I would be hesitant to posit that power is intrinsically oppressive. Power differentials between groups, however, do tend to foster oppression toward those with less access to power (Hamilton & Sharma, 1997). This tendency is particularly pronounced when a power differential is combined with some type of difference between the two groups in perspectives, worldviews, or some other type of identifying characteristic.

Equalizing power relationships is a key precept of anti-oppressive social work (Hamilton & Sharma, 1997). Until steps have been taken to equalize power disparities in the profession, it will be difficult to identify the full scope of the extant bias underrepresented faith groups experience (Wambach & Van Soest, 1997). As long as faith groups are underrepresented, then various strategies can be employed to silence or marginalize their voices.

Lack of appreciation for power differentials can lead to criticizing proponents of spiritual inclusion for failing to provide adequate empirical documentation of discrimination (Clark, 1994; Liechty, 2003). Such criticisms presume an equality of power relationships between various groups. They assume that underrepresented groups will have little difficulty making their voices heard in professional forums. As someone who has tried to document the bias people of faith encounter, I am well aware of the difficulties getting this type of research into mainstream forums. As Gilligan's (1993) work illustrates, until populations have a place at the table, appeals to academic research have little validity and can even reinforce discriminatory patterns in cases where the research is conducted by members of dominant groups.

Consequently, social workers might consider steps designed to equalize power

differentials in their spheres of respective influence. Although many methods can be employed to achieve this goal, priority might be given to demographics, since people actively construct the institutional structures that foster discriminatory dynamics. Ideally, in keeping with Haynes and White's (1999) comments, the demographics of our agencies, professional associations and faculties. should correspond to the appropriate demographic area. In other words, a local agency tasked with serving a particular geographic region should aim towards reflecting the spiritual/ religious demographics of that region. Similarly, a national professional association should aim to reflect the nation's demographics.

I believe that implementing these ideas will go a long ways toward creating a place at the table for faith groups. Building a more inclusive profession will be work. But for those of us committed to an inclusive profession in which diverse populations can sit down, learn from each other, and grow together, it is a goal worth striving for.

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David R. Hodge, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Arizona State University-West campus and a distinguished non-resident fellow at University of Pennsylvania's Program for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society. Correspondence can be addressed to the author at: Dept of Social Work, P. O. Box 37100, Phoenix, AZ 85069-7100

The House of God - Heaven and Hell: A Canadian Perspective on the Empowerment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) People through Religion and Subjugated Knowledge

Darlene Mili, M.S.W., University of Toronto

Since sexual minority clients experience a profound sense of alienation from, and often hostility towards, organized religion or do not hold membership in majority culture churches and denominations, therapists can be misled into thinking that religious belief and spirituality are not important to them. In fact, the opposite is often true. This narrative examines how Christian religion, particularly Catholicism, can be experienced by LGBT clients as both an empowering and disempowering phenomenon. A particular focus is placed on the same-sex marriage debate.

Introduction

This narrative is written from the perspective of a woman, raised within the Catholic faith, who later went through a painful process of reconciling her homosexuality with her spiritual worldview. At a time when the same-sex marriage debate continues to generate sensationalised headlines in Canadian mainstream media, the author provides a serious examination, within the context of the debate, of how Christianity can be experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) as both an empowering[1] and disempowering phenomenon. Practitioners who work using an empowerment perspective with LGBT clients need to understand how the phylogeny of Christian theology has shaped the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people's construction of self and sexuality. Such knowledge is required in working with the client so that negative messages about homosexuality can be confronted and intercepted and so that constructive action can be undertaken to speak out against such negative messages.

Rationale

Clark et al (as cited in Ritter & Terndrup, 2002) claims that sexual minorities have a profound sense of alienation from, and often animosity towards, organized religion. According to Garranzi, LeVay & Novas, and Scasta (as Schuck & Liddle, 2001) since most religions, and Christianity in particular, condemn homosexual behavior, and even homosexual orientation itself, many clients are affected by this factor. Religious background is also associated with greater difficulty in coming out, and internal conflicts arising from religious beliefs can inimically affect homosexual identity formation (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Because many sexual minority clients are hostile to organized religion or do not hold membership in majority culture churches and denominations, therapists can be misled into thinking that religious belief and spirituality[2] are not important to them. Yet, Halderman (as cited in Ritter & Terndrup, 2002) suggested that the profound emotional and existential meanings associated with religious issues for many sexual minorities mandate that these issues be taken seriously. Spirituality can also be a "constructive way of facing life's difficulties and is particularly appropriate when problems cannot be fixed or solved" (Sermabeikian, 1994, p.181). This certainly applies to homosexuals living in a heterosexist world where dominant attitudes and biases cannot be simply "fixed." Thus, it

can be argued that part of a therapist's role is to help people use spirituality as yet another tool in their "coping arsenal" (Sermabeikian, 1994, p. 178). While religion and spirituality may be sources of strength, they may also be sources of conflict and ambivalence for LGBT individuals, who may struggle to reconcile with the negative message of their religious upbringing. Thus practitioners must understand the systemic context of religion and how it impacts LGBT people's lives and their human rights. These include, but are not limited to, equality before the law, the right to self-expression, the right to privacy, and the right to be treated with dignity (Ife, 2001).

Historical Bias for the Denial of Same-Sex Marriage

An underlying precept of empowerment involves helping oppressed people understand "how structural oppression in its various forms impacts individuals" and it is one way for individuals to take back some control of their lives (Pease, 2002, p. 136). In the case of same-sex marriage, a historical knowledge of the Christian underpinning of marriage is relevant to understanding the present day social and legal construct of marriage.

The Bible has long been portrayed as reflecting cosmic and divine order. The sanctification of this social order is used to justify heterosexual marriage as the norm. This has led to a denial of equality before the law in that heterosexual marriage is legally recognized while same-sex marriage is not. Christian theology, particularly Catholicism, seeks to control and repress sexuality by condemning all forms of human intercourse except the most traditional act of reproduction within the confines of a heterosexual marriage and without any form of birth control (Fortune, 1989). This view, consistent with the early Biblical interpreters' obsession with conjugal sex for procreation only (Ranke-Heinemann, 1990), reduces sexuality to a one-dimensional activity, understood solely in a context of a heterosexual relationship (i.e., one in which procreation can take place). It leaves LGBT people questioning their self-worth and potentially struggling with their sexual and gender identities because their relationships are difficult to define directly, or solely, in terms of procreative functions. By insisting on sexual activity solely to procreate within "the sanctity of marriage," the Church has not only unrealistically romanticized marriage but also denied people a sense of their own "sexual integrity and taught sexual repression" (Harrison & Heyward, 1989). This may induce feelings of guilt and shame in association with any kind of sexual activity outside the approved definition, including sex for the sake of pleasure only or homosexual sex.

