REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Inside Out: Personal & Professional Intersections

Volume 15, Number 2

Spring 2009

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NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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REFLECTIONS: NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING (ISSN 1080-0220)
is a refereed journal published quarterly by the Department of Social Work,
California State University Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California, 90840-0902
Periodicals postage paid at Long Beach, CA.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping, Department of Social Work, California State University Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California, 90840-0902

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Cover and original artwork: Dan Jimenez

PRINTED QUARTERLY BY THE CSULB UNIVERSITY PRESS

Letter from the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, PhD.

The belief that social workers or any practitioners dedicated to helping others can be completely objective has been discarded with the rise of post modernism and a recognition of the importance of long suppressed perspectives of marginalized groups. The efforts of social work to borrow from the medical model in the form of evidence-based practice admirably attempts to standardize approaches to social work practice based on empirical evidence. However, even medical practitioners recognize that their practice is as much an art as a science, since empiricism is limited in its ability to map medical diagnosis and intervention. Intuition is now recognized as an integral part of medical practice, along with an up-to-date mastery of scientific research. So as we move toward evidence based practice, we should not ignore the art of social work and the essential subjectivity of all perspectives, including the perspective of the skilled practitioner.

In this issue of *Reflections*, Erlene Grise-Owens and Kathy Lay have invited social workers to share stories of how their subjective perspectives inform their work with clients and students. The personal perspectives of the authors in this issue have been informed by their membership in socially constructed, marginalized groups. The personal is political, as the feminists in the 1970s would say, and judiciously sharing our perspectives and our personal experiences can make a profound impact on our work with others. Our values inform our practice whether we want them to or not; acknowledging this can free us to look outside of ourselves to understand the perspectives and struggles of others.

Sometimes the relationship between the personal experience and the professional commitment can be painful and difficult to manage, especially when our client issues intersect with problems in our own families. The most impressive aspect of these narratives is the way they reveal the false dichotomy between the objective and subjective selves, and the ways acknowledging who we are can be a powerful fulcrum to move others out of inertia and inaction.

Ben Shepard reviews the film *Milk* in this issue, an example of the power of coming out of a socially suppressed identity. The act of bringing the inside out can be transformative for ourselves and those we work with. *Reflections* would like to thank Erlene Grise-Owens and Kathy Lay for having this insight and bringing these moving narratives to our readers.

By Kathy Lay

Introduction to the Special Issue Inside Out: Reflections on Personal and Professional Intersections

Erlene Grise-Owens, Ed.D., Spalding University School of Social Work

&

Kathy Lay, Ph.D., Indiana University School of Social Work

Inside, Outside

Looking in, the dialogue begins,
exposed to the light,
bringing the new,
but keeping what is held.
Looking out, the dialogue begins,
exposed to the others,
bringing forth old and new,
and emergence is now.
(Kathy Lay, 4-09)

In the spirit of our call for papers, we wish to share some "inside-outs" of our editing process of this special issue. Outside, on this contemplative Sunday, a Spring rain nourishes the Earth and the dogwoods blossom. Inside, we reflect on how the tears in these narratives, indeed, watered the soil of these stories to bring forth resilience, reclamation, celebration, and contribution to others' restorative growth: Inside-out wholeness.

The seed for this special issue came from our own experiences of reading *Reflections* and then having articles published in the journal. Having a place to share our "narratives of professional helping" impacted our personal and professional development in powerful ways. Then, as this seed germinated, Erlene experienced sitting with a student as he told his "inside-out" story, and saying to him, "You need to share your story…let's work on finding a place..." Talking with long-time friend and colleague, Kathy, the idea blossomed: Let's approach *Reflections* about doing a special issue on "Inside-Out: Reflections on Personal and Professional Intersections." We did and…

We are grateful for the imagination and openness of Jillian Jimenez, Editor-in-Chief, who promptly embraced this idea. We are grateful for those who make *Reflections* possible; it provides a unique and crucial place for this type of narrative knowledge to be shared. As Muriel Rukeyser said, "The world is made up of stories, not atoms." Stories are one of the oldest and most effective ways of meaning-making and community-building.

As we edited this special issue, we (Kathy and Erlene) felt community with the story-tellers; most of whom we had never met and still have not talked with directly. We resonated with many narratives and were provoked by some. As editors, we collaborated and argued (e.g., "I don't like this article. I don't agree with the approach;" "Well, I like it. It's not my experience or my voice, but I think it is a crucial perspective.") What a gift to have a partner in this editing/story-gathering endeavor with whom we could constructively disagree and creatively agree.

Mostly, we were humbled by our role as gardeners who received the beautiful bounty of these narratives. And, we appreciate the grace of authors who received reviewers and editors' feedback as fertilizer to enhance their final fruits. We thank the reviewers who expeditiously gave collegial, instructive, and sensitive feedback. The tone of their reviews respected the story-tellers, while giving critical input that strengthened the clarity and impact of the telling of the story. Also, we acknowledge Wendi McLendon-Covey's direction and navigation throughout the publishing process.

All these narratives are different in expression of voice and specific incidents. Concomitantly, they are similar in demonstrating intersections of personal and professional; story and story-teller. They capture the common experiences of pain and alienation present in all isms, oppressions, and marginalization. At the same time, they celebrate the common themes present in coming out, claiming wholeness, and celebrating fullness in identity. These insights and illustrations about commonalities of our humanity are even more than what we hoped for in gathering the inside-out narratives. Singly, each narrative is powerful and inspiring; together, they offer an amazing life-labyrinth of hope and beauty.

Natalie Clark's interweaving of intersectional scholarship with her personal story is both a stand-alone narrative and a metaphor of this special issue on intersections. Similarly, Dana Grossman Lehman's narrative is emblematic of this issue, as she tells her story about collecting the stories of Holocaust survivors—and the impact of those stories on her own life-story. Dina Gamboni's "From Meatballs to Matzoh Balls," about finding intersections in her multiple ethnic identities, resonates with Natalie and Dana's narratives. (And, there is a cosmic message in the fact that West Coast Dina and East Coast Dana have such intersections in identities.)

Likewise, Shelly Werts and Colsaria M. Henderson evocatively share an every-woman story through their accounts of abuse, anger, action, empathy, and advocacy. On the surface, Andrea L. Bell's reflections on her experiences with the "Burning Man" subculture and Shamont Hussey's reflections on "Church Burns" have little in common, except for images the titles evoke. However, Andrea's experiences of alienation in her youth—and, then finding community resonate with Shamont's alienation from the church community of his childhood.

Then, Shamont's reflection on his coming out experience and the burns from religion intersects with Ann M. Callahan's theme of authenticity through resilient healing—both because of and despite religious experiences. Similarly, Mark Geisler's reflections on coming-out as a search for authenticity links with Ann's narrative and Lori Messinger's reflections on her integrated identities as a lesbian, white person, and academic. Likewise, Lori's narrative intersects with Barbara McQueen and Melinda Pilkinton's articles about insider to outsider experiences as White women in predominantly Black educational settings and teaching-learning about race; dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Finally, Jay Miller's narrative includes how his birth-story was impacted by racism and intersected with his experience of being in foster care, which formed the possibilities for his current social work professional role. Jay's story intersects with Eileen Mayers Pasztor and Monica McCurdy's article on the intersections of their parenting roles, including as adoptive and foster parents, and professional child welfare roles. Eileen and Monica's stories intersect back again with Natalie's reflections on navigating her path as single mother, community worker, and academic. So, this special issue offers a garden labyrinth of storying and re-storying.

We, the editors and authors, invite you to meander with us through this narrative-garden-labyrinth, and find your own intersections. We hope that you will join this conversation-community that only stories can evoke. We hope you resonate, argue, and engage with these narratives. Finally, we hope that these reflections will inspire and empower you to claim and celebrate your own stories—inside-out and outside-in—as you help others claim and celebrate theirs, too. In this communal path, may we all arrive at a center of integrated re-storying wholeness.

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Who Are You and Why do You Care: Intersections of Identity within the University

Natalie Clark, M.S.W., Thompson Rivers University

In this narrative, the author considers the process whereby her new role as a social work academic has resulted in shifts in her identity expression as insider/outsider. Weaving concepts from intersectional scholarship, with personal narratives and poetry, the author describes her daily acts of resistance as she strives to maintain, express, and ultimately embrace the changes this new role brings.

"I am a poster girl with no poster
I am thirty-two flavors and then some
and I'm beyond your peripheral vision
so you might want to turn your head
cause someday you're going to get hungry
and eat most of the words you just said..."
(Ani Difranco, 1995)

"The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at."
(Trinh T Minh Ha, 1989)

"A poem worth of clichés is floating inside me here
One day of sunshine, eagle in a tree,
Drinking coffee in the sunshine by the lake
Children smiling, laughing, streaked with the marks of my parental inconsistency
Articles don't write themselves with twin boys marching around my computer...
Like sentries preventing creative thought and demanding hugs."
(personal journal, 2008)

I wrote this little poem last summer while on holiday with my children at the lake, hoping to steal a few moments to write this article. With deadline looming, I know I am passionate about and committed to writing, teaching, and speaking about this "Inside-Out" topic. This poem, however, best expresses my professional and personal collision of worlds over the last three years; this article is my attempt to explore the identity crisis of my personal and professional life. Crises are generally precipitated by change and this story is no different. Three years ago I interviewed for a job at a university. This, in and of itself, might not be remarkable if it were not for the fact that I was eight months pregnant with twins and already a solo parent of a three-year-old girl. I was leaving the city where I had practiced as a social worker and community-based researcher to return to the rural community of my childhood.

This narrative explores the process whereby my new role as an academic has resulted in my own movements and identity expression as insider/outsider and often feeling like the "inappropriate other" in the academic world. All this occurs as I strive to maintain and express who I am, while actively engaging in and embracing the emergence and changes this new role brings to my personal and professional self.

Intersectionality and Inappropriate Other: Professional and Personal

A key question guiding me has been: What are the daily practices of negotiating the complex power relations stemming from the university institutional authority that often does not account for intersectional identities of belonging? On a theoretical level, my work has been informed by the work of theorists such as bell hooks (1994), Patricia Hill Collins (2004) and Trinh T. Minh Ha (1989, 1997) who have challenged the concepts of identity put forward in mainstream feminist movements. In particular, these theorists explore the process whereby either/or thinking and the creation of binary opposites is central in oppression and have helped define post-colonial scholarship and the creation of intersectional frameworks of analysis. However, as Collins (2004) and hooks (1994) have both noted, abstract thought is not enough in forwarding social justice agendas; action is required. I found myself rereading *Teaching to Transgress* and being impacted by bell hooks' words "I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share" (1994, p. 21). Further, hooks notes, "somehow it was my disinvestment in the notion of the professor or academic as my identity that I think has made me more willing to question and interrogate this role... I feel I have benefited a lot from not being attached to myself as an academic or professor" (p. 134).

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women in the document entitled "Intersectional Feminist Frameworks: An Emerging Vision" (2006) describes intersectional frameworks as having the "potential to open new spaces for transformation by examining not only the complex factors operating in women's and men's lives that keep them marginalized, but also how they are often able to respond to those forces in creative and innovative ways" (p. 5). This description captures the vision of this article and of my own identity: the creation of a daily practice that allows for fluidity, creativity, and constant change through varied locations and situations through which I move. Intersectional scholarship, together with auto-ethnography, informs my development of this practice. Deborah E. Reed-Danahay (1997) writes in the anthology *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, "Double identity and insider/outsider are constructs too simplistic for an adequate understanding of the processes of representation and power" (4). I also draw on bell hooks' *Talking Back* (1989), in which she says "[talking back] is no mere gesture of empty words, [but] is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice" (9). Talking back is not only about locating my own voice within the context of community-academic work, but is also a form of counter-storytelling in order to create narratives that disrupt dominant spaces such as those within the profession of social work and the academy. Critical race theorists such as Richard Delgado (2000) suggest that these narratives can "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (61).

Many students identify their reason for choosing social work as, "I just want to help people;" but they have no awareness or insight into the history of the profession and its links to oppression of people. Cindy Blackstock, in her article entitled "The Occasional Evil of Angels" (2005), draws attention to the fact that social work believes so strongly in our ability to do good in society that we do not examine, or reflect, on our "potential to do harm" (p. 1). Blackstock argues that we have created a "white noise barrier" that has prevented us from seeing our own reflection and the harm created by our profession. In many ways the reflection taught in many human service and social work programs is this barrier: a reflection overly focused on the student and on the self but which does not

examine the key role of power and the construction of knowledge. Echoing the words of Blackstock, Narda Razak (2001) states that the "Basis [of] social work values and ... ideology of caring and empathy, allow social work practitioners to 'do good' by the students without delving into issues like imperialism, colonialism and other forces of oppression" (p. 226). Social work classrooms need to be spaces where difficult and courageous conversations can happen, where we question the profession of social work and those of us who teach within the university, and where critical analysis of power and oppression at a structural level can be facilitated. bell hooks (1994) speaks of the importance of educators being willing to engage in sharing and reflection in the classroom and to be vulnerable. Similar to hooks, Razak (2001) questions the power presents in the social work classroom, stating that "The classroom can be a colonizing space where power and dominance continue to be enacted" (10).

Becoming a social work educator has challenged me to begin to tell these narratives that interrogate the very profession I am an educator within. I have found this daily practice echoed elsewhere, as in Myerson's (2003) book *Tempered Radicals: How Everyday Leaders Inspire Change at Work. Myerson* coined the term "tempered radicals" to describe individuals working within corporations and institutions. According to Myerson, in an interview with Sparks (2005), "...tempered radicals are people who operate on a fault line. They are organizational insiders who contribute and succeed in their jobs. At the same time, they are treated as outsiders because they represent ideas or agendas that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture...." (5-6). Tempered radicals experience both a personal and political struggle as they engage in acts or express identities within the workplace that are different from the organizational norm. She describes them as being both insiders and outsiders. "It's about rocking the boat, but not so hard that you fall out of it."

Daily, I rock the boat in my professional and personal life. Frequently, these rocking-the-boat points are at the very convergence of what it means to be an academic, a lone parent, and a community-based researcher and practitioner. I often feel at these points in the place of the "inappropriate Others" of Trinh T. Minh-ha's work (1989, 1997), where in my very act of bringing all of who I am into my new role that I become the inappropriate other—in the classroom, in my office, and in my research and service to the university.

Mothering in the Academy: Check your Babies and your Body at the Door

An example of this shifting and "inappropriate Other" can be found in my parenting status, which changed during my several years working as a community-based researcher. My status changed from a single, urban-dwelling white woman to a single mother who became pregnant out of wedlock, without planning, to three children. Further, conducting focus groups in communities throughout British Columbia while pregnant altered and changed the relationships with the project participants. Many of the young women were pregnant and also without partners and planning. So, when they asked the question, "Who are you and why do you care?" the self-disclosure of my own unplanned pregnancies as a woman alone connected us, and the dialogue and relationship building both within and across our differences began. In becoming the "inappropriate Other," I shifted from outsider and objective researcher to a direct connection to the young women being interviewed. In this context, the moral dimensions of mothering and the social construction of good mother/bad mother were foreground. Many of the young Aboriginal women spoke about the role of parenting status in their community and culture and how their own identity shifted as they became parents. My children include a daughter who is bi-racial and twin boys who are Aboriginal and from the Chase area and Secwepmec Nation. The reality of raising three children alone in east Vancouver resulted in my decision to apply for a job at the university and return to the Interior of British Columbia. After 17 years in Vancouver as a now mother of three, my identity shifted again. I joined a university, becoming an "academic" and a "rural." Power and privilege intersected with the move to

Kamloops, and the shift from community-based researcher to academic.

From the beginning of the interview process, my personal life intruded into the professional role I would inhabit. When the Dean of the School of Social Work and Human Service called me to indicate they would be interviewing me I said, "I should let you know. I am eight months pregnant with twins." She replied, "You cannot tell me that." I laughed as I was bursting with life, literally.

This metaphor of my personal life pushing forth into my professional life has continued. I was offered the job and immediately went on maternity leave. My new dean, a solo parent of now grown children, indicated that I could bring my children to work, as this job would be conducive to parental and professional life.

> *It is my first week of work and the Dean has dropped by my office, where I am working while my twin boys who are nine months old are playing on the floor. . She picks up one of them, dressed in her two-piece suit dress and sits in a chair. . This is a powerful moment as my personal life is in the lap of my professional life. My little boy reaches up and rips off the Dean's gold necklace.* (personal journal, January 2006)

This incident is not the first time I question the compatibility of my mothering in the academy, but it is a poignant first glimpse into the challenges I will encounter.

> *My students are standing in my office looking at the many pictures of my children. "Where is your husband?"* (personal journal, September 2008)

My status as a single-parent, lone parent, solo-parent is one of outsider in the professional university community. But the status often unites me with my students, many of whom are parenting on their own. I often experience the process of being "othered," while being aware that my education and my position within the university allow me the privilege of a nanny to assist me. My solo parenting status impacts my professional life in many ways. I often cannot attend social gatherings, evening talks, and meetings that start before nine a.m..

My daily acts of resistance are evidenced in bringing my children to work; ensuring my office is child-friendly; and supporting recent students to conduct a survey on child-friendly spaces on campus. In these acts of resistance, I echo Minh-ha (1997) who said, "she who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to and fro movement of life." I cannot speak of my students and support them in their challenges as mothers if I don't risk sharing my own challenges in accessing a child friendly campus, in finding child care, and in my other experiences of mothering on campus—coinciding with my students' experiences here. In this shared storytelling, we together can work towards change and challenging the status quo and invisibility of parenting on campus.

Community Practitioner or Academic Service

My professional identity and work have always been informed and mobilized through my interconnected identities. Identity and exploring intersections in my life and in the lives of others has been a defining characteristic since my own adolescence. Social Work is a profession that allows my explorations to continue within my practice, my teaching, and my research. In my previous work, my identity as an advocate and social justice community-based practitioner and researcher with young women was the foreground. My work with young women always calls me to answer the question "Who are you and why do you care?" I have to continuously engage in the process of locating myself and role model for these young women the multiple locations and identity moments in life.

In my work, I share my own intersecting identities of oppression and privilege. I grew up as a mixed Anglo-European Canadian rural girl in poverty but with strong connections to the Secwepmec community in Chase. This background brings a rural and class lens to the work I do with girls. Growing up with a single parent and living in poverty in a rural community as "other," I grew up fighting sexism while understanding privilege in my white body and fighting racism as an ally to my friends and lovers. The girls I work with have consistently called on me to locate myself and to answer questions like, "Why do you shave your legs and Tekla (the other facilitator) doesn't, and why aren't you married?"

The adolescent young women I have been privileged to work with are theorists of identity. They live in the intersections of societal oppression. They inhabit spaces where they are actively "othered." They experience privilege or oppression depending on their social location. For example, in my work with rural and indigenous girls, they often share their stories of exclusion from the mainstream health system and of encountering programs that do not meet their needs but, instead, seek to further colonize them. In many rural areas, health services are not available locally and, if they are, they are very limited. Even when traveling to a nearby city or town, one will find that many services or programs are designed with one specific axis of identity in mind. A girl may choose to access a program for sexual minority youth in order to explore her sexuality, but may find that because all of the other youth are white, she continues to experience marginalization.

Utilizing an intersectional framework allows for an examination of the experiences of young women who are excluded from the mainstream health system by a number of intersecting axes of power, with a particular focus here on the perspectives of rural and indigenous young women. The young women I work with are actively resisting this "othering" while living inside of and exploring the realm of subject, object, other, and self.

Since joining the university, I am continuing my work with young women. Currently, I facilitate girls' groups in the community and an Aboriginal girls' group in the rural community and small town where I graduated. Now, this work is considered my university service where it was my core professional identity prior to working at the university. In doing girls' groups, especially in the small town where I grew up, I am always living as both insider and outsider. As a non-Aboriginal woman, co-facilitating a group with an Aboriginal woman, I am aware of my privilege and my experience as outsider to this group. At the same time, I am also an insider through my family connection to a number of girls in the group. When the girls share their struggles with home and family, and I share my own experiences, I know this self-disclosure is a response to their question "Who are you and why do you care?"

> *On the last day of group I shared that I work at the university and the girls were surprised. I realize I have not shared this, and this in of itself is poignant to me. Why have I not centralized this? I know that for these young women what I do is less important than who I am and the choices I have made. However, they were also excited to hear this and talked about visiting my office at the university, in particular for one young woman attending the university next year.* (personal journal, June 2008)

You Made Your Bed, Now Lie in It: Academic Researcher versus Community-Based Researcher

Integrating my new identity as an academic researcher from community-based researcher and practitioner has created a challenge, i.e., as both insider and outsider. I joke that since joining the academy (not unlike the military) I have been having an "identity crisis." I grapple with the move from 17 years of practice, research and teaching based in the community to one based in the university. My crisis has been precipitated by the

experience of privilege that has come with this shift. Growing up without money, on income assistance, I understood this position well. I was not prepared for the status and privilege that came with the job at the university. It was subtle and often hidden inside comments like "Oh, you work at the university"; I was aware that something had changed in how I moved through the world but, more importantly, in how the world reacted to me. Since joining the university, I have found that foreground is this new power that I have to account for and to situate. I am reminded repeatedly in community spaces, where I once moved freely and without question, that I am no longer "of" the community. But, I am now of the university, with all the good and bad that goes with this new association. Many times I wish to leave this identity at the door, which is not possible.

In particular, in my work with Aboriginal communities, I have been aware of the history of racism and the ongoing colonization and appropriation of indigenous knowledge by academics. For example, in developing a partnership with the friendship centre to explore cultural supports for indigenous students in field placements in social work, I sat with the members of the board of the friendship centre. I listened to the stories of pain and of racism in their experiences with research and "partnerships" with the university over the past seventeen years. Although I was new to the university, I now live here too and must account for my privilege and power. I had to identify and acknowledge and locate my power as an academic and representative of the university. In doing so I had to receive the stories of truth and the impact of ongoing colonization, as we reflected on the past history of the relationship between the university and the Aboriginal community.

I move between my days at the university and my two girls' groups that I facilitate in community. I spend many weekends on Neskonlith reserve near Kamloops. I feel the shifting of my identity in those moments, as I am family there and do not need to locate myself. "This is my daughter." "This is my sister." I have been of that community for over fifteen years. Those spaces are comfortable; I can move without the university role. These are spaces where what I do for a living does not matter, is not noticed, or may not even be known.

> *I am at a meeting at the local friendship centre, and in a circle of community members, most Aboriginal, who I have been working closely with over the last year to develop Rites of Passage groups for Aboriginal youth in the schools. A new member joins the group today, and he looks at me and says, "...this is an outsider asking for insider knowledge". I realize that he is concerned about why someone from the university is supporting Aboriginal Rites of Passage groups in the schools, and is concerned that this is a research project seeking knowledge from the community about Aboriginal rites of passage. I wanted to speak up in that moment and clarify that I was there as a volunteer and practitioner with young women, not as an academic . But, I remained silent listening to his concerns. Later in speaking with the Elder working with the project, and great uncle to my children, I tell him how I felt and how I wanted to correct him, but did not. The Elder helps me to see the gift in listening and in not correcting another's perception of us – but to instead allow him to learn who I am in my complexity over time. This Elder provided me with a deeper understanding of the daily practice of an intersectional framework in my life. He taught me to be patient and to allow my fuller identity in all its expressions over time and place to emerge.* (personal journal)

I have been a community-based researcher for over ten years. Much of the work I have done has been in partnership with Aboriginal communities. As such, my motives in engaging in the research have not been examined in the same way that I have experienced them since becoming an academic researcher.

In this narrative, the author considers the process whereby her new role as a social work academic has resulted in shifts in her identity expression as insider/outsider. Weaving concepts from intersectional scholarship, with personal narratives and poetry, the author describes her daily acts of resistance as she strives to maintain, express, and ultimately embrace the changes this new role brings. I am very aware that in my current partnerships with local non-profits and with Aboriginal communities, I have had to locate myself within both the university and the community in order to feel authentic in these spaces. I have had many challenges, as the inherent power I hold since joining the university intersects or joins with the passionate community-based practitioner I was (am?).

Clothing the Empress: Or Acts of Truth-Telling and Resistance in the Academy

In an interview with Maria Grizinic (n.d.), Trinh T. Minh Ha posits that "...when the difference between entities is being worked out as a difference also within, things start opening up. Inside and outside are both expanded. Within each entity, there is a vast field and within each self a multiplicity." I am engaging in this process of "...making and unmaking of identity" each day in my work in the university and within the community and within my own home.

I cannot leave my new academic identity at the door. So, I choose to bring my identity outside of the university to all aspects of this new role. I choose to bring the community and my movements in these spaces and who I am outside of this new role to the institution in which I now work. These acts of resistance are visible in how I decorate my office and how I dress myself in this new role. How I move in that space is also an act of resistance of challenging power. I remember moving into my new office with a lovely view of the river below me. But, directly in front of me was the sterile, grey, standard office equipment of each office in the row of offices beside, above and below me. Resistance begins in the small acts of anarchy in the spaces where I define myself as the same but also different. In doing so I am challenging what it means to be an academic.

> *I drive down to the local thrift and purchase a green velvet chair, a rocking chair and a brown velvet chair; several old photos, and a rug. . My colleagues on either side asked me what I was doing as the grey furniture was placed in my hall and replaced with the mosaic of colours from home and thrift that I had moved in to replace these. . "What are you doing? Why would you buy furniture for here?". To which I replied, I will take it with me when I go. . "When you go? You are a lifer here."* (personal journal, February 2006)

This I know for sure: I am not a "lifer" here. But, instead, I am someone inhabiting a new role for a period of time in my life. I am also aware that at the same time, in how I live and move in the community, I am also creating new visions and ideas of what it means to be an academic. The surprised question "You work at the university?" is one I encounter often. This experience has been an important lesson for me to consider how to make visible my new self in my personal life. How has my identity shifted and in what ways does this inform and guide my practice, my mothering, my sense of self as a woman?

I have had the privilege and honour of working with girls in rural communities across BC and have heard their voices, in all their complexities. As a researcher, practitioner, and now social work educator, I am experiencing transformation alongside the girls, students, and

communities. As they have come to voice the impacts of intersecting factors in shaping their health and wellbeing, I, too, must share my own experiences here. Through auto ethnography and storytelling about my own challenges and personal growth as a social work academic, I hope to encourage my colleagues and others in social work education to explore the richness brought about by an intersectional lens and critical engagement with other processes of "talking back." Without the inclusion of the experiences of a diversity of voices in the academy, social work education policies and programs will continue to re-inscribe harmful power dynamics that disempower rather than empower. As a practitioner, researcher, advocate, and former rural girl, I remain committed to fundamentally reorienting the ways in which social work education is framed and ultimately operationalized.

I end this narrative with a poem I wrote about aspects of self and identity and attachment to professional identity in particular:

Am I a truth-teller?
What lies have I nurtured my entire life,
Suckled at my breast,
Deception my only child
Your marks on my nipple
I cannot wean you my child
My creation.

By Kathy Lay

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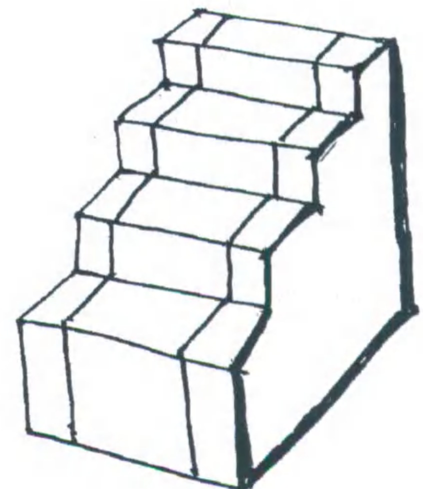

Conversations That Continue Long After They Are Over: The Impact of the Research on the Researcher

Dana Grossman Leeman, PhD., Simmons College School of Social Work

This narrative explores variant ways a phenomenological study involving eight adult child survivors of the Holocaust contributed to significant shifts in the researcher's worldview, and to her identities as a social work practitioner and educator, mother, and member of a religious and cultural community. In addition to briefly summarizing the study process and findings, the author further considers the life lessons taught to her by the eight participants. These lessons include being present in one's own life, relational resilience, the sustaining and restorative potential of kinship bonds, and commitment to social activism, humility, and gratitude. A core lesson is the fundamental belief that there is good in others and in the world, despite continued evidence to the contrary.

* Participant names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

I completed and defended my doctoral dissertation in December 2004. For my dissertation I interviewed eight adults who survived the Nazi Holocaust as children. Although five years have passed since I conducted those interviews, the conversations remain very much alive in me, as do many of the lessons about life, loss, love, family, and kinship bonds, resourcefulness, and renewal that these seven women and one man taught me. Rarely does a day pass when I do not think of something or react to something in my life, in my community, or to the news of the world that does not somehow connect back to them. I am aware on an almost daily basis that the conversations we had, and what I learned from them, continue to reverberate in my personal and professional lives. These lessons are important to me as a social worker, but resonate most deeply with me as a Jew. Bearing witness to the stories of Holocaust survivors and ensuring that these stories do not disappear is both a privilege and a communal obligation. Each time I think of my respondents, recall something that they shared with me, or refer to them in written work or in the classroom, I feel that I am consciously preserving their stories so that they do not disappear as the aging survivor community dwindles.

Doing this research changed me. It catalyzed palpable shifts in my worldview and in the many selves that are constitutive of me: the mother, the educator, the socially conscious clinical social worker, the Jew, and the woman. It forced me to challenge many of my own assumptions about the ways in which I view others, and about the world I live in. Wiersma (1992) maintains, "The stories a person tells about his or her life are recognized to be not only expressive but formative as well…these stories interpret our experience and shape our lives" (p. 195). My dissertation was a collection of life stories that were entrusted to me, which I shared with others. In doing so, I re-authored aspects of my own personal narrative. For the first time in my life, my Jewish identity was given freedom for open expression in a professional sphere. To do this research, it was necessary for me to fully inhabit and give voice to my Jewish identity. Though neither a survivor nor a descendant of survivors, I strongly feel that being Jewish gave me a kind of "insider" status that contributed to my respondents' willingness to share their very personal and powerful stories with me. Moreover, I believe that being self-identified as a Jew gave my research—the interviews and the written product—greater transparency and authenticity. This added to the credibility of the study from a scholarly perspective, but created deeper personal meaning for me. In the years since I concluded the study and defended my dissertation, these conversations continue within me, though the tape recorder was turned off years ago ago.

I learned much from *Alisa, Dzidzia, Ena, Eva, Fred, Monique, Jutka, and Liane. Most importantly, because of what they taught me, I view people with a more respectful and strengths-oriented lens. I am less apt to partialize and individualize their problems, and more able to organically contextualize people's lives—taking into consideration the profound and differential impact that racism, oppression, socioeconomic disadvantage, and marginalization has had on their lives. This has had a lasting impact on my interpersonal relationships, my clinical practice, and the ways in which I teach social work students. Additionally, though their stories were often painful and always poignant, I experienced a renewed sense of faith in the capacities that human beings have to endure tremendous hardships and create lives that are full of meaning, while living and coping with the remnants of traumatic pasts. These were unanticipated gifts.

"Why Are You Doing This?" Locating the Researcher

This journey began in the months preceding my written comprehensive exams which were due at the end of the second year of my doctoral course work. I was working in a psychiatric partial hospital at the time, as well as doing private practice. Day after day, and group after group, I noted the alarming prevalence of clients who had sustained physical and sexual abuse. I began to keep track of this data over a period of four months and estimated that 85% of my female clients were survivors of sexual abuse. Moreover, I was struck by the varying impact of these abuse histories on their mental health and functioning, relationships, and overall quality of life. Initially, I thought I'd launch a study that evaluated the efficacy of doing short-term group treatment with survivors of sexual abuse in a partial hospital setting. Unfortunately, a managed care company purchased the hospital, and service delivery was altered by the dictates of new management. I was, however, left with the pressing question: "Why are some of my clients who were trauma survivors able to cope reasonably well most of the time, despite their trauma, and others are essentially paralyzed by it?"

It was also around this time that a documentary about an adolescent survivor of the Holocaust won an Academy Award. I saw the film and read the book upon which the film was based. The author survived forced labor and deportation to a death camp where she nearly died of typhus and starvation. After liberation, she married and created a thriving family. She was candid about the lasting effects that the war had had on her, while retaining a fundamental vivacity and optimism that intrigued me. I found myself pondering the question: "How did she do this after losing most of her family in the death camps, after having witnessed the atrocities committed in the camps, and after having almost died herself in Auschwitz?" From these curiosities, my study was born.