Since the expression of sexuality is one of fundamental biological imperatives, such attempts to proscribe it create a state of perpetual guilt and a feeling of being sinful. Sinfulness implies the need for redemption and forgiveness. Yet how does one repent when one has done nothing other than express one's natural instincts? One must first find something to repent and be forgiven for. Thus values of suffering and of the need for redemption propagated by the Church (Redmond, 1989) only exacerbate the state of perpetual guilt. Feelings of being sinful, the narrow one-dimensional definition of sex, and the Catholic Church's official position of "accept the person, condemn the behavior" (Canda & Furman, 1999, p. 110) contribute to LGBT people's sense of guilt and shame over how they choose to express their sexuality. It not only limits their right to self-expression, but the shame and guilt become internalized, causing self-regulation of expression and even self-hatred, thus denying LGBT people a sense of control over their choices and lives.

When Church values, such as sex for procreation only within the confines of marriage, permeate societal institutions, such

as the legal system, they are used as justification to discriminate. For example, a court ruling that denied gays the ability to marry was based on the belief that the principal purpose of marriage, procreation, cannot be achieved in a homosexual union ("Two Men," 1993). The sophistry and hypocrisy of such a ruling[3] is evident in the fact that it ignores married heterosexual couples who intend to never have children, and never annuls marriages where offspring have not been produced. Thus, only LGBT people are singled out for discrimination on the basis of non-procreation.

A Need for a Spiritually Empowering Approach

For some, spirituality serves as a bastion of strength as it provides emotional consolation, inspiration, guidance, structure, and security. Gutierrez et al (1995) state that empowerment encompasses the reduction of self-blame, assumption of personal responsibility, especially for change, increased self-efficacy, and the development of group consciousness. Spirituality can foster personal responsibility, identity, respect for ethical codes, meaningful ritual, and community building (Gotterer, 2001). Thus, spirituality is a salient consideration for an accurate assessment of any client system and particularly for LGBT people, whose view of concepts such as sin, negativity, shame, and forgiveness are often wrapped in the shroud of religious beliefs (Pellebon & Anderson, 1999).

By failing to acknowledge the prospective empowering effects of spirituality, practitioners thus miss out on the strengths that it may bring to the process. They also risk disempowering clients by reinforcing the "prevailing paradigm of pathology" (Damianakis, 2001, p.26) by failing to fully understand external factors such as the impact of religious and spiritual beliefs on their clients. By dismissing spirituality as a viable therapeutic tool, practitioners implicitly make a value judgement as to what is or is not helpful to a client. Finally, since spirituality is an integral component of belief systems of many cultures, ignoring the spiritual component of people's lives can be a failure to exercise cultural sensitivity. If the goal of empowerment is "to increase personal, interpersonal, and political power" (Gutierrez et al, 1995, p. 535), then ignoring the impact of spirituality on LGBT people is not consistent with an empowerment approach.

Empowering Interpretations of the Bible

Alternative LGBT-friendly Biblical interpretations could be viewed as empowerment through "the insurrection of subjugated knowledge" (Pease, 2002, p. 141). Saleeby (as cited in Pease, 2002) states that subjugated knowledge is described as marginalized knowledge that exists but is denied legitimacy and acknowledgement in the larger society. Alternative interpretations of the scriptures are empowering in that they produce "alternative power saturated knowledge" (Pease, 2002, p. 141). This knowledge can help challenge LGBT clients' internalized negative messages about their sexuality and religion. Alternative interpretation can be utilized to define a goal for LGBT people, assist them to believe themselves worthy of it, and help them develop a plan to reach an approximation of that destination (Simon, 1994). For example, the quote "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it..." (Jeremiah 31:33) can be interpreted as God's will being in each of us. It offers an empowering view for LGBT people in that following their heart can be seen as following the law of God. They can develop a view of themselves as individuals created in the image of God. This can be an ego-supportive intervention. Jeremiah's verse could also be seen as God's willingness to relinquish control over His children and allow them to become the adults that they are

destined to be. It could be argued that to not follow one's heart (i.e., to be true to one's self) is to defy God's will. This interpretation can be an empowering intervention that allows LGBT individuals to release feelings of guilt and shame and accept their sexuality and to believe that their life has meaning as ordained by God. Knowing that God's unconditional love allows all people to follow their hearts and that there may be a deeper spiritual meaning to life may facilitate a sense of peacefulness and provide a coping ability (Hodge, 2001). This is consistent with an empowerment principle, quoted by Saair (as cited in Simon, 1994 p. 2-3), to aid "clients in finding meaning in and making sense of their situation, relationships, and problems." For LGBT individuals, the meaning may be an understanding of how their religion and their sexuality intersect.

Alternative Biblical interpretations may provide a sense of personal power by replacing counterproductive beliefs with productive ones that draw on the client's spiritual worldview, and by shifting the focus from present obstacles to the spiritual lessons that clients desire to learn (Hodge, 2001). Within this process, the practitioner helps the clients analyze their narratives, externalize the problems, assess their strengths and limitations, and reframe the narratives in a productive and meaningful way (Northcut, 2000). The practitioner must be respectful in the presentation of alternative knowledge as some ideas may be contrary to the clients' beliefs and the practitioner's actions may be perceived as a challenge to the fundamental self or personal ontology (Hodge, 2002). Practitioners walk a very fine line between challenging dominant discourse and imposing a definition of the problem in a way that is disempowering (i.e., paternalistic). In addition, in presenting alternative knowledge, practitioners have an obligation not to lose focus on their role of identifying client's strengths and marshalling resources to address the client's difficulties, or else the practitioner risks becoming a spiritual director (Hodge, 2001; Northcut, 2000). The practitioners are also obligated to recognize when it is appropriate to refer an individual to an external resource. For example, if a LGBT client feels a sense of spiritual isolation, a practitioner may suggest joining an LGBT-supportive spiritual community such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). A more enlightened view of LGBT people and their rights can also be found in some other Christian denominations, United Church being but one example. Even within the Catholic Church, particularly in North America, a spectrum of views broader than the Vatican orthodoxy exists. However, practitioners should be aware of, and address, the guilt that some LGBT people who grew up in one faith may feel in leaving that faith to explore other religious denominations or spiritual venues.

Subjugated knowledge represented by the alternative Biblical interpretations can be construed as resistance as it represents a localized effort "to attack mechanisms of power" (Pease, 2002, p. 141). However, resistance to dominant discourse does not necessarily lead to empowerment (Pease, 2002). For example, in my opinion the alternative Biblical interpretations are not particularly empowering, as the "absurd singling out of Biblical verses" (Pittenger, 1977, p. 87) amounts to a linguistic interpretation war, with each side selectively choosing passages or interpretations that support their position. The Bible dictates that slaves are to obey their masters (1 Peter 2:18), people are exhorted not to pray in public (Matthew 6:5-6), women are not to cut their hair, and so forth (Sweat, 2003). Yet, such prohibitions are now conveniently overlooked, begging the question of who decides which passages of the Bible are to be interpreted literally as the word of God,

and which are reflective of the Bible's time and social mores. Christians use the Bible to maintain a particular social order "where straight, white men are in charge," argues Biblical scholar Professor Lloyd Lewis (Sweat, 2003, p. 22). For them, alternative interpretations can be seen as a threat to this power structure as they challenge the social order of heterosexism and patriarchy. The Bible also tends to be viewed as a "handbook of ethics" (Mulrooney, 1998, p.137), whereas it may simply be a mythological story (Campbell, 1988), so tortured through multiple translations that its original meanings have been long lost (Fox, 1992).