The dissertation phase of my doctorate took seven years, and in the interim, colleagues, child survivors, mentors, and family members frequently asked me why I chose this particular topic. In October of 1996, I met with Elie Wiesel, (Nobel Prize- winning author and survivor, known for his memoir *Night*) at his Boston University office to discuss my proposal, and this was one of the first questions that he asked me. At that point, I was not entirely sure why I was drawn to this work. Perhaps this sounds contrived, but I felt like I almost had to do it. I felt driven to do it. When I shared this with others, most assumed that I was either the child or grandchild of a child survivor, but I am neither. In fact, I have no known Holocaust survivors in my family. The Holocaust, however, has resided in my consciousness since childhood. I learned about it in religious school and have vivid memories of reading Holocaust memoirs during my adolescence. I visited Yad Veshem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, when I was thirteen, and still recall how terrified I was of the artifacts and imagery displayed there. Yet I always sought to learn more about it even when I was fearful. Perhaps there is a connection between my own sense of luck and privilege, and the fear that these kinds of events could happen to me and to my loved ones. Although unlikely, the Holocaust

and the numerous cases of communal genocide that have happened around the world in the sixty years since liberation have demonstrated that it is possible.

In retrospect, of all the possible research choices I had heretofore considered, this topic was the one I found most compelling. I knew that I could remain invested in this work over the long haul and that I might be able to make some kind of a contribution to the Jewish community. Indeed, at the start of the process, this mattered more to me than advancing knowledge and understanding within my profession. I also thought that this research would allow me to integrate and utilize different aspects of my identity: as a clinician interested in and experienced with trauma work and wanting to expand my knowledge base, and as a Jew who has always been involved with and connected to a cultural, ethnic, and spiritual community.

Holocaust Literature

Historically there has been a tension in clinical Holocaust literature about survivors' post-war lives, and the literature broad and divided with regard to the extent and depth of the long-term effects associated with the Holocaust (Bar-On, et al. 1998). In an effort to narrow the field, I consulted with experts—those whose work I had read, and those who had provided direct services to child survivors in their clinical work. Based on their recommendations, I began a three-month period of total literary immersion and intensive study. I read articles, books, memoirs, and historical treatises and viewed documentaries. Child survivors' experiences during and after the Holocaust were noticeably under-represented in the literature. I became curious about the impact of those experiences on their lives and the meaning, if any, that they made of those experiences.

The literature was divided into two distinct themes. Some literature claimed that survivors managed to do quite well in spite of their traumatic experiences and were successful in most aspects of their lives. Other literature argued that the effects of the Holocaust on survivors caused many to suffer from lifelong depression, anxiety, attachment disturbances, marital difficulties, and social withdrawal (Bar-on, et al.1998).

Literature specific to child survivors initially represented them as a homogeneous group thwarted by chronic and persistent psychopathology, but over the last decade there have been shifts towards a more strengths-based approach. Some studies countered this image by showcasing child survivors' resilience, professional achievements (particularly in the helping professions, medicine, and sciences), and commitment to social justice and activism (Lomranz, 2000; Suedfeld, 1996, 1998, 2001).

As I became more familiar with the literature, it occurred to me that the voices of the survivors themselves were glaringly absent from most Holocaust studies. Their thoughts, feelings, and opinions were rarely prominently featured. As a researcher, I knew that this represented a knowledge gap. My reaction to this as a Jew, however, was more visceral. Though I understood that clinicians and researchers had made important contributions to further collective understanding of the impact of the Holocaust on survivors, those under study had become the subjects of an ongoing and intense dialectic, but were often excluded from it. So, in an effort to rectify this I sought to create a study that would enable child survivors to speak for themselves, and allow their words to inform my emerging understanding. I felt that this was my responsibility as a Jewish social work researcher, and this foundational principal ultimately governed my methodological choices.

The Research

The central research question that framed this study was: How do adult child survivors of the Holocaust describe their experiences and relate them to their post-war lives?

Under the aegis of an extremely sensitive and attuned chair and second reader who understood how central my religious and cultural identity was to me, I decided to do a phenomenological study that employed grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis, and they wholeheartedly supported this. Because phenomenological

research is about the impact of lived experience and the meanings that people make of those experiences, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with four standard questions and a series of probes. The aim was to give respondents latitude to speak about what was most important to them and to render a "...deeper and richer portrait" (Suedfeld, 1996, p. 169) that might better demonstrate their strengths and coping techniques as well as vulnerabilities and personal challenges (Suedfeld, 1996).

As the conceptual framework and methodology took shape, I hoped that my dissertation and my findings might illuminate the importance of child survivors' experiences as they related to the Holocaust and the wellspring of emotional and practical knowledge they had to impart to the greater human community.

Sample Characteristics and Data Collection

In this study, child survivors were defined as adults who were between birth and thirteen years of age from 1933 to 1945 and living in any Nazi-occupied territory. This purposive, non-probability sample consisted of eight self-selected respondents identified primarily through telephone and email referrals

Respondents had to meet the inclusionary criteria of being Jewish and born into any Nazi-occupied territory between 1933, the year Hitler ascended to the position of Reich Chancellor, and 1945, the year of European liberation. I chose to focus on this particular age group because it was under-represented in Holocaust research and literature.

Data sources included the audiotapes and transcripts from initial and follow-up interviews. There were twelve interviews in all: eight interviews and four debriefs. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Additional data sources included respondent fact sheets (detailed facts, dates, demographic information, and identified themes from each interview), respondent time lines, which helped me visualize each life story and identify themes, and story summaries (a two-page synopsis of each life story). These summaries became the basis for later codes and thematic categories.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis began with interview transcription and occurred through a series of open and selective coding passes, memos, and thematic content analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The respondents shared several similarities that added to their exceptionality. They were close in age, having been born between 1934 and 1937. Seven came from educated, upper-middle-class families who lived in cosmopolitan European cities prior to Nazi invasion. Six spent the war years with one or both parents and seven had at least one surviving parent after liberation. Only one respondent was orphaned during the war. Prior to Nazi invasion, their parents enjoyed membership in vocations related to commerce and medicine; most were highly educated and affluent. Some of their parents were respected and prominent citizens of the communities in which they lived.

Each respondent graduated from college. Four held Masters Degrees; two earned their doctorates; and one became a physician. Seven were married with children, and five had grandchildren. Six expressed interest and involvement in organized social action efforts. Seven identified themselves as child survivors; five claimed active participation in the Jewish community, belonged to a synagogue, or both.

These eight individuals were anything but one dimensional. They were ordinary and extraordinary. They were not super heroes, but were special. They were complicated. They were audacious and fragile. They were curious and intellectually gifted. They were guarded and self-protective, yet generous, kind, and hospitable. Among them were avid gourmands, swimmers, gardeners, balletomanes, skiers, lovers of music, opera, and ballroom dancing, voracious readers, and filmgoers. As a group, they were devoted to their professions, their families, and their friends. And, as a group they were committed to their physical and emotional self-care and the well being of others. They taught me that suffering does not summarily result in loss of faith or hope, and that oppression does not automatically condemn one to a lifetime of isolation or inexorable cynicism. At a time when

I myself have felt disenchanted with the human community, mistrustful of and betrayed by government, they taught me the value of not losing sight of the good that continues to live on in the world.

This study also found that these eight child survivors of the Holocaust survived the war because they were fortunate to have remained in connection with significant others who cared for and protected them throughout the war. These critical relationships, consisting of parents, uncles, elder siblings, and gentile rescuers, enabled these survivors as children to not feel alone in the world, provided some form of companionship or kinship, and met instrumental needs. Moreover, by bearing witness to others taking actions to safeguard their lives and provide for them, these respondents internalized a sense of innate worth that may have helped them to retain their basic assumptive worlds (a belief that there is good in the world, that the world makes sense, and that they have inherent value as human beings) and cultivate their resilience (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Walsh, 2003). Through these empathic, often nurturing, life-sustaining attachments, the eight respondents in my study evolved into well-educated, professionally successful, compassionate adults who believed in the inherent goodness of others and sought to do good in the world through their respective professions and the promotion of social justice.

Each child survivor in this study spent between one and four years in a hostile, damaged world. Each experienced the feeling of being hunted by a nefarious presence that sought his or her total destruction. Their survival is miraculous. Yet, through kinship and connections, and lives devoted to self-knowledge, self-care, and altruism, all of them attempted to repair the same world that had tried to erase them from it.

Each respondent attributed his or her survival to "luck," or at least one providential event that defied logic but favorably altered his or her situation. For some, luck appeared in the form of a careless border guard, a sympathetic policeman, a compassionate stationmaster; surviving hunger, a warning of impending danger, or making it to the right place at the right time. Sometimes luck was a function of access to resources and connections with the people who made procuring resources possible. Or, it was the byproduct of ingenuity and courage—successfully bargaining with the Gestapo to obtain food or negotiate the removal of names from a deportation list.

What was most surprising to me about the findings was that when I asked each respondent how present the Holocaust was in his or her daily life, each reported that it was not. Collectively, they told me that the past had its place and usually remained there. Only in times of stress, like the attacks of September 11, 2001, the war in Iraq, a spate of suicide bombs exploding in Israeli neighborhoods, or extreme familial crises, did the past infiltrate the present in any negative or substantive way. And, when it did, each had an exquisitely developed repertoire of coping strategies that helped them get through vulnerable times.

Personal Transformations and Lessons Learned

Earlier I stated that this research changed me. As I think back on the experience, doing this work as a Jew triggered personal and professional transformations and altered my worldview. Through my conversations with my respondents and by listening to their stories over and over again, I learned that I must strive to be present in my own life, to consciously cherish simple moments, and to tell loved ones how I feel about them in the moment because once that moment is gone, it can never be reclaimed. I learned that safety and security are gifts, and that I must never take my loved ones and my privileges for granted.

I wish to reflect upon one internal process that bears mentioning and exemplifies these lessons more clearly. As previously stated, I spent three months at the start of my work immersing myself in the Holocaust. In addition to the literature, I watched films, went to Holocaust art exhibits, and visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., to walk through the exhibits and do some archival research. I visited Yad Veshem in Jerusalem and met with an archivist there as well. A strange and disturbing thing occurred. While doing this research, life went

on. I cared for my children. I went to movies. I taught classes and saw clients in my practice. I spent time with friends and family. I went shopping. I lived my life. But often, while living in the present, my thoughts were in the Holocaust. This made me look at the people around me differently, and it made me feel different as a mother. I found myself wondering who amongst my non-Jewish friends would help me or hide my children if our lives were threatened? I found myself wondering if I had been living in Europe during Nazi occupation, would our neighbors have betrayed us to the Gestapo. My third reader, Dr. Bernice Lerner, referred to this as living a "double life."

Another example of living a "double life" occurred when I performed mental "selections" while standing on line at the supermarket or post office. I will explain what this means. Immediately upon arrival at a concentration or death camp, Jews and other prisoners were made to remove their clothes, line up, and run in front of the Camp Commandant and a camp doctor. One of these officials would determine, based on age, gender, and appearance of health, who would be conscripted for forced labor and who would be put to immediate death. This was known as selection. I learned early in the process that because I had small children, I would have been separated from them as soon as we disembarked from the cattle car that delivered us to the camp. One of two additional scenarios would have happened: we would have been put to death together, or my children would have been taken from me and put to death upon arrival at a camp, while I remained alive as long as I could contribute to the slave labor force.

In order to do this research, daily I had to confront and live with that which terrifies a mother most: separation from her children, the powerlessness to protect her children, and the death of her children. Most child survivors' experiences entailed forced separations. Mothers had to leave their children in the care of strangers with the hope of saving their lives. Mothers had to put their children on trains that would take them to foreign countries and hopefully out of harm's way. Children witnessed their mothers' deaths. Mothers witnessed the torture and murder of their own children. Children said goodbye to mothers and fathers whom they would never see again.

I gave birth to my two children while doing this work, and I often thought of them as I was reading, interviewing, or writing my dissertation. Every day for years I lived in the stories of people who had endured these kinds of separations and losses. These stories and the images that they conjured frightened me, made me anxious, and gave me nightmares. I often spoke about this with my dissertation committee, who supported and normalized these reactions. My wonderfully sensitive third reader, Bernice, who had written her dissertation on child survivors as well, told me that living a "double life" was necessary. One had to try to find a way to fathom all that is unfathomable about the Holocaust. Somehow, after she told me this, I did not feel the need to do this as often and eventually stopped. But even now, years later, I still catch myself starting to "select" while on a line in a public place.

I conclude this narrative by acknowledging my eight respondents and a few of the ways in which I was moved by their sagacity:

> *I wish to thank Alisa, Dzidzia, Ena, Eva, Fred, Monique, Jutka, and Liane. Without your courage, willingness to teach, and generosity of spirit and time, this study would not have been possible. I learned so much from each of you and my life has been enriched by all of you. From you I have learned humility and gratitude. I believe that I take less for granted now than before I did this study. And I am aware of my blessings in a way that I was not before (Grossman Leeman, 2004).*

Coda

A few years ago on a sunny, summer day, I was in my backyard playing with my children who were very young at the time. It was a gorgeous day, and as my son ran through the sprinkler, I pushed my daughter on a swing. She giggled each time she headed towards the cerulean sky, and my son shrieked as he ran through the frigid water. I recall that day with great clarity, and the feeling that I was extremely blessed. I was able to play with my children in a safe and lovely setting, and I felt immense gratitude. I was also aware that in an instant, our lives could irrevocably change and it all could be taken away from me. I distinctly remember putting my hand on my heart and thanking G-d for my children's health, for our many privileges, and for being able to be with them in that simple and precious moment.

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From Meatballs to Matzoh Balls: A Jewish Italian-American Spiritual Identity

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Growing up in an interfaith, mixed-ethnicity family left the author without a religious or spiritual identity of her own. In this narrative, she describes her journey from cultural confusion and religious alienation through spiritual exploration, acceptance, and identity. Discussed are the ways in which individuals use religion, community, and spirituality to find a sense of purpose in life and the associated implications for social work practice.

Multiple Insides, Multiple Outsides

The shopkeeper glanced toward the two young women in hijab sitting on the floor. "They say you very beautiful," he said, "because of your big nose."

The girls giggled shyly, never taking their eyes off me. As an American accustomed to the usual American standards of beauty, I wasn't quite sure if this was a joke, or if I'd simply misheard. Perhaps my look of incredulousness demanded explanation, for he continued.

"Indonesians," he said, incorporating colorful hand gestures to illuminate his words, "have flat nose. You…" and here he paused, "have biiiiiig nose! Very beautiful!" He nodded, seemingly proud of his English and his explanation. The girls continued to giggle. I simply blinked and said, "Thank you."

Throughout my stay in Indonesia, I heard this refrain many times. The girls in the boarding house where I lived showered me with frequent compliments. Pregnant mothers would rub my nose for luck, with the hope that this would channel my large, striking, somewhat Semitic features to their unborn children.

This was the first time I'd ever thought of my looks as anything but flawed. What was so hard for me to reconcile was that this *hidung mancung,* or "prominent nose," that my Indonesian friends found so attractive was exactly the feature that had filled me with insecurity throughout my entire life. Even more so than a *bat mitzvah* (which I never had), a nose job (which I also never had) seems to be every young American Jewish girl's rite of passage.

It was not for lack of family support that I never had my nose "fixed," but, mostly, fear. And I'm glad I didn't, as my looks mark who I am and where I've come from. It's interesting to me that, while many people often have a hard time placing my ethnicity, Jews never do: somehow, I'm instantly recognizable to Jewish people from all over the globe.

Yet people of Italian descent also seem to recognize me as one of their own—and rightly so. While my mother's family are Ashkenazi Jews who escaped the pogroms of Russia and Poland in the early 20th century, my father's family came from Italy at about the same time.

When my parents met in the early 1960s, neither family was happy about the match, and, I'm told, there was much hand wringing and worry behind closed doors. But over time, as it became clear that my mom and dad had something special together, both sets of grandparents decided, "They could do worse," and invited each others' families into their lives without malice, and, soon, with love.