On the other hand, many LGBT individuals do find strength in Biblical scripture. Thus subjugated knowledge can be the means through which individuals find their personal sense of power or resistance. LGBT individuals often struggle with self-hatred and self-doubt, similar to other members of disempowered minority groups who assume that wisdom lies outside themselves, generally within the dominant group (Simon, 1994). Alternative forms of knowledge and views of the Bible can assist in the critical task of helping LGBT examine the "mythical and degraded self-portraits that they have internalized unconsciously as members of a stigmatized group" (Simon, 1994, p. 13). They can also facilitate LGBT individuals' desires to coalesce as a community with likeminded people who share common needs and issues.

The Catholic Church and Public Discourse

In examining the effect of religion on individuals there must be recognition that spirituality has an "equal potential for harm," such as promoting hatred (Sermabeikian, 1994, p181). Religious values shape societal norms of right and wrong. In particular, the Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexuality promotes and condones violence against LGBT people, thus denying LGBT people a basic (i.e., first generation) right to public safety and freedom from harassment, intimation, and torture (Ife, 2001).

Pope Benedict XVI, former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, wrote in his "Letter on Homosexual Persons" that:

> When civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase...(Fortune, 1989, p. 93).

More recent pronouncements that dominate the public discourse have Church leaders making statements such as "a homosexual person...is not suitable to receive the sacrament of holy orders" (Sweat, 2003, p.20). Then there are reports that the Vatican is preparing a document to ban gays from entering seminaries, ostensibly to rid the Church of pedophiles. This is happening even though the American Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers and American Academy of Child Psychiatrists all clearly state that there is no correlation between homosexuality and child abuse (Sweat, 2003). The propagation of stereotypical myths (gays as pedophiles) and the condemnation of homosexuality target LGBT people for violence and make them feel unwelcome in the Catholic Church. Their spiritual life can become ignored, repressed, and a source of shame and guilt. According to Miller (as cited in Simon, 1994) LGBT people's feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred are consistent with historically disadvantaged population's tendency to believe the worst about themselves.

From an empowerment perspective, the public discourse within Christian Churches is

a microcosm of the debate happening in society on same-sex marriage. It can be viewed as the struggle between different interpretations (i.e. knowledge), as well as the differing applications of such knowledge. Some Churches' interpretations and application of scripture create a welcoming environment for LGBT people. Specifically, the United Church and the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) have contested dominant discourses and practices. These alternative interpretations and practices form the basis of resistance. For example, in 2001, the Toronto chapter of the MCC used an old Christian tradition of publishing "banns" in a unique twist to have same-sex marriages recognized by the government of Ontario. The tradition of "banns" is a public notice of people's intent to marry. Following it, a valid marriage license, registered by the province of Ontario, is issued. MCC attempted to use the "banns" as a loophole for same-sex couples to enter into legal matrimony and continued "marrying" same-sex couples using this tradition. It forced the government of Ontario to take an official stand on the issue, pronouncing that the marriages would not be registered because they did not meet federal guidelines ("Banns," 2001). As a result of a legal challenge by MCC in defense of the reading of "banns," the issue of gay and lesbian human rights as exemplified by the right to marry has now been brought onto a national forum. Canada's current position of recognizing same-sex marriage has also led to a debate within the United States, with many states recognizing the same-sex marriage and other states embroiled in a debate over the issue.

Actions undertaken by faith congregations, spurred by the recent gay-bashing of a Hamilton café owner, provide another example of spiritually-based resistance against the dominant discourse. Parishioners of First Unitarian and Centenary United Churches marched from their places of worship to the café as a show of support for the owner and to demonstrate against hate crimes (Gulliver, 2004).

Perhaps part of the challenge for LGBT people in feeling that spirituality is empowering is that such expressions of resistance appear small and isolated. In terms of sheer numbers, Catholicism has great power within Christian religions; hence it appears as though the religious discourse on homosexuality is dominated by the Catholic Church. In addition, despite the dissident voices found among North American Catholics, Canadian media coverage of the same-sex marriage debate tends to focus on the viewpoint espoused by the Vatican. There has been much coverage of the late Pope John Paul II and other top Vatican officials speaking out against legalizing the same-sex marriage ("Pope," 2004). The late Pope referred to it as "degrading," and there is no indication that Pope Benedict XVI will affect any changes in the Church's stance. In fact, his previous statements, already mentioned in this paper, are worrisome at best, and at worst can be interpreted as condoning violence against homosexuals. The challenge for those operating from an empowerment perspective is that in having the debate on same-sex marriage dominated by the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church, dialogue is difficult, if not impossible. Pease (2002) argued that "dialogical forms of communication challenge the knowledge/power connection of dominant discourse." Unfortunately, Catholic doctrine holds that the Pope is infallible—his interpretations are beyond reproach. It is this dogma that reifies knowledge in dichotomous absolutes and prevents any dialogue on the issue. Simon (1994) warns against such dualistic thinking that is embedded in institutions and impedes collaborative relationships. Any challenge within the Catholic Church to official interpretation is met with swift retribution. For example, a Canadian Catholic priest who publicly supported same-

sex marriages and argued that "imposing separate but equal qualifications on the rights of minorities is inconsistent with our Charter of Rights" was suspended by the Archdiocese of Toronto (Ryan, 2004).

It is certainly discouraging for LGBT people that the Vatican feels the necessity to launch a global campaign against same-sex marriages in an attempt to "stem the tide of widening legal recognition for same-sex unions in Europe, North America and elsewhere" ("Pope," 2004). However, the Vatican's campaign can also be viewed as evidence that the same-sex marriage debate has gathered enough support to be a perceived a threat. Given Simon's (1994) urging to be patient because empowerment takes time and continuity of effort, it is impressive to know that the actions of one small Toronto church (MCC) three years ago have changed the legal, and perhaps social, landscape for LGBT people in Canada and perhaps internationally.

Personal Reflection

For me, a lesbian who was raised Catholic, the decision to write this paper evolved from a personal struggle with religion. I have been extremely disenchanted with organized religion, and I ascribe to Marx's notion that religion is the opiate of the people. Thus I saw the need to critically challenge my assumptions and values in regards to religion. It is also an acknowledgement that I risk over-identifying with clients' spiritual struggles due to my negative feelings toward religion. Since such feelings are a primary source of counter-transference biases, I feel a responsibility to be reflective and to strive to ensure that any therapeutic relationship I am engaged in does not become tainted by my personal experiences. Arguably the hardest challenge for me has been one of personal values and of self-awareness. Not surprisingly, practitioners may be inclined to avoid spiritual work rather than confront their ambivalence and reflect on their own spirituality (Cornett, 1992). It is a highly value-laden area for both the practitioner and the client. Thus practitioners' own spiritual biases may be "a more complicated area than sex or politics!" (Northcut, 1999, p. 219).

Another challenge for me has been the requirement to relinquish control over the therapeutic process and its outcomes and to temporarily abdicate the role of an expert (Damianakis, 2001). Since spirituality may be unexplainable, my own comfort level with it dictates how much I hear and understand of this aspect of clients' lives. To truly hear someone it is necessary to take the stance of "not knowing" without losing sight of the goal of the therapeutic relationship (Gotterer, 2001). How do I handle my passionate feelings on LGBT human rights in a way that will allow me to take the position of not knowing? Can I let go of my notions of right and wrong, just and unjust? I realize that viewing religion only as a disempowering force denies the reality of alternative views. Without such alternative knowledge there can be no dialectic communication and no stance of not knowing or seeking to understand the other's perspective. Even when a client might share my own biases, if I am to honour the clients' right to make their own informed choices, I have a responsibility to present alternative possibilities. This is easier said than done when one is passionate about an issue that is often cloaked in the dichotomies of just vs. unjust, moral vs. immoral, and sanctified vs. condemned.

The realization that there are factions within Christianity that are providing resistance to the dominant ideology has been personally empowering for me. Sometimes engaging in social activism can feel like a Sisyphean task, so it is important to identify and celebrate the small victories. It is equally vital to recognize pockets of resistance and to nurture them.

More importantly, if I apply standpoint theory to my own views, I realize that as a lesbian, raised Catholic, I have always felt that

heterosexuals are not aware of, or interested in, fighting against what I perceived as discrimination legitimized by Christianity. Yet, if I take the often quoted estimate that gays and lesbians account for 10% of the population, I am forced to recognize that the progress made on the issue of same-sex marriage has been largely due to the support of heterosexuals. Heterosexuals do "get it," i.e., understand that the issue of same-sex marriage is a human rights issue and *are* supportive of the rights of LGBT people. This realization has challenged my personal paranoia as well as my "split." To explain, Turner (1991, p. 118) discusses how another minority, African-Americans, develop a "healthy paranoia" designed to help navigate the "splits" within themselves, as it relates to their alliances with various groups within society. A minority identity is linked to vigilance in interactions with others (expectations of rejection), concealment of identity for fear of harm, or internalization of stigma. In writing this paper I was forced to examine how this phenomenon operates within my self.

I still struggle with the question of whose fight it is. I wonder if it is empowerment or deference to paternalism to expect heterosexuals to lead the fight. Will they bother to take up the challenge within their own congregations? However, I realize that, as LGBT people who have left Christian religions, we are not able to lead the fight ourselves for change within those religious institutions.

I still harbor strong emotions with regards to many organized religions, as I perceive them to be less than accepting, if not downright hostile, to us as homosexuals and to our rights, including the right to existence. Thus I continue to struggle with many religions' stance on homosexuality, particularly that of the Catholic Church. The central dilemma for me is how to challenge, without my becoming oppressive, the discrimination and the denial of human rights when they are shrouded in the cloak of religion and religious freedom. How do I maintain my passion for gay and lesbian rights, yet remain close to people's experiences when they share views that differ from mine? This is critical when it comes to religion. Issues that have a religious context (e.g. homosexuality, abortion, birth control, etc.) are ruled by the fallacy of bifurcation (e.g., good vs. bad, moral vs. immoral). I have seen people become so impassioned by such issues that they appear to lose sight of any opinions contrary to theirs, as well as the ability to carry on a civil discourse and to not revert to demagoguery. I think that in writing this paper, I was constantly forced to keep in mind that the issue of seeking empowerment through spirituality has, like many others, no simple black and white answers. Rather, it has every shade of gray and has no single objective truth or answer associated with it. Thus, this paper has been one of the many steps in my journey of self-exploration, where I seek to deconstruct my own ambiguous feelings on the issue.

Conclusion

This narrative was the author's attempt to challenge her personal perspective that Christian religion is disempowering, through the denial of human rights, to LGBT people. The paper looked at alternative interpretations of the Bible as subjugated knowledge that can be used to challenge the dominant discourse on the micro level, in therapy or through self-reflection. The paper also explored encouraging examples, within some Christian denominations, of spiritually empowering actions that can be viewed as public acknowledgement and support of LGBT people's human rights.

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(Footnotes)

[1] Empowerment is defined as "gaining control over one's life" and "gaining control over the factors which are critical in accounting for one's state of oppression or disempowerment" (Breton 1994, p.24).

[2] In this paper spirituality is defined as "the general human experience of developing a sense of meaning, purpose, and morality" (Canda, 1989, as cited in Pellebon, & Anderson, 1999, p. 230), and encompasses religion, which is "an institutional set of beliefs and practices" (Canda, 1997, as cited in Hodge, 2000, p. 3).

[3] The Ontario court ruling (June 2003) allowing gay marriages and the subsequent Federal Government's decision not to appeal it gives some hope that this hypocrisy is finally acknowledged. However, concerns still remain, given the Alberta government's announcement of the intention to invoke the notwithstanding clause. As well, the federal government made it very clear that even if Bill C-38 is passed, legalising same-sex marriage in Canada, religious authorities will be free to grant or deny their blessings as they see fit. This ruling allows religious organizations to continue to discriminate against homosexuals.

Darlene Mili, M.S.W., is a community counselor in Toronto, Ontario, who works for the LGBT community. Comments regarding this article can be addressed to: dmili@utoronto.ca.

Walking the Labyrinth: Enhancing Spiritually Sensitive Clinical Practice

Michelle Bigard, MSW, Central Michigan University

The author's initial introduction to walking the labyrinth occurred during a time when she experienced vicarious traumatization. Her own walk prompted her to explore how this ancient spiritual tool could be used in her clinical practice when working with clients addressing the sequelae of trauma, as well as the variety of ways in which clinicians are incorporating the labyrinth into their work.

Introduction

Incorporating spirituality in my professional practice has served to empower both my own life and the lives of clients I serve. Introducing the labyrinth to clients has served as a significant means of integrating my clients' spiritual perspectives in our work together. In this narrative, I will address the application of this ancient spiritual tool to enhance spiritually sensitive clinical practice. I will describe the labyrinth and document its origins and healing properties. My initial experience of walking the labyrinth occurred during a time when I was profoundly impacted by the stories of trauma from the clients I served, and I was prompted to explore how the labyrinth could be used to complement other therapies when addressing the sequelae of trauma. After sharing my experience, I will discuss the appropriateness and relevancy of walking the labyrinth for spiritually sensitive clinical practice and document the variety of ways clinicians are incorporating the labyrinth in their work. In writing about its healing process, I hope to honor the spirit of walking the labyrinth by integrating and sharing what I have learned. I also hope to inspire other clinicians and clients to walk its healing path.

The Origins and Resurgence of the Labyrinth

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool that has been in existence for thousands of years, and its form is found in almost every religion. It has been used for prayer, ritual, initiation, and personal and spiritual growth. Christians in the Middle Ages walked the labyrinth as a symbolic pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Its form contains a spiral (universal symbol for growth and transformation) within a circle (universal symbol of life and wholeness). A labyrinth is different from a maze, which is multicursal, offers a choice of paths, and consists of many entrances, exits, and dead ends. The maze taunts, teases, and challenges it walker. A labyrinth, in contrast, is unicursal. There is one way in and the same way out in reverse. A labyrinth functions like a spiral, creating a vortex in its center as its path, in and out, unfolds clockwise and counterclockwise. A labyrinth graces its walker. There is no wrong way to walk it; one must simply choose to enter and walk its healing path (Artress, 1995; West, 2000).