For me, dancing the delicate waltz between two distinct ethnicities and religions was easy at first. As a child, I felt uniquely special: I had more holidays than anyone! Although my parents were not religious, we celebrated both Jewish and Christian holidays in traditional fashion, with huge feasts and plenty of family. We lit a Menorah and had a Christmas tree; we found both Easter eggs and the *afikomen*. It rocked. It also was not unusual. As Cowan and Cowan (1987)

reported, many intermarried couples choose to create wonderful holiday celebrations from both traditions without adopting one religion for the family.

Despite knowing nothing about either religion, I proudly identified myself as "Half-Jewish and Half-Catholic." But this vision of myself came crumbling down the first time I went to Hebrew School—not as part of the class, but as a visitor with a friend from elementary school. In my memory, the rabbi looms large with his black hat, stooping down with a reprimanding finger in my face. "If your mother is Jewish," he shouted, seemingly seething with anger, "you are ALL Jewish!"

Most likely, as Mayer postulates in his 1983 book *Children of Intermarriage*, the rabbi was responding to fears that the increase in mixed Jewish-Gentile marriages, along with the fact that Jews were having fewer children as well as sustaining much weaker religious ties, could lead to a deterioration of the Jewish community in America. I, however, was much too young to comprehend or even have any knowledge of this much talked-about concern. And so this one terrifying childhood experience made me vow never to go to Hebrew School again.

Seeking Belonging

As I grew up, my dual identity left me feeling not just more and more confused, but more and more left out. In a world of social lives organized around religion, I was the only one without one. In primary school, I desperately wanted to join the Camp Fire Girls or the Girl Scouts. Historically, these organizations were associated with God and Christianity, and I understood that there was an implication that, in the past, Jews were not particularly welcome. Because of this association, they were deemed inappropriate for me to join now. In junior high, the Cotillion dance classes given at one of our town's exclusive social clubs were similarly out of bounds.

In high school, I was also discouraged from joining the Christian Youth Fellowship many of my friends belonged to, and was decidedly uncomfortable at the few church events I attended. Yet I also felt out of place at the Hillel dances and the B'nai B'rith youth group activities—I'd never been to synagogue, didn't speak Hebrew, was barely familiar with the major holidays, and didn't even have a Jewish name. I felt I belonged nowhere.

According to Mayer (1985), this sense of alienation is common to children of inter-religious marriages. The children of marriages between Christians and Jews, he writes, are not only less likely to participate in traditional Jewish practices such as Shabbat, bar and bat mitzvahs, Jewish education or synagogue membership, but they are also much less likely to be involved with any other formalized religion, as well. This proved very true for me.

It finally hit home just how "outside" I really was, even within my own family, when I overheard a conversation among my three aunts. Discussing my cousin, one year younger than I and with whom I was very close, her mother said, "You know, she's dating that Italian boy. What if they get married? What if they have *children?*"

I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach. "I guess they'd be like me," I responded quietly. My aunts clucked their tongues and tried to cover their blunder, saying, "Oh, well, your father's different." But I wasn't quite sure how the 18-year-old *Gamboni* they knew way back when, before he was my father, could have been all that different from the *Ferrovecchio* my cousin was dating now.

Validation and Alienation

Once the tricky dynamic of religion was removed, however, I always felt like a straight-up "Italian Jew" in the ethnic senses of the words. In the era of mob movies and *The Sopranos*, it was easy to glamorize being Italian-American. (Yes, my grandfather "ran numbers" for the "Italian lottery" in Brooklyn. No, I don't know what this *actually* means.) My last name is easily confused with one of the most famous New York crime families (Raab, 2005), so we've had our share of lavish service and prime tables at various restaurants in the area.

And aside from the obvious religious aspect inherent in Judaism, being "Jewish" in America is a considered culture all on its own (Whitfield, 1999). The values and background of this

culture unifies American Jews from across the country in a way that can defy regional differences. The cultures of my two families, in fact, have a lot in common, highlighted by an emphasis on food, animated discussions, traditional family values, and a take-no-prisoners New York attitude.

When I arrived for my first year of college at a large Midwestern university, I was surprised to meet people who'd never met anyone either Jewish *or* Italian. Although it was easy for me to forgive the simple ignorance of my new acquaintances (Stephan: "So... do Jewish people really have horns?" Me: "You're kidding me, right?"), the blatant, hate-fueled anti-Semitism was harder to ignore. Some, thinking I was fully Italian, would share slurs with me, as if I would surely agree with them. Mostly I would just walk away from these incidents with few words, incredulousness more so than anger bubbling to the surface.

At the same time, college was the first place where I felt my identity was truly validated. Friends lovingly called me the "Pizza-Bagel" or, co-opting two normally offensive slurs, the "Guinea-Hebe," and I loved it. I learned to read Hebrew in time for Passover in a crash course at Hillel, and cooked a traditional Italian "5 Fishes" seafood dinner on Christmas Eve. Finally, my dual-cultural background once again made me feel uniquely *me*.

Yet while I felt secure in my cultural identity, there was still something missing: a sense of connection to the world, a feeling of greater meaning to the struggles of life. Even as a young teen, I was drawn to the social services, working with the Easter Seals, children's hospital, and eventually gravitating toward activism and homeless outreach and advocacy. My mission, I felt, was to help those struggling with physical, social, and emotional difficulties in their lives.

This lack of a solid spiritual foundation continued to lead me on a search for a deeper sense of life purpose, beyond a vocational calling, throughout college and after. Many of my Jewish friends attended *Shabbat* services, embracing their religious identities more fully. And several of my Protestant Christian friends began questioning some of the more stringent tenets of their conservative religious upbringings.

As for me, I had nothing to embrace nor question. I had no concept of God, religion, or spirituality. "The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out!" was always my theory. Yet, at the same time, this declaration rang hollow. Could my understanding of reality really be all there was to life?

Seeking Purpose and Integration

This sense of purposelessness grew, and often became punctuated by periods of malaise and depression. I began to search in earnest for an answer to these feelings of emptiness I was harboring. According to a 2007 *Newsweek* poll, 91% of Americans believe in God (Braiker, 2007), and, knowing that the majority of my friends and peers had been brought up with some form of organized religion, I turned to them to find out more about their beliefs.

I started with Judaism since, although I wasn't brought up religiously Jewish, I was brought up decidedly and emphatically "not Christian." Yet in my exploration, I experienced the same feelings of alienation I'd had as a child: I didn't understand the religious traditions and customs, nor the prayers and songs, often in Hebrew, a language I knew nothing of. And the rich culture, beyond that which I experienced at family gatherings, seemed foreign to me. I felt there was a secret code to Judaism, one I would never learn; the entire experience left me feeling once again like an outsider.

As I proceeded with my spiritual explorations and questions, I was particularly struck by a comment from a classmate who'd studied with me in Indonesia. "Dina," Kristen said gently, "I wouldn't be a friend if I didn't tell you this, but I think the answer to your struggles lies in having a relationship with Jesus." Like many born-again Christians, Kristen found great comfort in her religion (Ryle, 1885). I'd always been moved by traditional Black Gospel music, and envied Kristen her sense of calm and life purpose. I decided to join a "Christianity 101" group for "new believers" that Kristin had

recommended, right there in my small town in Upstate New York, to see if perhaps there was something I was missing.

I cannot explain the sense of awkwardness I felt at these meetings, which consisted of a pot-luck dinner, followed by a TV presentation of a very charismatic British preacher discussing the basics of Christianity, and a group discussion. Although I always felt mighty Italian at synagogue, I felt awfully Jewish in the basement of this church, surrounded by the fellowship of church-goers, all brushing up on their already established beliefs with their cloth-covered Bibles in tow. The only non-Christian there was me.

But that charismatic British preacher, whose name escapes me but whose charm never will, had something going. The lure was appealing: I wanted Jesus to absolve me of my guilt! To carry my burdens! To set my troubles down! Who doesn't want to be forgiven? Still, I had trouble with the tenet that says in order to go to heaven, one must believe in Jesus as a personal savior.

During the third or fourth group discussion, I timidly raised my hand. "My family, they're good people," I started. "They're domestic violence counselors, special-ed teachers, para-professionals working with handicapped children. They pray, they donate to charity." I paused. "But here's the thing. They're Jewish. Are they going to Hell, too?"

I was met with only silence. The minister mumbled, and looked down, as the rest of the group avoided my eyes and fumbled with their clothing. The minister's wife, however, finally spoke. "If you're asking me if I believe that God is a just god," she said slowly, carefully, and with kindness, "I do."

Expanding Horizons: Looking Within, Looking Without

While I never went back to this fellowship group, it had planted a spiritual seed in my intellectual mind. I'd felt such a sense of relief and joy at the initial prospect of what Christianity had to offer, what a "relationship" with a higher power could mean, that I was inspired. It's a rush that I still feel when I hear Gospel music, or a particularly beautiful prayer, or even see an orchid or other wonder of nature. In that moment, I felt I could learn something from all that energy.

Perhaps, I thought, the *davening* of the Jews, the prayers of the Christians, the Muslim *salah*, were all ways of getting to the same thing: a path to a universal God, energy, or spirit. Whether it is inside us or an outside force, I still hadn't—and still haven't—decided on. Yet it was the push I needed to start really looking to create my own spirituality in earnest.

I was drawn to spiritual tomes, New Age readings, and Native American spiritual literature. I studied the world of karma and reincarnation through classic Buddhist literature [Hesse's *Sidhdhartha* (1922) was a favorite] as well as more pop-culture books oriented toward Americans such as *Surfing the Himalayas* by Frederick Lens, *That Which You Are Seeking Is Causing You to Seek* by Cheri Huber (1990), and Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* (2004).

I then branched into more fringe concepts, reading up on astrology and exploring the alternative healing modalities of Reiki and Polarity Therapy. Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (1993), a now-classic "intro" to spirituality in the form of fiction, opened my eyes to the power of coincidence and intention. I pieced through Schucman's *A Course in Miracles* (1976), devoured all of Carlos Castaneda's *Adventures of Don Juan* (1969) explorations into shamanism, and read metaphysicist (and supposed psychic and channel) Jane Roberts's *Seth* (1970) teachings. My own spiritual "awakening," however, came about through a confluence of three significant books, all given to me rather than sought out.

After a close childhood friend was suddenly and tragically killed, a former professor of mine, with whom I'd remained close, gave me Rabbi Harold S. Kushner's 1981 bestseller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It sat on my shelf for years after my friend's death, but in my new spiritual quest, I picked it up again. Kushner's insightful writing addresses human suffering, and how a "good" God can simultaneously exist with the "evil" in the world. His book opened my mind and thoughts to the concept of a true "higher power," in the traditional sense.

And, as part of my work with support groups for people with mood disorders, I was given Marsha Linehan's *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder* (1993). Linehan's theories combine Western cognitive-behavioral approaches to mental health with Eastern religious and mindfulness meditative practices. I began to slowly incorporate a mindfulness practice of focused attention in my own life as a way to connect to the world around me, as well as to an inner sense of calm.

But, oddly, what was most influential to my present-day spirituality had nothing to do with any formal religious teachings or modalities whatsoever. In fact, it was much simpler than that, something we do every day: walking. *There are Mountains to Climb* (1996), Jean Deed's first-person account of her solo through-hike of the Appalachian Trail at 51, opened my eyes to the spirit present within us as we do everyday rituals. I was fascinated by Deed's determinism, as well as her spiritual awakening as she hiked the trail.

Spirituality in Person and Practice

Soon, I began to incorporate what I'd learned through these books into my everyday life. I found myself drawn to the woods, and, more specifically, the Finger Lakes Trail (FLT), located practically in my backyard. The FLT is a 562-mile-long trail that goes from the Pennsylvania-New York border in the west to the Catskill Mountains in the east. Two or three days a week, I would take what remained of the daylight hours after work to walk portions of the FLT. I incorporated walking meditations and an awareness of nature into my sojourns; breathing in the air as the seasons changed opened up a new sense of spiritual awakening for me. After four years, in jaunts of just a few miles to ten or so at a time, I'd walked over 300 miles of the trail. Through the joining of these intellectual, emotional, and physical experiences, I found a comfort and solidity in a pantheist nature- and energy-based spirituality. I continue to use my interactions with nature as a connection to a sense of deeper purpose. To me, growing food, recycling, and walking in the woods are all my own personal forms of prayer.

As I delve deeper into social work practice, I've come to realize the importance of religion and spirituality in recovery and healing work. When faced with a crisis such as a life-threatening illness, the loss of a loved one, or other end-of-life issues, the question of spirituality comes to the forefront, and the implications for exploration within social work practice are huge.

I've always felt uncomfortable broaching the subject with clients; as for me, these are personal and solitary experiences. Yet interestingly, the more I explore my own spirituality, the more it becomes incorporated in my work. Most recently, I had an internship at a cancer center that focuses on incorporating complementary therapies with Western-based chemotherapy and radiation treatments. This cutting-edge center provides weekly drop-in classes in stress reduction, guided imagery, mindfulness and other meditative practices, Jin Shin Jyutusu, acupuncture, and massage, as well as spiritual counseling and dream-tending workshops. My personal favorite healing approach available at the clinic is the walking labyrinth, a meditative tool to help facilitate change, growth, and discovery (http://www.lessons4living.com).

Full Circle: Embracing a Multi-Cultural Identity

As a social worker, I enjoy listening to clients as they explore their own spiritual paths. I feel I'm uniquely placed to listen to and reflect on those struggling with a sense of religious, spiritual, and cultural identity: I understand what it's like to be alienated from one's own culture, through no fault of one's own. Still, while helping clients to explore their spiritual paths, I prefer to keep my own personal spiritual views and values to myself, hidden inside a somewhat brash New York half-Italian, half-Jewish exterior.

Within my perpetual searching and growth, I've never let go of the strong cultural ties I grew up with. Now, as an adult, I am fully secure in my identity as a religiously spiritual (pantheist), ethnically Jewish, ethnically Italian-American. Although I don't practice the religions of either set of grandparents, I embrace and embody both of their cultures—

I am comfortable and proud of my rich ethnic background. And while I politely but firmly disagree with people who refuse to allow me to identify myself as "half" Jewish, I also acutely feel the pain of knowing there are people who hate me simply for reasons that can't be seen outwardly—except, perhaps, in my beautiful *hidung mancung*.

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Path of a Survivor

Shelly Werts, CSW, Mental Health Therapist

Personal experiences inform professional journeys. The author of this narrative has been afforded the opportunity for growth on paths of personal enlightenment and professional competence simultaneously as the two have converged in her life. This narrative is her proclamation as social worker and a survivor that all voiceless voices shall be heard; that everyone can have the courage to stand as one in bringing sound to our shared cause.

* Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

*"We have the power, we have the might,
the streets are ours, take back the night!
Join together, free our lives, we will not
be victimized!
What do we want? Safe streets! When do
we want it? Now!
However we dress, wherever we go, yes
means yes, and no means no!"*

A Critical Incident of Intersections

I attended the "Take Back the Night Rally & March Candlelight Vigil" on October 6, 2005, at the University of Louisville campus. The event is held every year in October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness month This rally and march support the fight against "...sexual assault, rape, childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner abuse, domestic violence, and all forms of oppression and violence against women" (University of Louisville, 2005). At the time of this event, I was a member of both the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). I have also been involved with the Center for Women and Families for several years. That night, I was staffing tables for both the ACLU and NOW, literally running back and forth between the two.

In intersecting personal and professional roles, I participated in this event for several reasons. First, I was there to represent my own personal agenda I am a survivor of rape and domestic violence I brought my best friend's daughters, "Janelle" and "Janey," both of whom I consider my nieces. Janelle was twelve and Janey was thirteen. I brought my nieces to teach them about violence against women and children, to teach them about empowerment, and to actively show them resources available to them or anyone in need of support systems within the community. Several organizations were there in support of survivors and victims alike. I was there to represent NOW, which supports the fight against all violence and oppression towards women. As part of my social work field placement and as a member of the ACLU, I was also there to represent RFP (Reproductive Freedom Project). Between the two tables, I assisted in the sale of t-shirts, pins, and bumper stickers, as well as providing information about the two groups. After listening to the speakers, working at both the NOW and RFP tables, walking around with my nieces to gather information from other organizations, and absorbing the powerful statements written on t-shirts designed by survivors through "The Clotheslines Project," I marched with my two nieces. We held up signs provided by NOW that stated "Stop Violence Against Women. We chanted as we marched around the large campus perimeter on public sidewalks. We screamed as loud as we possibly could. Screaming these chants was a very powerful experience for me.