Labyrinths come in all shapes and sizes; however, the two types of labyrinths most utilized today are the Classical and the Chartres. (For a picture of the labyrinth styles, please refer to www.labyrinthsociety.org and click on "about labyrinths"). The Classical is a seven-circuit labyrinth originally found on the Isle of Crete, home to the mythical Minotaur. It is the most universal form of the labyrinth and dates back over 3500 years (West, 2000). In comparison, the forty-two-foot-in-diameter labyrinth found on the floor

of Chartres Cathedral in France was created during medieval times and has eleven circuits that wind through four quadrants in a non-linear way. A Christian pattern of the cross is visible within its pattern. The Chartres labyrinth incorporates sacred geometric principles in its design. Larger than the Cretan form, its path in and out is one-third of a mile in length and takes approximately fifteen to twenty minutes to walk (Artress, 1995).

The practice of walking the labyrinth is currently experiencing resurgence. Reverend Lauren Artress, Canon of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, reintroduced this ancient spiritual tool to modern day spiritual practice in the 1990's. She initially painted onto canvas the Chartres labyrinth design and began to facilitate workshops which enabled others to experience its healing path. A permanent outdoor labyrinth, made of terrazzo stone, located near the Grace Cathedral doors, became the first public labyrinth in North America and is available to be walked twenty-four hours a day. Reverend Artress also created Veriditas (1996), a not-for-profit organization, whose vision is to activate the human spirit. Its mission centers on the labyrinth experience as a vehicle for personal healing and growth, a tool for community building, an agent for peace, and a metaphor for life. Veriditas also maintains a worldwide labyrinth locator. Today, labyrinths are being built in a variety of settings, which include churches, retreat centers, hospitals, university campuses, public parks, and street scapes as well as private spaces. In addition to numerous websites, there are many books that provide suggestions for how to create and use this tool for personal and communal transformation (Artress, 1995; Curry, 2000; Geofferion, 1999, 2000; Sands, 2001; Schaper & Camp, 2000; Simpson, 2002; Stone, 1998; West, 2000).

Walking the Labyrinth

During the time that I was actively addressing and healing from the impact of vicarious traumatization in my professional and personal life, I was fortunate to be part of a weekend retreat, organized by our hospital chaplain, in which staff members came together to create and walk a Chartres-style labyrinth. In anticipation, we first gathered together to share why we had elected to be part of this creative endeavor. Most shared both personal and professional reasons: to learn how the labyrinth could be used in clinical practice as well as to personally experience its healing power. A sacred place was established with the use of a Tibetan bell. Each person rang it before speaking, as a way of ushering in the authenticity of the words spoken and the respectful listening in response. Next we created, on a mammoth canvas that covered most of the gym floor, a human compass and masked off the twelve concentric circles to outline our labyrinth. Soon, the labyrinth path was completed. We prepared for our entrance into the labyrinth by walking around it, hands held together. We sang a simple chant and a dance movement was introduced. Its impact was soothing and invigorating. By moving to a common rhythm our bodies and breath were in sync. We entered the labyrinth for the first time hand in hand, as a human chain, and then again in succession, hands apart, as a community of walkers following the same path at the same pace. The journey into the labyrinth was analogous to the journey of life. I felt, as our bodies moved as one down this unchartered territory, that I was not alone. Others, too, grappled with unanswered questions, and I did not have to find answers on my own.

In the afternoon, we had the opportunity to walk the labyrinth at our own pace and reflect contemplatively on our individual life journey. The path was graced with votive candles at every turn. In the center, a bowl of water was placed for cleansing, a candle for

burning, and a bowl to place an offering, to be used if desired. We were encouraged to walk at our own pace, mindful of our own natural rhythm. When we passed fellow walkers, whether moving on ahead or moving in the opposite direction, acknowledgement was given with the Sanskrit greeting 'Namastee,' which we were told means 'the spirit in me honors the spirit in you.'

There are three stages of walking the labyrinth: purgation, illumination, and union. The walk to the center is the first stage of purgation. This is the time to purge, shed, release, and empty, to let go of blockages, which can include prejudgments, attitudes, and stereotypes. It is a time to quiet the mind and experience whatever thoughts and feelings arise. Illumination is the time spent at the center in meditation or prayer, presenting oneself as an open receptacle for whatever wisdom, inspiration, or message is forthcoming. Union occurs as one exits the center and walks out of the labyrinth, preparing to integrate and actualize the insight gained in one's life (Artress, 1995; Ryan, 2001; West, 2000).

Following this orientation to the labyrinth, I will share the issues that I faced as I initially walked its path. My experience walking the labyrinth served as a context in which I was able to integrate my healing from vicarious traumatization, and it encouraged me to seek ways to use the labyrinth to enhance my clinical work with survivors of trauma.

My Story

For ten years I worked in a six-week inpatient hospital program for adult survivors of trauma. I was touched deeply by countless stories of personal trauma that revealed the dark side of human nature. I experienced vicarious traumatization, what Saakvitne and Pearlman (1996) refer to as the transformation of the clinician's inner experience as a result of empathic engagement with trauma survivors and their stories. Just as non smokers experience secondhand smoke from smokers, therapists experience secondary trauma from exposure to their clients' traumatic experiences. Exposure to another's trauma shatters three basic assumptions: the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). I recall the moment when I knew that I was no longer helpful to my clients: I was supervising a master's level social work student who was giving a psycho educational presentation to our program's clients on the dynamics of domestic violence. I knew intellectually that the presentation was not addressing how one could recognize and then exit out of and/or prevent domestic violence. The clients began to express their feelings of frustration and hopelessness. I mirrored their feelings and thought to myself, "There is no hope, there is no safety." My basic assumptions were shattered, and I found myself struggling with unanswerable questions and deeply saddened. I was powerless to intervene.

My typical style of coping is what I refer to as the Olympic Style—to just try faster, farther, and stronger. This was reinforced in my discipline of endurance as a marathon runner. Just as the right combination of rest, training, nutrition, and mental preparedness could ensure running a good race, I thought that if I just read more, worked more, found that golden technique or theory, I would be effective clinically and ease my despair. This approach did not work as every day my body felt like it had just run a marathon, and, in fact, I could no longer run. My legs were heavy and running for an hour necessitated sleeping for three to recover. My spirit and body were exhausted.

As I stood at the threshold of the labyrinth, waiting my turn to walk at my own pace among my colleagues that afternoon, I was unsure what to expect. I did, however, trust its grace. I silently released my anguish for the broken spirits of the clients I worked with, my anger regarding the human capacity

to inflict cruelty, my feeling of tremendous insignificance that I could do anything about it, as well as my fear that I was not worthy of safety, peace, and personal happiness. At the center, I symbolically offered to the flame my despair and I dipped my hands in the cleansing bowl of water. As I stood in the center, I felt my Olympian persona begin to melt. As I walked out, I found myself relaxing and walking at a pace that made me feel grounded, and I was aware of the strength moving up my legs as I simply took one step at a time.

After emerging from the labyrinth, we had time to express our experience of the walk through drawing. A few months earlier I had done a quick visualization exercise called The Cube (Gottlieb, 1995). The visualization consisted of imagining elements in a desert landscape, and each element represented something about one's life: a cube, a horse, a ladder, flowers, and a storm. I remember crying for three days after I read the interpretation of my image at the back of the book. My cube, the same color as my terra cotta desert, merged into the landscape and had no definition. My horse was not an ordinary riding or working horse: it was Pegasus. Rather than being firmly grounded, my ladder floated and danced in the sky. My flowers were wild and scattered, not contained and nurtured by me. The storm destroyed my flowers. I did not know how to simply be, to give and receive nurturance in spite of the storm, knowing that I could be sustained by the love and attention of others and a compassionate God who cared. In wonderfully bright and earth-colored pastels, I transformed that image. I drew a large, red-rock desert landscape, with a cube of white alabaster in the foreground. My horse, mature and chocolate brown, with reins loose, stood beside me. The ladder was propped securely on the cube and flowers and vegetables grew in the garden nearby. Storms of varying intensity came and went, and they were weathered. I took the paper drawing and molded it into the form of a bowl. This represented the image of my new-found self: both surrounded and contained, as well as open and receptive, with gifts to offer to those who approached me.

Healing from Trauma

Healing from vicarious traumatization parallels healing from trauma. Healing from trauma has been identified as having three stages: the establishment of physical, emotional, psychological, and moral safety; remembrance and mourning, during which one acknowledges and is able to process the traumatic experience; and reconnection (Herman, 1992). Reconnection involves crucial spiritual themes.

> Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining faith. These are the tasks of the third stage of recovery. In accomplishing this work, the survivor reclaims her world. (Herman, 1992, p. 196)

The experience of walking the labyrinth offered both a process and a container for working through this third stage of recovery. In my own healing from vicarious traumatization, the labyrinth served as a vessel from which I emerged feeling soothed and nurtured. The experience of walking the labyrinth provided an opportunity to synthesize the various steps I had taken for recovery, to create meaning of my personal and professional struggle, and to ready myself to reengage in my work with trauma survivors. I continue to walk its path.

After walking the labyrinth, I became very curious about ways to introduce the labyrinth as a tool to complement the therapies offered to clients healing from trauma. I researched the literature to more fully understand the healing properties of the labyrinth, to inquire about its appropriateness in enhancing spiritually sensitive clinical practice, and to learn how clergy and mental health practitioners were using the labyrinth with clients. I discovered that the labyrinth has a universal allure.

The Labyrinth as Archetype

Part of the labyrinth's allure is that it is an archetype with which we can have direct physical experience. Archetypes are universal forms or figures that exist independently of the human psyche in the collective unconscious and bring meaning to life experiences. Cultures throughout time have depicted sacred circles, or mandalas, as a representation of the cosmos and psyche. According to Jungian psychology, the circle, which expresses unity and wholeness, is the archetype of the Self. The spiral represents the process of healing and individuation (Artress, 1995; West 2000). The image of journey is a powerful symbol for spiritual as well as secular living; it is the arche-image for life. The questing journey is the arche-image for spirituality (Senn, 2002). The labyrinth, with its spiral path enclosed within a circle that leads its walker on a questing journey, enlivens the archetype of transformation.

All the great world religions contain teachings that articulate the journey of the spiritual seeker, of the path one must walk in order to grow in compassion and to respond to the world in wisdom and clarity (Artress, 1995). Ancient mythology, folklore, and fairy tales from throughout the world tell stories of the journeying quest (Senn, 2002). The perennial myth of transformation is found in all cultures and religious traditions that address the universal dynamic of change in human existence (Canda, 1988). The allure of the labyrinth is that one does not to have to follow a particular religious teaching, ascribe to a specific spiritual practice, or belong to a particular culture to walk its path. It is available to believers and non believers alike.

Walking Meditation

Walking the labyrinth is similar to the Buddhist practice of walking meditation during which one's focus is on the taking of each step and one's breath is controlled and regulated (Corbett, 1998). Walking has therapeutic effects, which include the decrease of cortisol levels, an indicator of stress (Jin, 1992; LaTorre, 2004). Movement removes the excess charge of psychic energy that hinders our efforts to quiet our thought processes. Walking the labyrinth gravitates one toward process mediation. This form of meditation is very similar to the use of guided imagery as the concrete path of the labyrinth symbolically represents one's own life journey (Artress, 1995). By walking the labyrinth's non-linear path, we step out of our linear mind. Focusing our attention on the winding path with its hairpin turns engages primarily our right brain. This creates the perfect state for letting go of our typical analytic ways of thinking and accessing intuition and creativity. The labyrinth experience is simultaneously kinesthetic and introspective, making it a complete mind-body integrative activity (Peel, 2004). The labyrinth offers a holistic experience that honors the body, mind, and spirit, and thus it has vast potential for its use as a healing tool in spiritually sensitive clinical practice.

Making Meaning of Our Lives

As human beings, our deepest longings are rooted in our desire to make meaning of our lives. The accompanying challenge of transformation is universal (Canda, 1988) and is salient for clients who are suffering from life altering events. The subjective experience of the spiritual quest is rooted in normal

developmental processes and provides an overarching structure of purpose to the seeker in search of meaning and transformation (Nino, 2000). Spiritual perspectives are related inextricably to clients' understanding of suffering and hope, as well as their ability to accomplish life tasks (Jacobs, 1997), and need to be incorporated into the therapeutic process. A holistic approach responds to clients' spiritual needs by including prayer, meditation, contemplation, and ritual in clinical practice (Canda, 1990). As clinicians, we are called to co-create a healing space for clients to do the work of reflection and change (Jacobs, 1997). Benedict (1995) incorporates spirituality in social work practice by creating a sacred space with clients. "Sacred space is an environment or container of safety and compassion which honors each client as a unique sacred being" that "creates the fertile ground for much healing" (p. 3). Artress (1995) describes the labyrinth as a sacred place to which walkers bring their spiritual hunger. This hunger is reflected in the need for healing, the longing to be co-creators with the divine, and the seeking of self-knowledge. The labyrinth offers both a context and a process for clinicians to utilize in the co-creation of a sacred space with clients when integrating spirituality in clinical practice.

Spirituality in Social Work Practice

The integration of spirituality in clinical practice is an important issue for clinicians and is viewed as central to the therapeutic relationship. Canda and Furland (1999) view spirituality as the heart of helping in social work practice: it is fundamental to empathy and compassion; it is integral to the vital flow of practice wisdom; and it is the driving force of service to others. Spirituality is understood to be an essential, holistic quality of every person, an aspect of a person's development of meaning, morality, and relationship with the divine, and an experience of a transpersonal nature that expands one's identity beyond ego and social roles (Canda, 1997). Spirituality is viewed as fluid and developing, as a form of self expression in which identity-developing experiences encourage the individual to "test and taste" oneself (Henery, 2003, p. 1110). When one views spirituality as encompassing every dimension of human life, it transcends specific spiritual practices and exists whether or not a person believes in a divine being or follows any form of organized religion (Logan, 1990).