I had attended my first rally and march in 2004, while a BSSW student. At this event, the organizers allowed survivors and supporters the opportunity to approach the microphone after the march and speak in an open-mike format. Several survivors approached the podium and spoke out against their abusers. Some read poems they had written, some read from speeches, and some just expressed what they were feeling at that exact moment. I was one of those survivors who spoke that year, quite unintentionally, I might add. I had spoken to friends and therapists about the abuses I had survived, but I had never spoken so publicly, openly, and candidly as I did that night.

I felt compelled to say something in the presence of others, whom I thought surely understood what I had gone through. I wasn't afraid that I would be judged harshly for having experienced domestic violence and rape. I hesitated at first as a flood of emotions welled to the surface. I remembered then, as I do now, the powerlessness I felt with each separate incident. My voice was stifled as I whimpered "no" when my ex held me down from behind. Not once, but twice. I remembered feeling utterly ashamed. How would anyone believe that I was raped by my significant other? I told no one, and I never reported either occasion I suffered in silence.

I also remember feeling out of control all the moments when I was hit, choked, threatened, or told I was meaningless. As quickly as the images of my past abuses came, they passed; leaving me with the courage to step up onto the podium and speak.

It was the scariest, most empowering, and most courageous feat I had ever accomplished. I thought that my heart would explode and life, as I knew it, would be over. I was both wrong and right. My heart did not explode, but my life—the life that I knew, the life that made me hide and feel ashamed—was over. I remember how shaky my voice was when I declared, "I was sexually assaulted and abused. Today, I face the fear. Today, I face the pain. And this is a good way to begin." People—total strangers—cheered and clapped. They approached me, thanking and hugging me. Many told me that I was not alone. I knew that if I had chosen to cower and hide in the crowd, I would be giving my perpetrators the power to restrict me once again, and I would never forgive myself for staying silent. I chose the word "assault" because what they did, through rape, emotional and physical abuse, were direct attacks without mercy, shame, guilt, feeling, or conscience. They directly assaulted every facet of my being. "Rape" is an ugly word, but the act itself is even uglier, much more vile, and the most damaging.

This occasion of my personal triumph illustrates Gilligan's (1982) revolutionary insights about women's moral and psychological development. As Gilligan articulates "virtue for women lies in self-sacrifice...[which] is directly in conflict with the concept of rights that[supports] women's claim to a fair share of social justice" (p. 132). Throughout my life, I had set aside my personal needs and desires to benefit others, sometimes to the extent of personal annihilation. I couldn't seem to get beyond sacrificing myself for others. I spent an entire decade spinning my wheels and getting nowhere, only to be left with heartache and loss.

Turning thirty in 2004 was a pivotal moment in my life. Things started to fall into place for me, and for the first time life was starting to actually make sense. I was beginning to truly recognize that I was an important person in the cogwheel of existence. Standing on that stage was part of that transitioning from sacrificing only for the sake of others to the realization that my needs are just as important as the needs of others. It is a balancing act that I am still learning to practice on a daily basis as I learn to claim my voice.

After this first experience of the rally and march in 2004, the following year I came prepared with a written speech. I thought about what I would say and what impact it would have on my growing self-esteem. I had faith that by releasing all the pent up anguish I would be free of it. I was building momentum as I walked around from booth to booth, soaking up all the supportive energy in the crowd. I felt powerful when I marched, proclaiming loudly, not only to whoever could hear us in the immediate vicinity, but also to those who

hurt me, that it is never okay to abuse or to rape anyone for any reason. The moment came after the closing statement. I had my speech in hand ready to approach the podium, when my energy was cut off by the announcer saying, "That's all. Thank you all for coming Good night."

I couldn't believe it. Not one survivor in the audience was allowed the opportunity to put voice to the pain, anger, anguish, abuse, or trauma they had experienced. I was deeply hurt and angered. Had I been younger, I would have walked away depressed and sulking. But, I'm not the same person I was then. I walked up to the person in charge and told her exactly how I felt about not being able to speak out and how important it is for a survivor to be allowed the opportunity to do so. Clearly, she was taken aback and said that she had wanted to try something different this year. I told her I could guarantee that I would not have been the only person to approach the mike that night. Maybe someone who had never spoken to anyone about the abuse they had experienced would have approached the podium, having not felt so alone after all.

I walked away feeling conflicted. I was able to voice my concerns, yet I did not feel fully validated by the organizer. I wanted to convey to her the deeper reasons for feeling hurt, for the injustice, and for what it meant to be one of many survivors in the crowd longing to connect on a more meaningful level.

Characters and Considerations

My personal experiences influence my reaction to the fact that, as a survivor, I was not allowed the opportunity to voice my thoughts and feelings surrounding my abuse. I was hurt and angry for myself as well as for the other survivors. My voice was stifled for many years, and now that the floodgates had opened, I no longer wished to be silent. As a survivor, communicating my experiences is an important aspect of my healing. How many other survivors in the audience at the rally felt stifled because they were not heard? What kind of message does the action of the organizer send when lines of communication that had been opened are cut short? Should we remain quiet and suffer in silence?

I was one of the many survivors in the audience. I am a thirty-four year-old, white female, CSW, survivor of rape, and survivor of domestic violence. I have been beaten, choked, threatened verbally, threatened with a loaded gun and a butcher knife, slapped around, almost run over by a car by an angry ex-partner, and forced upon sexually. I have been told I wasn't good enough, smart enough, or talented enough to be in any professional position. My experiences at the time taught me to believe that I was not worthy, and that hurting someone or being hurt by someone was normal behavior.

Violence against women knows no boundaries. It does not pick victims based upon socio-economic status, race, or religion. Gender does play a role. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (2009), 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. As a woman, based upon my own personal experiences as well as those of friends, family members, and clients I have spoken to, I know that women have been abused and oppressed for a long time. Violence against women is not an uncommon phenomenon and is not just a current problem; it is a systemic, prevailing issue that crosses time, space, geography, and culture.

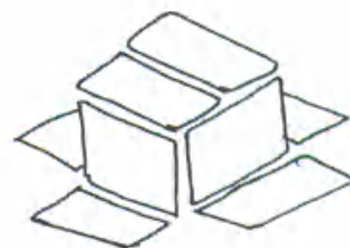
Cultural and Ethical Considerations

Awareness of violence against women is a key factor in helping women fight for their rights, in assisting organizations within the community to provide a support system, and in providing policy changes to create programs that not only support victims, but also hold perpetrators accountable for their behavior. Awareness creates an atmosphere of recognizing signs and symptoms of abuse, counseling, the promotion of coping skills, and rehabilitation of both victims and perpetrators. At one time, violence against women was socially acceptable and considered a form of discipline. The belief systems surrounding abuse have altered as time has passed. We are in an era where it is no longer acceptable to hit a woman because she burned dinner, to beat a child because of toys left on the floor, or to rape a female because she wore the

wrong outfit. A man can no longer do whatever he wants to and get away with it just because he is "powerful."

Because I am a social worker, the NASW (1999) Code of Ethics both appeals to and guides me. There are six ethical principles within the Code of Ethics: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. All six principles apply to and should influence the issues surrounding violence against women and their vocalization of the issues. As a social worker, I am responsible for helping those in need while addressing the systemic social conditions underlying the problems. It is my passion and mission to address oppression, degradation, humiliation, and suffering. The Code of Ethics challenges me to become the best social worker I can be. Social Work encompasses fighting for positive changes that support a just society. I must keep in mind that the people I come into contact with have value, and that to serve them through social justice is to honor them, no matter who they are or what role they play in the issue at hand. When I understand the circumstances of all those concerned, I honor them through validation of their dignity and worth, while understanding the underlying causes for every action or inaction.

We are all interdependent creatures and, therefore, the bonds created through intersecting relationships have grave importance When I connect with victims and survivors, whether through my personal experiences or professional commitments, I open the doors to change through empathy. Following the social work principles as a creed, I can build trust through actions and words. Trust is key when working with victims and survivors. As I actuate the first five principles, competence in my professionalism is created. As a survivor, I feel validated knowing that the Code of Ethics exists. I feel safe knowing that there are regulations in place supporting victims, opposing acts of violence, and providing supportive rehabilitation to perpetrators and abusers. I have the humility to understand that the same principles that protect victims also reach out to perpetrators and abusers to make amends and better themselves through self-determination. Understanding and education are keys to creating a non-violent future for all.



Deeper Connections in Professional Practice

Looking back on my experiences, I realize that the inability for the voiceless to be heard in a supportive and non-threatening environment is antithetical to the Code of Ethics. When I think about the silenced voices, several concepts come to mind. Saleeby (2006) discusses the link between the strengths perspective and empowerment. To empower the victims and survivors in the audience at the rally, the organizers needed to first see that strength is derived through validation, and that there is a need to put words to the pain and suffering trapped inside each individual When provided the opportunity to strengthen the voiceless through communication, empowerment is created.

Saleeby (2006) discusses that as a social worker the importance of nourishing the strengths of others while sustaining and emboldening them enables them to become better versions of themselves through self-determination. As a social worker, it is my duty to empower others through encouragement. The courage to take on fear through breaking the silence is powerful. Each person possesses strength to overcome obstacles. Some are able to recognize the strength within, while others need their strengths to be nurtured in a positive direction. The strengths perspective teaches us to encourage our clients to see the possibilities within. Change happens internally as well as externally.

Finn & Jacobson (2003) discuss the concepts of belonging and difference. Group dynamics teach us that from the onset of life

we belong to a certain group and are differentiated through belonging to this group in the larger context of society. This applies to victims as well as survivors. Once a person is put into a situation where safety and security are compromised due to domestic violence, they are automatically categorized into a group. The individual becomes one of those poor souls that can't get out of his or her situation. When one is pegged into the category of helplessness, whether or not it is recognized by others, it becomes difficult for that person to fit into society's norms of perfection without problems.

As a survivor, I know firsthand how it feels to be different. I have never felt that I could fit into the perfect *Leave It to Beaver* lifestyle that I assumed others lived. At one point, I was so ashamed of all of the abuse I had experienced that I thought, "If people really knew me—what I thought, what I felt— I would be shunned…I'd be different from everyone else, and I wouldn't belong." It is vitally important for victims and survivors to feel that they belong. Part of that belonging is allowing them to actively participate in healing openly with others like themselves. I see now that because of my past. I belong to a very powerful force that supports the fight against oppression, injustice, and violence on so many levels. When I am surrounded by others who have suffered as I have, I don't feel so different after all. The concepts of difference and commonality bring us all together to belong to something much more grand; healing through beautiful self-expression and common bonding.

Mooney, Knox, & Schacht (2002) discuss how societal and cultural factors play a role in violence against women. Some factors discussed surround how the media portray violence as a normal part of society. As a nation, the United States has become desensitized to violence, accepting it as normative and ignoring the signs, symptoms, and consequences of violence against women. Societal acceptance of women submitting to men is an example of "gender role socialization." It has been well documented that both women and children were viewed as property, that the view of property has prevailed through time, and that the devaluation of women and children has become accepted as a rationale for violence against them. It is far easier to abuse someone who is thought of as weak, helpless, and powerless. Victims and survivors alike have found it difficult to fight against their abusers because of the views surrounding violence against women and children. I felt completely helpless in my situation when I was being abused. I felt powerless and I was incapable of stopping the abuse and rape.

My story is only one of many. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (2009), the most recent data (2007) documents 248,300 victims of sexual assault annually. However, approximately 60% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police. These stories are both personal and systemic. According to the American Bar Association, Commission on Domestic Violence (2009), of all females killed with a firearm, almost two-thirds were killed by their intimate partners. In 2002, the number of females shot and killed by their husband or intimate partner was more than three times higher than the total number murdered by male strangers using all weapons combined in single victim/single offender incidents. Fifty-six percent of women who experience any partner violence are diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Twenty-nine percent of all women who attempt suicide were battered; 37% of battered women have symptoms of depression; 46% have symptoms of anxiety disorders, and 45% experience post traumatic stress disorder.

Abuse on any level is not acceptable. No rationale can excuse the behavior of someone who perpetrates and abuses. Why is it, then, that as an industrialized, modern society, we have not overcome the obstacles leading to violence and have created a generation of perpetrators filling the prisons to the brink?

Personal and Professional Intersections

That night in 2005, I immediately took measures to make my point known. When I approached the organizer of the "Take Back the Night" rally, my personal experiences, professional confidence, and advocate role intersected, giving me the impetus and courage to speak. Her response indicated to me that my feedback did not grab her attention as I'd wanted. So, I wrote a letter to the organizers on behalf of all survivors. In this letter, I asked about the rationale for leaving out such a vital and poignant segment of the rally. I emphasized the importance of providing an open forum for all audience members to speak about their own stories, the stories of their loved ones, and their reflections surrounding the rally and march. The purpose of the podium is to allow all supporters of non-violence the opportunity to be heard and validated. I received a response letter stating that the scheduled speakers before the march represented the thoughts and feelings of the audience, because one speaker was a victim and one was a supporter. I did not believe that my point was understood or validated at the time.

However, open-mike was reintroduced the following year, and I read a poem I had written about what it was like being a victim. I felt empowered to say that being a victim was who I was, but not who I am. Shortly after I stepped down from the podium, I was interviewed by the local paper. In the article I was quoted, saying, "It's taken years for me to get to the point where I could say enough is enough. You are not alone. Just reach out to someone" (Riley, 2006, p. B1).

I will continue to fight against oppression and violence against women. I am a feminist, which I have recently discovered is more about standing up not only for women's rights but for the rights of all humanity, and less about hating and pointing fingers at men. Life has led me in the direction of fighting for everyone's rights, which is apparent in the groups I continue to belong to, the issues that I am passionate about, and the positions I have chosen to work in over the years. I believe it is my calling to fight for social justice, equality, opportunity, and the rights of all those who suffer.

Since graduating with an MSW, one of the places I chose to work was Kentucky Correctional Institute for Women. There, I shared my philosophy of feminism with my clients by empowering the women I worked with to change their minds and open up to the possibilities that lie within each and every one of them. Frequently, I voice my rationale for having worked with the women at Kentucky Correctional Institute for Women: I believe in hope, and I believe that everyone has the capacity to change their lives for the better, no matter what their circumstances are.

Currently, I work at the Department of Veterans Affairs as a Mental Health Therapist, specializing in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Military Sexual Trauma. Working for the VA is one of my greatest honors, as it provides me an opportunity to give back to thousands of my fellow veterans. I have come full circle in my life, having started out my career path in the U.S. Navy as a psychiatric technician. The wisdom I have gained from surviving abuse, combined with the educational opportunities I have been afforded, guide me in working with the women and men who have served the United States.

I have a bumper sticker on my vehicle of a quote by Maggie Kuhn: "Speak your mind even if your voice shakes." I spoke my mind at the first rally I attended in 2004. I spoke my mind the following year when I wasn't permitted to freely express myself. I spoke my mind when I read aloud how I used to be a victim. And I will continue to speak my mind whenever I see the need for something to be said to the female and male heroes of our country as they struggle through their daily suffering. I will tell them they are not alone, that they are worthy of healing, and that although the memories may never go away, they deserve to live a healthy and safe life, free of harm.

I cannot make others see their possibilities. I cannot make them believe in their own potential. I cannot make life easier or better for them. But I can be a tour guide on their journey. I can point out things to them along the way that they may never have

acknowledged before. but that only they can choose to see. I can promote awareness through voicing my thoughts and feelings. I can validate others as their stories unfold. I can steer my course onto the path of possibility. But in the end, I can only effectuate active changes in my own life. Others must do so of their own volition. Change is a personal phenomenon that can be a gift for others to cherish along the paths that lead them to their destination. I can never regain what I have lost, but I can obtain what I need to be whole. The intersections of my personal experiences and my professional roles bring together that wholeness—for me and for those I am privileged to serve on our common path of healing.

Today I am a survivor.
Today I start to heal.
Today I start to feel.
Today I start a new journey.
Today I start to embrace myself.
Today I am angry.
Today I am hurt.
Today……….