Sheridan (2002) defines spirituality for the social work practitioner as "a search for purpose, meaning, and connection between oneself, other people, the universe and the ultimate reality, which can be experienced within either a religious or non religious framework" (p. 567). Spiritually sensitive social work practice expands the paradigm of person-in-environment to incorporate spirituality in conceptualizing the healing context of clients served. Canda (1997) describes spiritually sensitive social work practice as a helping relationship within which the worker:

> ...links personal and professional growth, engages in dialogue with clients about their frameworks for meaning and morality, appreciates diverse religious and nonreligious expressions of spirituality, supports creative resolutions of life crises, and connects with a variety of spiritual resources as relevant to the client. (p. 299)

The Labyrinth as a Tool for Spiritually Sensitive Clinical Practice

As a therapeutic tool in spiritually sensitive clinical practice, the possibility of the labyrinth is infinite, as its safe and neutral path can contain whatever issue the walker brings to it. It has been used by a variety of mental health practitioners, such as nurses, health care designers, chaplains, social workers, marriage and family therapists and psychotherapists in private practice,

institutional, community agency, and retreat settings. The labyrinth has been used to facilitate the solving of problems (Peel, 2004), healing from gun shot wounds (Sitzman, 1999), coping with chronic illnesses (LaTorre, 2004), increasing creativity (Geofferion, 2000), and enhancing prayer (Geofferion, 1999). It has been used to bring wholeness to cancer patients, healing to rifts in communities, strength and compassion to mourners, and reconciliation to those who are estranged (West, 2000). It has been used as an adjunct to narrative therapies and as a context for psychodrama. The clinician and client are free to be creative in their use of the labyrinth and adapt the walk to meet specific needs (Bloos & O'Connor, 2002). Clients can also walk the labyrinth in preparation for therapy sessions as well as afterwards to integrate what was addressed and prepare to reenter their day-to-day world (West, 2000). The labyrinth has also been used when working with children (Senn, 2000).

Dissimilar end results are experienced by walking different labyrinths. The Classical style labyrinth has fewer turns and long sweeping paths to the center. Walkers emerge from a Classical labyrinth in a more relaxed, extroverted mind set. It can be used in preparation for times in which one wants to present with an alert, relaxed attitude. The Chartres-style labyrinth, with its many right and left turns, balances the hemispheres of the brain and energy center of the body. Its complex path helps to quiet the mind readying it to receive insight and guidance. Walkers emerge from a Chartres-style labyrinth in a more reflective and introverted state and can benefit from quiet time alone afterwards (Artress, 2000).

There are as many ways to walk the labyrinth as there are people. The beauty and simplicity of the labyrinth is that there is no right way to walk its path. One must just choose to enter. However, there are common approaches that can provide guidelines for the first time walker. At the threshold, take a moment of reflection. When entering, pay attention to all the thoughts, feelings, and sensations experienced and simply let them go. Ask a question, focus on an issue for resolution, or simply be open to what comes to mind. Be aware that initially walkers may feel silly or foolish. Most importantly, walk with an attitude of open mindedness, clear of having specific expectations for the walk. Walkers must be willing to hear the truth as they walk into their intention (West, 2000).

The labyrinth can also be used as a way to connect with one's physical body. For those struggling with a long term-disability or a terminal or chronic illness, or who are survivors of trauma, separation from and even contempt for the body are common sequelae. Walking the labyrinth takes on the form of a body prayer. It provides an opportunity to stand firm in the ground and to experience the flow of energy and life into the body (Artress, 1995).

A variety of other creative practices can enhance the walking of the labyrinth such as music, dance, song, creative expression through movement or drawing, and painting and sculpting. The labyrinth can also be used as a center for empowering rituals to honor milestones, initiations, and significant events in our lives (West, 2000). Although purchasing a canvas labyrinth or contracting for a permanent one to be built is possible, creating a labyrinth communally is an empowering, community-building experience.

For those who do not have access to a walking labyrinth, the use of a finger labyrinth is available. Carved in wood, sculpted in clay, drawn on paper, traced in sand, laminated on cloth, etched in glass, or provided on a website to scroll on with a mouse, the finger labyrinth provides an alternative to walking and a portable meditation tool. Rather than experiencing the labyrinth through one's legs, the fingers experience the sensation of the gentle rocking of the labyrinth's gracious

curves. Finger labyrinths can be found on numerous websites using the search word "finger labyrinths."

Facilitating the Walking of the Labyrinth

In order to facilitate the individual or communal walking of the labyrinth, it is vital that the clinician have his or her own personal experience and practice with walking the labyrinth. Part of creating a sacred space between clinician and client involves introducing the labyrinth in a manner which invites the walker to trust in a new process, in spite of natural doubt or skepticism and to be open to a new experience. The clinician draws on skills honed in working therapeutically with individuals and groups. Although certification in facilitator training is not mandatory, it is offered and encouraged. For further information about facilitator training, please see www.gracecatherdral.org/labyrinth/factraining/. There is no literature at present that documents contraindications for using the labyrinth. For those with motility issues, the finger labyrinth is a substitute. The labyrinth society is beginning to serve as a central resource to develop a research base on the use of the labyrinth in a variety of settings. Please see www.labyrinthsociety.org/html/research.html. for further information.

Walking the Labyrinth in Clinical Practice with Trauma Survivors

Having had a positive experience walking the labyrinth in my own journey of recovery from vicarious traumatization, and encouraged from learning how others had been incorporating the labyrinth in practice, I joined with our hospital chaplain and other colleagues to affirm integrating the walking of the labyrinth in our clinical program working with trauma survivors. The labyrinth is used formally in communal group exercises, walked independently by clients as they wish or incorporated in their individual therapy sessions, and incorporated in communal celebration rituals. The following describes a variety of ways in which the labyrinth is integrated into clinical practice with trauma survivors.

Preparing for and walking the labyrinth provides a concrete means to create a sacred space with clients and a neutral means to introduce spiritual issues that are salient for the client in the healing process. Often, survivors of traumatic experiences feel abandoned by their own defined higher power and the labyrinth gifts the survivor with a neutral context of spirituality. It also provides a unique space in which to converse with a higher power that is separate from traditional religious spaces.

Trauma survivors may also mistrust others and resist help offered, as they fear giving up control or being retraumatized. Again, the labyrinth can provide a neutral context in which to build a therapeutic relationship. In the realm of the journey, the helper is of the archai. Helpers do not impose; they stand beside (Senn, 2002).

Starting where the client is at is an important healing principle. One can walk the labyrinth at any stage in the healing process. A client who is unsure whether or not to address a specific issue in therapy, can walk the labyrinth to gain guidance. A client who feels stuck in therapy may not figuratively know what step to take next but can, however, walk the labyrinth and keep moving and active on the journey at a time of not knowing.