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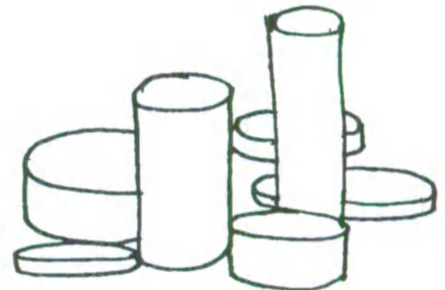


Angered Into Action: A Woman's Story of Reclamation

Colsaria M. Henderson, MSW Student, San Francisco State University

In this narrative, the author describes her daily struggle to thwart the damaging self blame that threatens to creep into her psyche and assault her efforts to rediscover and recoup her wholeness. By writing about the attack, she seeks to empower herself and help other survivors channel their anger into action.

Facing Taciturnity: Voicing My Story

It was a hot, dry summer. I was in New Mexico with my mother, who was attending a conference in the dome-shaped Holiday Inn. We were twenty-four miles from the Navajo reservation, where I had spent my past few summers basking in the heat. I had learned so much there. I had learned to lasso, though only fence poles, as moving objects still escaped my growing abilities. I had spent hours of multiple days surveying the many elders and their silver-smithing techniques. I was mesmerized by the turquoise stones and the process of heating and cooling. I envisioned draping myself in brightly woven colors and elaborate turquoise jewelry, as if I were in the role of a healer or *Hatatii*. I would roam the land in search of spiritual connections I had only read stories about. I loved my time there. Accompanying my mother in her hotel stay would signify the end of my pubescent summer adventure.

The conference was not for young girls in the throes of adolescence, and so I, like many peers, were relegated to the hotel room and all of the hotel amenities. This being the third year in the row, I felt I had grown up with many of the youth that hung out in the public hotel spaces. Knowing them well solidified my coming of age in many ways, as I had developed tremendously during my stay on the reservation. One girl in particular had become my confidant. We were inseparable that summer; we met every morning for pancakes in the restaurant, relishing the final moments when the check came and we could say, "Just charge it to my room." We felt free and adult like. However, this summer was slightly different than the previous ones. This summer her older brother joined his family in this now yearly tradition.

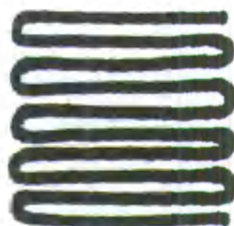
He was three years my senior and I was a raging, hormonal girl, eying shyly his natural, beautiful, physique when he would dive into the indoor swimming pool. He had a cultish following of young pubescent and pre-pubescent girls, who gathered at one corner of the swimming pool, some lying out on lawn chairs as they had seen grown women do. And, then there were others, like me, shyly in their one-piece bathing suits submerged in water up to their necks. Yes, this summer was different and I was different. My close friend, her chaperoning, beautiful, older brother, and I were together constantly. Within a few days my shyness had mostly worn off and I felt free to playfully tease and laugh with him.

Two days before the conference ended, all three of us had come in from a swim and were watching purchased movies in their hotel room. The two of them shared an adjoining room with their mother, leaving me to pout with jealousy a bit. The room was typical: two full beds, a couple of lamps, a dresser, and hideously patterned curtains that led out to the covered courtyard and indoor pool. My friend and I lay on our stomachs, our heads facing the TV, legs swinging in the air. He rested on his back on his bed, watching TV casually and teasing us about the scenes in the movie that made us giggle.

Sometime later, she and I grew bored with the monotone room and the complicated plot, and she set off to go convince her mother to give her money so we could go to the arcade. When she left, he and I continued to finish the movie, while he teased me about my now encroaching shyness when a kissing scene came across the screen. "Haven't you ever kissed a guy before?" "No! No. Not like that," I said, shifting from somewhere between an emphatic answer and a shy, soft response. He moved over to the bed I was lying on and told me in a soft voice that he wanted to be my first. He wanted to show me how. I remember becoming instantly over-heated; my heart raced, as the blood rushed to my face and my body became rigid. He touched my face, stroking it from the corner of my left eye, down my cheekbone, to my chin. Then he kissed me softly on the lips. I was ecstatic and scared, but mostly ecstatic.

He kissed me again, pressing his lips harder and faster upon mine. I became uncomfortable but instantly questioned whether this was how it was done. I remember thinking that I was so lucky: *he chose me*. The kissing then became...harsh and disenchanting. He began forcibly, convulsively grabbing at my body, as I tried to grip his hands to push him away. It was as if we were playing an unfortunate, unnerving game of Keep Away. I managed to push my head back from his, though he had one hand securing my ponytail, pressing it toward him. I said "Stop!" I was ignored. It was only seconds later that my clothes were ripped and my skin was exposed. I was in an impossible position now and mostly I remember feeling defeated.

Flashes of skin and terror are mostly what I recall from there. I hit him with something glass because it broke and cut me in the process. I can still feel the sharp, stinging heat coming from my face, as it collided with his fist. Within moments the back of my head felt equally the same. I recall pleading, "Please...please." His mouth was moving, but very few sounds were coming out. The only words I seem to recall are partnered with his hateful, yet pained, eyes. He was holding me down by pressing on my throat and collarbone, when he whispered, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." The soft words did not match the angry thrusting. I turned my head and focused on the rust colored paisley pattern imprinted on the curtains. Maybe they weren't so bad. When he released the pressure of his body and hands, I fell, and then I ran. I never looked back. I spent the rest of the day in the shower, and the rest of the conference in my hotel room.



Shame and Guilt: The Silence of Our Sisters

I spent years battling with devastating questions and self-blaming statements. Why me? Was I chosen or convenient? What do I do with his *apology*? I shouldn't have flirted with him. I wanted his attention. I wanted him to kiss me; what does that say about me? Sometimes, when I felt really self-destructive, I would unwaveringly, outright blame myself for being a tease, for wanting him, for being female. I had been programmed along the way, as a girl, as a woman, to instinctively criticize my part in this curse. Later, in my early 20's, when I began counseling rape survivors, I would still hold the heaviness of what happened and occasionally pick apart my culpability in what occurred in that Holiday Inn so many years ago. Combating the shame, guilt, and damaging self thought was still a daily struggle, even though I now knew the rhetoric and the statistics and had a deeper understanding of my perceived place in our patriarchal society.

I did not disclose, discuss, or acknowledge what happened to me that summer for over a year. In my waking life, it had simply not taken place. I had no such memories. My dreams were haunted by sounds and voices back then. I hated to sleep and often opted to stay awake for days on end. When I finally opened my mouth about that summer, it came out in a torrent of screams and panic, spastic speech.

I had been with a group of friends and my current boyfriend was teasingly chasing me across a field, with the rest of the pack close behind. He grabbed my wrist, turning me around, and as I frantically began pulling away, instantly becoming anxious, he grabbed the other wrist. At that moment, I could feel the anxiety and terror creeping through my body, rushing out in the form of tears and creating flashes of scorching fever rushing through my chest, neck, and face. The more I fought him to let go, the more conquered I felt, the more the tears ran, and the more I knew I was in peril. My begging him not to hurt me, buckling my knees, creating dead weight, must have stunned him into letting go. As soon as he did, I dropped to the earth, staining my jeans with grass and dirt, and took off running in the opposite direction.

The shaken crowd, including my bewildered beau, did not follow. I ran into a nearby department store and barricaded myself in the handicap stall of the women's restroom. I eventually realized where I was, and what had happened. I sobbed on the floor for many minutes, shaken and ashamed. Sometime later, one of my oldest friends found me in the back stall of Sear's Department Store. She begged me to let her in and when I did not, she crawled under the door. After a moment of crying on her lap while she stroked my hair, she asked for understanding. I told her; I told her everything I remembered. She displayed no signs of shock or surprise; her face, while thoughtful, showed instead a genuine expression of indifference. She merely handed me a string of toilet paper squares and said, "It happens to all of us eventually. It's okay. You just have to move on." Seconds later, she got up off the ground, reached out her hand, as a gesture to help me up, and simply stated, "Let's go. Everyone's waiting." The fact that her smile seemed sincere made my oncoming nausea that much more potent.

Claiming Anger: Moving Toward Reclamation

Pamela Fletcher (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005) in *Transforming a Rape Culture*, discusses a personal story in which she was accosted by a man in a bar who refused to listen to her when she sternly told him to let go of her. The shock and teachable moment for her came in two waves of realization. The first was that her body was viewed as property, and the man who felt he had a claim to it disregarded her completely, only backing down when another man came to *claim* her. The other realization that took her by surprise was that the women she was with did nothing to protect her or to stop the man from accosting her. The women later justified the man's violating behavior by telling Fletcher that this happened "because (she) was so exotic looking." Hearing women accept and expect to be subjugated to the worst displays of sexist behavior continues to anger me into action. I spent years apologizing to myself for my part in *letting* my attack happen to me. I wallowed in sadness and turmoil, I tried to ignore that piece of my life story, and I lived in fear and terror of what was around the corner. But, none of that self-loathing, disparaging, and detrimental mindset made that piece of me disappear—that foreign object that exists attached to my spine, gripping my core, yet sitting just below the surface. I regularly fight the urge to cut it out, knowing that I cannot, but still desperately wanting to do so. No action or inaction could change what happened years ago. So I decided to accept this change in me. No, not accept, endure and acknowledge this foreign part of me that I cannot expunge.

The acknowledgement of this change in me, of this newly crafted me, was a painful process. I had to start by learning to tolerate small glimpses of this new woman, barely glancing at her through my peripheral vision when passing shiny surfaces. As the ongoing façade began to fade, I began to spend time staring at this new being with intention. These moments were the hardest, assessing the damages and tolerating the outcome, often leading to sobbing emotion and eventually into the resemblance of strength. My identity had changed, someone had altered it without authorization, and I was left staring at what first seemed like scraps. It took a long time for me to recognize myself in the bits and pieces left over. I fought myself, my thoughts, with a purposive determination to claim this new me. Once I shifted my mindset from sole views of

wreckage to an active resolve of endurance and ownership, I surprisingly found myself smiling at my reflection, almost smirking at my newly established strength.

In owning who I am, all parts of who I am, I am making myself whole again. I am focused on helping other women go back to being whole. Lisa Cosgrove, in a book review of "After Silence: Rape and My Journey Back," quotes Nancy Raine, "I could not dwell within myself as I once had. I was, I now understand, homeless" (Cosgrove, 1999, p. 22). The description of homelessness I take to mean a disconnect, a divide, with who you were and who you are post-rape. I am no longer, what Raine terms, my pre-assault self (Cosgrove, 1999). I must live with who I am now and continue each day to assure that I am whole, complete, unbroken. Healing this type of open wound is not easy, but with each outcry of outrage, angst, and truth it becomes easier to live with, a little easier to incorporate in my identity. Rape and sexual terrorism survivors must be given room to speak, to scream, to protest. By writing my story, by assigning words to the violating act he did to me, I somehow feel a power shift takes place. I can still determine my story; I can still determine who I become. I did not relinquish that, and as long as I continue to voice my experience, the healing continues and the power remains mine.

Inside Out Intersections: Personal, Political, Professional

I have worked with survivors of sexual violence since 1999. As social workers, we are often first responders to the terrors women live through. We must not perpetuate the silence of our sisters. A rich understanding of the initial shame and guilt society can burden rape survivors with is a must. We must understand the dichotomy that is felt by rape survivors when they begin to voice their stories and are told to "move on" or to "get over it." We must further understand that the very people who say they support us may give us the impression that it is too hard for *them* when we talk about it (Cosgrove, 1999). Social workers and therapists need to make an active effort not to shy away from this characterization. Social workers must make training and understanding a priority. The importance of survivors being believed and heard are not myths. A basic comprehension of myths, facts, and common best practices is crucial.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) released its related policy statements in the 2006 book *Social Work Speaks*. Within this public and professional policy statement on "Women's Issues," NASW calls for all social workers to actively screen for violence against women in all psycho-social assessments. The standardization of such screening could assist in breaking the silence of survivors by providing an opening to begin the healing process with the assistance of a professional, and by systematically informing survivors that they are not alone in this recovery. Furthermore, the NASW, in its policy on "Crime Victim Assistance," advocates for the mandated and continuous funding of Victim of Crime Assistance (VOCA), including government payments for rape kits and sexually transmitted disease testing. Increasing and assuring VOCA funding would guarantee survivors some financial support, allowing their energy to be focused toward their healing process.

My inner optimist wants to believe that these and similar policy changes will themselves call for some form of systemic change, decreasing sexual violence against women, but the daily work reveals a need for something more drastic, more demanding. With my voice and recent reclamation, I would like to join past revolutionaries in their cries, imploring men to stand up and take on accountability for their brethren. Andrea Dworkin explained it best in her speech, "I Want a Twenty-Four Hour Truce during Which There is No Rape" (1983). Dworkin takes the view that women have been fighting this fight continuously and that there is no time left. "We don't have forever. Some of us don't have another week or another day to take time for you to discuss whatever it is that will enable you to go out into those streets and do something. We are very close to death. All women are." She argues that men have to

talk to other men and that until this occurs the ongoing brutalization of women will continue. I too am tired of picking up the pieces, my pieces, other women's pieces—it never ends. Men addressing men are not only needed but are crucial to ending sexual terrorism. Dworkin implores men to begin by drawing a truce for twenty-four hours; I am willing to start with an hour.

According to the 2006 Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), quoting the Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey, there were 272,350 sexual assaults reported in 2006. This equates to a sexual assault taking place about every two minutes in the United States.[1] With the frequency of sexual violence being this high, it is hard to understand how I could have felt so alone for so many years. We need to talk to each other about rape and sexual violence. We need to discuss sexual violence with our male co-workers, co-advocates, family members, and community. We need to help others facilitate their coming out process, rediscovering their wholeness or entirety after the attack. I need to reclaim my power, and writing about my process and my story continues me on my healing journey. I vow to eternally acknowledge all of myself, and to use my freshly retrieved power to bring about awareness of the daily struggle. I can no longer sit in silence, and I seek to help others harvest their own anger, by transforming it into action.

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(Footnotes)

[1] This statistic does not include children 12 years old and younger.

Social Worker, Therapist, Burner: The Journey of the Wounded Healer

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This narrative explores the author's experiences as a professional social worker and a member of a local "Burning Man" community. The author's experiences in becoming a wounded healer are summarized. The "Burning Man" festival and subculture are briefly explained. The intersection of these two facets of identity generates benefits and challenges. Benefits include closure on the journey of the wounded healer, congruent aspects of Burner culture and social work values, and increased therapeutic efficacy. Particular challenges include potential unintended overexposure of clients to therapist's personal material and discrimination against members of a somewhat controversial subculture. Potential ethical resolutions of the inherent dilemmas are explored.

An Introduction: Beginnings, Background, and Burning

The year is 1982. I skulk into the corner of the junior high girls' locker room. Not only am I the only one there without the adorable 1980's "preppy" look, but I am also the only girl who doesn't wear makeup. My efforts to hide are unsuccessful: the torment begins again. It widens the gulf between me and my peers, increasing my certainty that I will never be accepted anywhere.

It's 26 years later. I am still wide awake at 4:30 a.m. The cold air of the Nevada desert is mercifully still—for the moment. We leave a 700-mile journey behind us as our truck finally rolls off the pavement and onto the parched prehistoric lake bed known as the playa. Several hours later, intense winds will kick up, causing total whiteout conditions as the air saturates with the tan-white dust that most of us regard as sacred. For now, at the main gate and again at the greeter's station, happy enthusiastic people bound towards us. They are garbed in goggles, colorful fake fur, and bright neon lights (EL wire). They swallow us up in huge loving hugs and they exclaim, "Welcome Home!" In the distance, The Man stands silent, a benevolent guard over the blossoming city, his neon-lit outline in contrast with the deep darkness of the desert sky.

As a child I was tormented and ostracized by my peers, from second or third grade through high school graduation. I grew up in a conservative, conformist town, which had little tolerance for interpersonal difference. I know first-hand what it feels like to be deeply lonely, uncertain of myself and of ever finding a place in society. Although I excelled in academics and athletics, I went home nearly every day feeling badly about myself. I believe my story is one of millions of examples of the isolation and damage unintentionally perpetrated by generally well-intentioned people and the norms of mainstream society.