Learning a variety of means of self expression, particularly with clients for whom verbal expression of affect is difficult, is also important to healing. A client who is unable to speak a narrative of his or her story can walk the labyrinth wordlessly. When shame or fear stops the sharing of his or her personal story with others, walking the labyrinth communally offers the client a shared experience with

others without necessitating disclosing the specifics of a trauma history.

The walking of the labyrinth is a client-focused intervention. The control of the process is always with the client. The labyrinth walk can be done with minimal direction from the clinician, or the clinician and client can work together to provide a context and intention for the walk. For example, when working within Herman's (1992) stages of healing, a client who is in the safety phase of healing may walk the labyrinth with the intention of focusing on the physical sensation of walking as a means of learning to be centered and grounded in the body. A client who is in the remembrance and mourning stage may walk with the intention of identifying losses at each turn in the labyrinth's path and identifying helpers that have provided comfort at each turn while exiting the labyrinth. For those in the reconnection stage, images of transformation may be a more salient focus. The intentions and ways to walk the labyrinth to address specific individual needs are infinite. Processing of the labyrinth walk can be done individually; through contemplation and journaling, it can be shared with the clinician and be central to or an addition to the therapy, or it can be shared with others in a communal fashion.

Walking the labyrinth also provides a concrete way for clients to experience the painful feelings and issues they are addressing in therapy. Often for survivors, tolerating and regulating painful emotions is an important part of the therapeutic work as all too often intense feelings in the present trigger traumatic memories and the client feels paralyzed by them. For example, a client with a history of neglect often felt in her adult life that she did not belong, that she did not fit in and was excluded by others. While walking the labyrinth in a group context, she stepped off the path and found that although others had found their way to the center, she ended up back where she started. Feelings of not belonging and negative thoughts of "never getting it right to fit in" surfaced. In tears she voiced her discouragement. She feared that yet again she would not fit in and would be excluded from this experience. She was encouraged to stay in the present with her thoughts and feelings and to start again. This time she made her way to the center. By processing her experience afterwards, she was able to receive feedback from fellow walkers who were able to empathize with her feelings and accept her own process to get to the center. She was able to hold on to this corrective emotional experience and use it to counter her traumatic reenactments.

Conclusion

I was introduced to the labyrinth at a time when I was in the process of healing from vicarious traumatization. Although I had not suffered a primary trauma of my own, my experience of suffering and healing paralleled the experiences of the clients with whom I worked. In applying the concept of parallel process to my clinical practice within a therapeutic community milieu, I knew that what was therapeutic for me as a clinician had potential for being therapeutic for clients. This concept also holds true in reverse. I wanted to integrate my own healing experience of walking the labyrinth and provide an opportunity for clients to also walk its path to complement and synthesize the therapeutic work they were already doing. I viewed the labyrinth not as a panacea but as a useful tool. I realized that it may not be appropriate for every clinical situation and that the choice to walk the labyrinth is always that of the client to make. The labyrinth could, however, be used to enhance various forms of treatment in which spiritual issues and the need to make meaning of life events are salient.

At the hospital where I shared in creating the canvas labyrinth, the practice of walking the labyrinth has been embraced. A permanent one has been built, composed of a limestone

walkway between low-lying vegetation, and is located near the healing garden on the hospital grounds. It is readily available for staff and clients to walk when moved to do so; it is used in conjunction with individual, group, and family therapies; and it is used in rituals of celebration and healing. The response of clients and staff to walking the labyrinth has been favorable.

I no longer work at the hospital, and in my new setting I do not have access to a permanent walking labyrinth. I have, however, introduced the finger labyrinth to clients and have received positive feedback. Many report it to be a helpful tool for relaxation and value the experience of feeling more centered and grounded after its use. One client found that after using the finger labyrinth, she was more receptive to painful feelings that she had previously avoided and was able to explore them in subsequent therapy sessions. In my clinical experience, the labyrinth assists clients to recognize what they feel and need.

Similar to other clinical interventions, what is helpful for clients is helpful for clinicians. The labyrinth can be used as part of the clinician's spiritual practice, as a means of centering prior to a particular session, as grounding prior to a meeting, as a form of self care when struggling with the profound impact of work on one's life, and as an activity in team-building efforts with others.

Integrating one's learning and using it in the service of others is central to the third stage of union when walking the labyrinth. This has parallels to the Catholic tradition of discerning one's vocation, "what God calls one to do distinctively with one's life to make a contribution to others" (Canda, 2003, p. 80). It is my intention in writing this article to act on my vocation and embrace the spirit of union. In sharing my personal and professional encounters with the labyrinth and illustrating its usefulness as a tool to enhance spiritually sensitive practice, I hope to encourage others to walk its healing path.

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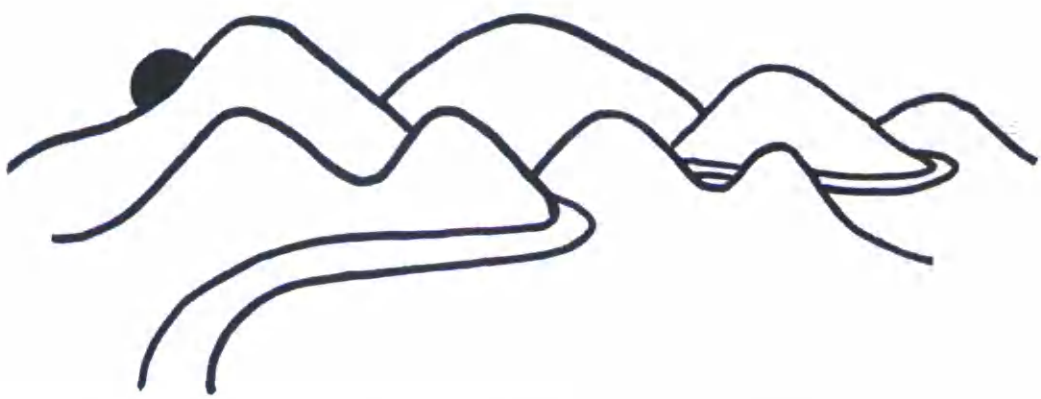
Michelle Bigard, MSW, LMSW, is a faculty member at the Central Michigan University Counseling Center. Comments regarding this article can be addressed to: bigar1mf@cmich.edu.



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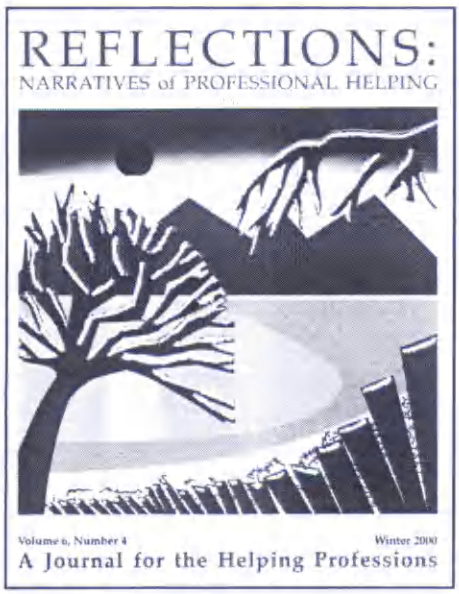

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