One high school friendship afforded me the blessed relief of learning about interpersonal connection and "emotional nutrients." As graduation approached, I realized that I could receive a regular paycheck for creating healing relationships with other human beings through the helping professions. Then, there was no looking back. Of course, I was quite rough around the edges; and, despite my good intentions, I was unprepared to be a professional helper. Regardless of this predicament, the opportunity was offered to me at the age of 19 at the first of many "counseling" agencies without licensed supervision. Many of my rough edges smoothed over with the passage of time, extensive therapy, professional training, and ongoing personal effort. Still, as I started to

enter the discipline of psychotherapy, the remnants of my childhood social challenges became more apparent. Overall, I was doing well, but I was dismissed from an MSW internship (despite, by my supervisor's report, good clinical work) for not fitting in well with the rest of the staff. Mr. Spock, my childhood hero from *Star Trek*, once said, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few…or the one." I understood the need for social norms. But, like so many others I would meet later in life, I had run smack into the aspects that (arguably) benefitted the many at the expense of one. I was a wannabe healer whose own healing from this collision was missing some key components.

Today, however, at the age of 40, I am a proud and enthusiastic social worker. I'm a clinical psychotherapist in private practice, and a professor of social work at CSULB. I am also a Burner, that is, someone who has internalized and practices the tenets of the Burning Man subculture. This article interweaves conventional expository and narrative formats. It explores the rich benefits and challenges inherent in the intersections of these two co-existing facets of my identity as therapist and Burner. One benefit is the subculture's inherent potential for healing, which I illustrate using stories from my own narrative as a "wounded healer." Two particularly salient challenges are the potential for unintentional overexposure of my clients to material from my personal life; and the potential for being judged negatively as a member of a controversial subculture. As such, this article represents the most concrete and wide-ranging step I've taken in my own "coming out" process as a member of this vibrant, if often misunderstood community.

What is Burning Man?

"Trying to explain what Burning Man is to someone who has never been to the event is a bit like trying to explain what a particular color is to someone who is blind [from birth]" (Burning Man, 2008a,b).

Imagine you are put upon a desert plain, a space which is so vast and blank that only your initiative can make of it a place. Imagine it is swept by fearsome winds and scorching temperatures, and only by your effort can you make of it a home. Imagine you're surrounded by thousands of other people, that together you form a city, and that within this teeming city there is nothing that's for sale (Harvey, 2000).

Burning Man is an annual festival of art, music, culture, community, and self-expression. It's also a city: Black Rock City, Nevada, U.S.A. An experiment in temporary community, it is the only full-fledged city in the United States that exists for only one week out of each year. The city has its own post office, mayor, Department of Public Works, radio station, Rangers, and two daily newspapers. On another level, it encompasses a year-round subculture present around the world, with regional representatives on five continents (Burning Man, 2008a,b). The Burners I've befriended here in Los Angeles are, essentially, my chosen family.

Participation in Burning Man tends to encourage internalization of new norms, values, and worldviews. Returning home from the festival "…you'll take the world you built with you. When you drive back down the dusty roads toward home, you slowly reintegrate to the world you came from. You feel in tune with the other dust-covered vehicles that shared the same community. Over time, vivid images still dance in your brain, floating back to you when the weather changes. The Burning Man community, whether your friends, your new acquaintances, or the Burning Man project, embraces you. At the end, though your journey to and from Burning Man are finished, you embark on a different journey — forever." (Steenson, 2008).

Burner Subculture and Clinical Work Converge

Having stayed awake well past dawn both Friday and Saturday nights, participating enthusiastically in local Burner parties, I fear that Monday is going to be a real challenge. Five clients, office hours, my two-hour class, and my biweekly peer supervision-case consult group loom over me as my alarm clock sounds—altogether too early! As consciousness returns reluctantly, my mind flashes back to images of the weekend: long heart-to-heart conversations, group "cuddle

puddles," and dancing to beautiful music. Every time I participate in various Burner events with my chosen family, I feel the healing of my old wounds of exclusion. It's a physical sensation in my chest: almost like the "good pain" of a sore muscle being massaged. As I stretch my weary legs this Monday morning, I notice that, inexplicably, my body feels really good. I sail through the day on a magic carpet of very good, positive energy. My work with clients, students and colleagues feels at least as effective as usual, if not more so. I may be physically tired; but my batteries are completely charged.

I walk to work, strolling through some of the beautiful parkland between my home and office. My mind is trying to sift through my counter transference to one particular family with whom I just started working. They seem very constrained and I sense that they keep looking at me strangely! By this point in my career, I am familiar with the potential for this particular counter transference spiral: When interacting with people I see as conservative or judgmental, I start my internal "outsider" thinking: "I am weird, no good and everything is my fault."

Then, I think of my Burner friends: undoing the poisonous early programming that "strange" or "unusual" inherently equals "defective." I think of Christian, my tall friend with sparkling blue eyes who's frequently clad in a kilt. His creativity and infectious sense of fun has manifested itself in a long and successful career as a toymaker and creator of Hollywood props. I think of my friend Scott, whose playa name, Open Heart, is so very descriptive of his general approach to life. His customary manner of dress, indescribable due to spatial constraints, defies all conventions, even those of cross-dressing. Although his default world experience sometimes involves being dismissed at first glance due to his appearance, this man is a brilliant writer, a highly skilled parent and a sharp and loyal friend. I think of his girlfriend, a married woman in an openly polyamorous relationship. She's a practicing witch, a musician in a rock band, a mother of two, and one of the most brilliant and compassionate organizers I've ever met.

With this inside-reflection, my counter transference spiral is halted. My insider life experience brings me back to my social work values of celebrating diversity. I regain my self-confidence and have a successful session with my new clients.

Later, my client, 23 years old, athletic, and depressed, slinks into my office, looking completely defeated. Twenty-five minutes of the usual ventilation, analysis and problem-solving get us nowhere. Her energy is low and she can't get out of her head: inside her self-defeat. "C'mon," I say, grabbing a few hula hoops from my wall. "Let's go to the park." Outside, birds are singing and the scent of native plants fills the air. Within ten minutes, I have taught my client how to hoop (a skill I learned through Burner subculture). My client is hooping and laughing. There's color in her face. Her energy is flowing and she's grounded in her body again. Inside and outside emerge.

Burning: Inside and Outside Benefits

Participation in the year-round culture of Burning Man has acted as a midwife, helping me externalize and practice multiple potentials that may not have otherwise surfaced. My personal growth and participation have made me into a much better social worker, therapist, and human being.

Increase in my personal support network: My many Burner friendships tend to be extremely nourishing, since the subculture attracts society's "cultural creatives," most of whom I have found to be unusually warm, open, and accepting. I have found this experience to be the perfect antidote for the girl who never fit in, giving me what I need in order to support my clients. My research for my Master's thesis indicated that social workers who don't maintain a strong network of support are more vulnerable to burnout (Bell, 2000). From experience, I teach my students that self-care is a prerequisite for effective social work practice; and that positive life experience greatly enhances professional functioning.

Understanding substance use: Although I'm sometimes loathe to admit it, I grew up a "good little girl." I have yet to smoke a

cigarette, taste alcohol, or indulge in any other recreational drugs aside from caffeine (and I don't plan to do so). In 1993, I was certified in Substance Abuse Counseling. The focus on the pathological use of substances intensified my untested beliefs from childhood. Needless to say, this worldview didn't exactly match those of many of my clients. As a Burner, I have come to know many functional, even brilliant, people who use various substances recreationally (as well as some who have had problems with it). I've learned that substance use does not always equal substance abuse. This understanding was a huge surprise, conditioned as I was to equate drinking/drug use with emotional unavailability, irresponsibility, physical ruin, and other sorry consequences. I've learned that many people seek, and receive, deep spiritual experiences through their use of illicit substances. I think the overall picture and practice of substance use is as complex and varied as human diversity itself. I have never, and will never, indulge in such usage myself, and I certainly don't promote it. However, I now have a much more experienced ear for listening to the details of a client's substance usage.

Positive effects of self-disclosure to clients: Since therapy is about the client and not about me, I am quite careful about when and to whom I disclose my participation in Burning Man. But, doing so can have beneficial effects. For example, a 65-year-old woman ventilated to me about her anxiety related to her adult daughter going to the playa for the first time. To her astonishment, I pulled out my necklace (a charm of The Man) from underneath my shirt and disclosed my own participation and general experience. My client was able to process some of her fears and receive new information; her new understanding ultimately brought her closer to her daughter. Another of my clients is a 37-year-old, rather fearsome looking punk rocker with severe issues of social anxiety, alienation, and being misunderstood. My first-hand knowledge of what it's like to be a member of a subculture, look upon the world with different eyes, and at times experience prejudice has greatly improved my understanding of this client and others. This fellow's understanding that I have been to Burning Man, and that he may run into me at an underground dance club one day, has helped him relax his defenses and engage in more authentic therapy with me. At the same time, I model that, although I am a member of an underground subculture, I am professional and competent at work. I should also note that having my hair in tight braids, a Burner tradition described below, has helped me build common experience and rapport with some of my African American clients.

Some of my growth is best explored in conjunction with some of the ten Principles of Burning Man. Space constraints prevent me from exploring each principle in depth, so I have chosen the most salient. A complete list and explanation of the Ten Principles can be found at: http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/principles.html.

Radical Self-Expression: As someone who grew up "different" from most of the other kids and took a daily emotional beating for it, I entered Burner culture with a lot of learned inhibitions. On playa, I've received permission to be silly, uninhibited, loving, spontaneous, and joyful. At Burning Man, I see people suddenly bounding into cartwheels on the playa. Some people become green and blue by dipping themselves in dye-filled kiddy pools like giant Easter eggs. I see giant "art cars" painstakingly fashioned into fire-breathing dragons, covered wagons, birthday cakes, dead cows, grinning Cheshire cats, and even the Golden Gate Bridge. I've ridden a floating magic carpet and (dressed as a bear) been "caught" by the Black Rock City Animal Control. (They caged me for a while, tagged me, and then released me.) I've experienced light saber battles, Monkey Chants, and Million Bunny Marches. (Did you ever see thousands of people stampeding about dressed as bunny rabbits? I highly recommend it!) Now, I watch other people model joyful emotional freedom—contrary to contemporary standard practice—and that gives me permission to start gently dipping my own foot into those waters. My "inner child" has joyfully come out to play. I've integrated pockets of myself long walled off and greatly reduced my childhood tendency to dissociate under stress. My own growth process continues. In

the meantime, I've integrated this intuitive understanding into my therapy practice *every day*. In my experience, a person's ability to access and experience the deep joy of the inner child, is the very best buffer against depression. This experience enables me to facilitate my clients' journeys home to their own sense of wonder and joy.

Radical Inclusion: "Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community" (Burning Man, 2008b). I avoid cliques, particularly after my rather rough experiences perpetually being on the outside of them. But we all have the seeds of exclusion within us. Now that I've internalized a subculture where everyone is welcome, I have a constant reminder to relax my judgments and be more loving and inclusive towards people, especially strangers. I am reminded to take everyone seriously rather than retreating behind that wall of separation and judgment.

Gifting: Burner culture places a high value on gifting. Larry Harvey, the founder of Burning Man, explains: "When you give a gift or receive a gift from someone, it creates an immediate moral bond with them, this feeling of human connection. In some sense, their life energy enters into you, and that, of course, is where community begins" (Harvey, 2000). Gifting has helped me move out of a mentality of scarcity and into my internal generosity. It's built my sense of community and joy in sharing. I have a favorite kind of toy, small rubber balls of various bright colors, with rubber "hair" and smiley faces. A blinky light inside activates when it's shaken. (Burners are fascinated with blinky lights.) I call them "Happy Blinky Things," and giving them to my clients (they cost only about 50 cents each). They provide a transitional object and also immediate access to their inner child, as evidenced by the huge happy smiles on their faces!

Self-sufficiency and *Leave No Trace*: When you head out to the playa, you have to bring *everything* you will need for a week. The desert is a harsh mistress; she will teach you very quickly if your shelter or supplies are insufficient. Through these preparations and journeys, I have learned that really, the buck stops with me. I am responsible for my own outcomes, in a way that's far more concrete and direct than we can usually observe in everyday society. Items I have forgotten are usually gifted, freely and cheerfully—but that isn't the point. It was my responsibility, darn it, and I should have brought it! Furthermore, I do not look to other people to clean up my mess for me. Such experiences have given me a sharp clarity about individual responsibility that I pass on to my clients in a myriad of ways, not the least of which is being much less likely to unquestioningly buy into sad tales of (sometimes self-created) woe.

Immediacy: How much time do you spend "in your head" on any given day? Well, wake up! What (and who) is around you, *right now*? What is happening inside of you? Being at Burning Man takes me out of my head and into the immediate moment. So often, we let so many precious moments of our lives just slip by. In a culture that's pathologically avoidant of our mortality, we suffer from the illusion that we have the luxury of letting time slip by unsavored.

In my social work practice, this awareness has reawakened the deep, wonderful work of existential psychotherapy as conveyed by Irvin Yalom (1998, 2002). This learning has allowed me to help clients access clinical material that wouldn't have otherwise been available. It also translates to a strong interest in experiential therapy. Through my own experiences, I've come to believe that traditional talk therapy, while crucial, is not sufficient. I want to be able to address multiple levels of my client's brain and mind, not just the neocortex—which is rarely the root of the problem anyway. By the time this article is published, I will be receiving training in Somatic Experiencing Therapy™, which helps the client attune to immediate somatic sensations to access and clear repressed emotions. Before Burning Man, I wouldn't have considered or understood the need for these interventions.

Decommodification: Isn't this a core value of social work? Today's intense materialism can be very challenging. Through peer pressure and advertising, consumerism has worked its way into the very core of the

family, as children and adolescents desire to fit in, and parents feel compelled to buy more than they can afford. Advertisers are shockingly pervasive, sophisticated, and slick; worse, "cool is socially exclusive," not available to everyone (Schor, 2005). Schwimme (2005) argues that consumerism has become more important than religion or cosmology in forming the worldview of children. Larry Harvey (2000) asserts that such materialistic pressures directly erode mood, mental health, and human relations:

> *All around us and within us a feeling of lurking anomie persists....Symptoms of this deep unease pervade our society. The spread of materialistic values has contributed to a moral coarsening and a growing cynicism in our country. Within a manipulative world all motives seem venal, all efforts illusory. But at a deeper level, it is the commodifying of imagination itself, the moral passivity, the social isolation, the angst that is generated by living in a solipsistic world of fraudulent satisfactions that is producing the greatest evil.*

I find it refreshing and re-grounding to step into a space, however temporary and imperfect, that tries to stand squarely against thoughtless, automatic consumption. No money exchanges hands (with two exceptions, ice and coffee sales). Participants are strongly encouraged to cover up any corporate logos on their vehicles or possessions. Reusing, recycling, and creating art from salvaged materials is all greatly encouraged. Most importantly, people are "cool" because of who they are, not because of income or possessions. I liken the experience to the clear vision from cleaning my eyeglasses after leaving them dirty for a while.

Challenges: Potential Negative Impacts for a Therapist in the Burner Subculture

Being a helping professional and a Burner presents with some challenges, some of which are rather unique. I welcome a client back into my office and settle down in my chair as she begins to recount her week's adventures. We have a strong therapeutic bond; and it's been wonderful to watch her shake off the shackles of her depression and engage in serious growth. Now I hear that her best friend, a long-time Burner, plans to move to our city. I maintain active listening and my outer façade, even as my thoughts form some dawning realizations: this friend is sure to dive into our local Burn community. Oh, God! She'll probably bring this client to some of our parties.

Okay. Radical Inclusion: welcome the stranger. I think we can negotiate that, with some discussion of boundaries. But what about an ex-boyfriend of mine who has transformed into quite the charmer, racking up notches on his bedpost at an amazing rate. What if my emotionally vulnerable client has sex with my ex-boyfriend? That's really too close for comfort. How am I going to help her process the issues when he inevitably moves on to the next woman? And furthermore, what sort of distorted information about me might thus find its way back to my client? How could that compromise the therapeutic relationship and my client's journey to wholeness?

Potential for unwanted intimate social contacts with clients: As noted in the above vignette, several of my clients are now saying they want to go to Burning Man, having discovered the festival through other sources. In most cases, I want them to have the experience: the joy, the freedom, the permission to be fully themselves. As master therapist Yalom (1998) puts it, "Anything that challenges the patient's permanent view of the world can serve as a fulcrum with which the therapist can wedge open the patient's defenses and permit him a view of life's existential innards" (p. 241). At the same time, this experience is a new exercise for me in negotiating therapeutic boundaries. It is axiomatic in the helping professions that conditions of boundary enmeshment, such as client overexposure to therapist material, or dual relationships

between helper and client, create a high risk of emotional damage to the client (Reamer, 2001). However, participation in a small subculture has several overlaps with boundary issues of social work in small rural towns—where in some ways, close contact is unavoidable, and practitioners proceed with extreme caution and careful monitoring. Yalom (2002) noted that "All comments must pass one test: Is this disclosure in the best interests of the patient?" (p. 87).

What if my clients see me running around naked? Or in a workshop that explores some aspect of sacred sexuality? Or sobbing at the Temple, grieving my losses? Or, if they become involved in my radically inclusive chosen family? On the other hand, I suspect that my familiarity with the more hedonistic aspects of the culture (e.g., pockets of unrestrained drug use and sexual activity) put me in a unique position to help a client with weak ego strength, as well as understand and avoid aspects of the subculture that could trigger uncontained and detrimental behaviors. Indeed, I recently engaged a young raver client in a nonpathologizing rehearsal of self-protective strategies.

Fortunately, I have not yet actually encountered any of the abovementioned troublesome issues. I have given these matters much thought, however, and have come to several conclusions. First, being a therapist, or any type of public servant, does not negate one's birthright to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," as our Founding Fathers would say. Not only am I unwilling to engage in the high level of self-sacrifice to give up my Burner culture, but I shouldn't have to do so. Second, I conclude that a reasoned push through my own barriers (not in the presence of clients!) is personally beneficial and also helps me understand more aspects of the human condition. We all know that the best therapy we can offer utilizes all levels of our own experience and understanding: it's top down and bottom up, inside and outside simultaneously. That's the essence of "use of self." Third, I draw upon the existential component of my theoretical orientation. Existential psychotherapy emphasizes universality in the concerns of navigating human existence. We are all "fellow travelers" (Yalom, 2002, p. 6) on the road of life. Staying grounded in the commonality of human experience, without negating proper clinical boundaries, helps me to disarm the internal sting or drama of a breach of my personal life and to move towards simply dealing with it in the most effective manner that I can.

And so, after much careful consideration, and consultation with other Burner helping professionals, I have composed the following general guidelines to deal with potential boundary breach. In some respects they are similar to the ethical guidelines offered by Munke and Fulmer (2004) regarding coping with boundary issues in rural social work:

(1) Upon hearing of a client's impending participation in Burner culture, disclose my own participation and attempt to negotiate specific interactional boundaries that would protect the client from exposure to my personal material, to the greatest extent possible, with minimal compromise to the client's experience. This session would include exploring the possibility of an ethically mandated termination (and referral) in case the client's world begins to overlap mine more than incidentally. Maximal attention would be paid to the client's needs, including his/her emotional reactions to my disclosure and to the possibility of termination. In this way, clear expectations would be established as well as a mechanism for coping with pitfalls that may occur despite best intentions.

(2) Given the specifics of the situation, explore within myself, and in peer consultation, what kinds of overlap could be ignored, what could be processed safely and effectively in session, and what would mandate the abovementioned termination and referral. Obviously, any substantial client involvement in my closer relationships, such as sexual contact with an ex-boyfriend, would most likely mandate termination and referral, as would persistent client initiation of one-on-one social involvement with the therapist.

(3) In the case of unforewarned client appearance in my Burner social life: follow client's lead regarding whether to greet him or her; maintain client confidentiality even if

client chooses to disclose the nature of our relationship; withdraw from the particular situation as soon as (nondisruptively) possible; and process the issue with client in session as soon as possible; use my existential orientation to refrain from "freaking out;" stay calm and grounded; and attend to the client's needs (as well as mine, albeit internally!) in processing whatever issues arise.

(4) Seek consultation and peer support as frequently as warranted to address my own emotional needs, to maintain grounding and clarity, and to avoid the distortions of counter transference.

Prejudice and judgment: The realities of the default world mandate that I use discretion in my self-disclosures or "coming out." Mainstream culture harbors considerable prejudice against the party scene, which in actuality is composed of multiple subcultures. We Burners are joined by ravers, Goths, Deadheads, Renaissance Faire folks, the fetish crowd, various drug subcultures, and I don't know what else. The boundaries are blurred, not distinct, but there are indeed boundaries, albeit unseen by many in the mainstream. The assumption is usually that "Burning Man" is shorthand for unchecked hedonism, writhing orgies, and reckless adultery and drug abuse to the point of oblivion. While I know that pockets of such abandon do exist at Burning Man—that's *not* me!

Personally, I think the most essential elements of Burning Man are embodied in the abovementioned Ten Principles. Still, the minds of many are already closed, particularly when such assumptions trigger backlash from cultural or religious mandates against hedonistic activities. Before writing this article, I had tended to keep my Burner identity as underground as possible, due to fear of scorn and, especially, fear of being discredited as a professional. More recently, I have decided that the prejudice of others is a reality that I have to live with; and that compromising myself to such pressures isn't a sacrifice I am willing to make. Furthermore, I've concluded that I can effectively advocate for diversity in demonstrating competent professionalism without "closeting" this aspect of myself.

My physical appearance: Many Burner women (and some men) follow a tradition of hair braiding before "going home" each August. Tight braids make hair care much easier on playa. At Burning Man, everything is art; and so most braided Burners show up with a beautiful array of color and texture braided into their hair. For me, it's part of pushing my traditional boundaries of appearance, beauty, and femininity. I was excited to have the chance to participate in this tradition. That is, until I notified the owner of the group practice in which I work and he said, "It just has to be professional." By which he meant, no hippie-dippie colors and textures! I was furious towards Matt for imposing some restrictions on my braiding, my experience. And I was flustered about being suddenly reduced to a rebellious teenager, asserting my preferences for personal appearance against an oppressive parent. Then I began to worry: The braids were such a departure from my usual "look," and they are not generally worn by Caucasians. Would he freak out about that, too? In the end, I went with long, waist-length braids of my own natural blonde, without any color woven in. My pulse was racing in the moments before he first saw my new braids. "Here goes," I said to myself. "My personal integrity versus my livelihood." As it turned out, he barely broke stride. "Cool!" he said, and continued heading to the bathroom. I did a little collapse in my therapy chair.

Conclusions, Continuations, and Community

"Welcome Home," they say to all new arrivals at the Greeters' Station. The first time I heard that, I didn't get it. This immense, intimidating place wasn't my home! Well ... now it is. And now I "get" it. The most important thing Burning Man has done for me is that it has brought me home to myself, within myself: huge progress in my archetypical journey of the wounded healer. Since our profession draws so heavily upon the personal resources of the practitioner, this process has unquestionably made me into a better therapist and social worker. True, my new lifestyle is fraught with challenges, some of which are rather unique. Also, the social environment in

practice definitely has its flaws; it doesn't always live up to the ideals I've enthusiastically promoted. But all in all, my participation in the subculture of Burning Man has provided me with an entirely new perspective on social norms and on myself. Despite the hazards, I wouldn't trade the personal and professional growth for anything.

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Church Burns: Healing the Black Gay Experience

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The author of this narrative is a 30-year-old, black, gay man. This narrative is a reflection on his experience developing and defining his own sense of self and identity, while being shaped by family, church community, and environment. Sharing personal experiences promotes a better understanding for the relationship between the black church and the black queer community. As background to his personal experience, this narrative offers a brief historical context of the black church. The church is foundational in the development of black culture in America, thus impacting the black queer experience and the author's "coming out" experience.

Genesis to Revelations

I grew up with a stern and traditional Pentecostal Church upbringing, surrounded by oppressive and contradicting forces, within both my community and my family. At times I found myself in conflict and often confused; however, I was clear about one fact: the need for unconditional love and support of family. Both in school and in church, I received clear messages of right and wrong. I was taught the "law of the land" and "God's Law," all of which I had to obey.

However, some of my family and loved ones skewed these lines every day; selling drugs and participating in gangs, violence, and other illicit activities. Though my parents disagreed with the actions of most of my brothers, cousins, and other extended family (engaging in illicit activities), they stressed that they were still family. Though my parents judged them, often reminding them of the errors of their ways, they were still welcomed and accepted by the family. My father offered our house as a sanctuary. They were always welcomed, but no drugs, violence, or drama were allowed in or around the house. Family was valued and cherished above all.

The principles, values, and ethics bestowed upon me by my family and church community fostered a sense of self and self-identity. I knew who I was based upon my family and my community affiliations. I was a reflection of my family and community influences. Therefore, my identity and values were based upon their expectations. I remember listening to the pastor of our church with open ears and an open heart, eager to receive his approval and validation. The pastor would offer clear and infallible life guidelines and goals: "Be Holy, Live Holy. Young people, you have to live for God. Stay away from temptations of the world (e.g., drugs, alcohol, gangs, gays, and other 'perversions')." He would often remind us of the importance of family, respect of and for our community and culture, as well as rejection of anything different that might threaten our family and/or culture.

The black church has traditionally served as a social and spiritual institution for black culture in America. W.E.B. Du Bois, acclaimed educator, African American protest leader, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), references and describes the early black church "as more than mere meeting places, hosting social events, but in fact moral centers of the black community" (as cited in Evans, 2007, p. 289). As this moral center and ethical foundation, the black church has historically accepted key core values: love, inclusiveness, justice, freedom, and equality (Douglas & Hopson, 2000). These values were established under the social and physical oppression of slavery and persecution and seen as sacred and infallible. Coupled with these core values, the black church also embodied contingent values (changing and emerging in response to social and historical circumstances). Historically, these contingent values have reflected what is important for

the black church (community) during the relative era.

In church, I was taught to be obedient. In our obedience to the will of God and our parents, we would receive God's protection and good favor. Throughout most of my pre-adolescence and adolescence, I embraced these expectations, ethics, and values as absolute. I attempted to embody the pastor and church's expectations of an ideal "saved" youth, one who has repented for all sins, living a path of holiness and righteousness and allowing minimal self-reflection and openness to exploring my own thoughts, curiosities, and interests. Anything that failed to fit the mold of an ideal "saved" youth, I had no interest in experiencing. I can remember being afraid that anything outside of what I had been taught threatened my very salvation and cultural preservation.

In high school, most of my peers referred to me as "reverend." I was a leader in my high school choir, and many of my peers confided in me spiritually and emotionally. While seeking peer support and guidance, my peers often disclosed their own adolescent angst and insecurities. I often advised and counseled my peers on issues like dating, pre-marital sex, alcohol, drugs, and, at times, homosexuality. Sadly, I must admit that my counseling and spiritual guidance was merely a shallow reflection of my own oppressive teachings and insecurities. As I look back, I remember restating some very offensive and oppressive biblical proclamations, condemning some of the "out" queer youth at my school. Though I never directly attacked any of these courageous queer youth, it pains me to own my part in perpetuating their oppression, uttering words of church bigotry, hatred, and homophobia. Throughout my charged crusade as a youth minister, I can remember suppressing and battling my own homosexual thoughts, feelings, and curiosities. I cannot begin to count the number of long nights spent praying and repenting for these intense, often arousing, thoughts and feelings.

At the age of 16, I began to openly question my identity, challenging those absolute values I had embraced. In an effort to seek guidance and counsel, I attempted to utilize the only support system I knew, i.e., my family and church. As I began to ask questions about race, culture, sexual development, and sexual orientation, I received a clear message from my church family and community. Any abnormal thoughts, feelings, and interests were wrong, even perverse. Understandably, this created a great deal of confusion and turmoil within. This identity that I had so clearly defined was solely based upon the values, ethics, and teachings of my stern, traditional (homophobic), Pentecostal upbringing. This adolescent identity crisis challenged the very values, ideals, and beliefs that defined my sense of self: If I am gay, then who am I? Can I be black and gay? How can it be? Does God love gays?

Gays in the Church!

Historically, the black church has stood as a cornerstone for Black Culture. Unfortunately, this cornerstone also stands as a physical, spiritual, and political barrier, forcing many black queers out of the church or into the closet. Today, black churches still have a position of prominence and influence over African American men, women, and children (Jewell, 2003). The role of the black church as a moral center has strengthened the black community in some regards, while damaging the social, spiritual, and physical state of black queers.

Growing up in my church, I can still remember the first time I heard the very mention of gay. There was a brother who came to our church religiously. He would often stand in and play for our youth choir whenever our musician was running late (which was often) or just absent. This brother was truly committed to the youth choir. Often he would stay late to go over songs, harmonies, and lyrics.

I cannot recall if he was necessarily "out." However, he had a little switch to his walk and a light lean to his swagger, which of course meant to everyone, without ever asking, that

he was gay. I remember being ill advised of his "tendencies" in Sunday school. Our teacher would say, "Ya'll watch out for that brother. I don't want none of you in the bathroom by yourselves with him. And don't you touch nothing that he touches. If he comes in the bathroom, ya'll just come on out." I can remember my father (who is a church usher), coming in and supervising the bathroom on occasion, specifically whenever this brother happened to take a bathroom break. It was as if they were worried that we would "catch gay." As I look back, I am embarrassed and saddened by the level of ignorance and insensitivity taught to the church's children and youth. It was not until later years and after his passing that I recognized this brother in Christ for the courageous and remarkable man that he was.

This experience is an excellent example of the black church's failure to adhere to its founding core values, and, instead, giving way to secular hysteria, hatred, and homophobia as its contingent values. This discrepancy in values has caused a great deal of conflict within the black church, as well as some ambivalence towards social issues (e.g., queer rights, homophobia, women's rights, HIV and AIDS education/prevention, etc.). This conflict has resulted in the black church's hypocritical stance for social justice on one front, while opposing the rights of others on another front.

Leviticus Faggot

I came out at the age of sixteen and was immediately ostracized by my church family and immediate family. Upon coming out, my father explained, "There won't be any of this sick stuff in my house. I don't want any faggots living under my roof." Shortly thereafter, I left home and would never live under his roof again. I was no longer welcomed in the very house other family members had considered a sanctuary. How hurtful and ironic that the unconditional love and support afforded to others failed to apply to me because I was gay. As for my church family, which had been my entire community, I was an abomination. I thought I had nowhere to turn.

In retrospect, this very rejection has fueled my commitment and understanding for the need of unconditional love and acceptance in the lives of queer youth and adults in the black church. The alienation that I experienced led me on a self-destructive emotional, physical, and spiritual rampage. I can remember a remotely accepting aunt telling me, "You got to live your life for God and come to your own understanding of salvation. Without that, you will be lost." At the time, I could not begin to comprehend the truth to her statement.

Shortly after leaving my father's house—I refer to my childhood home as my father's house because my mother refused to take part in or perpetuate my father's ignorance or intolerance—I left for college in New Orleans. In my first college experience, I found myself seeking a redefinition of self. Unfortunately, I attempted to define myself by what I thought were the highlights, as portrayed in popular culture, of the gay experience (e.g., reckless sexual exploration, drugs, parties, clubs, etc.). I sought the frivolous ideal of what was my understanding of "gay" by popular culture. I discarded anything and everything that resembled my prior teachings of ethics and values. The very foundation that I once stood upon seemed to have been stripped away; the mystique behind the cloak of my faith was gone. Without this foundation, I found myself searching to become something or someone else. I didn't know who I was or who I wanted to become. I gave in to what I thought was a fast and fabulous "gay life" of fun, drugs, sex, and clubs. Desperately seeking to become "grand" and "fabulous," I found myself adrift. I was lost in a fast lifestyle.

Without the family that once defined who I was, I struggled with defining myself as a gay man, or even a black man. For a time, I did not define myself as gay. I thought "gay" was a popular term used to describe the white majority of the homosexual community. In my community and church experience, I had no positive images and/or understanding of gay. In fact, my only understanding and teachings were based upon ignorance, fear, and bigotry. As an "out" gay man, I also struggled with identifying as a black man, feeling rejected by family, community, and culture.

I often felt that I had to choose, either black or gay. I saw no conjunction or middle

ground between the two. In my experience, the two identities (cultures) were often at odds. Even after coming out, I didn't see blacks valued and celebrated in the gay (white) scene and I definitely didn't see gays (whites) celebrated and valued in the black cultural scene. The tension and dichotomy of minorities and race in the queer movement remains staggering and alarming. However, in order to explore this issue, further research and discussion is required.

Revelations to Genesis: Claiming Wholeness

Over the years, I have grown to be proud of all that I am. I am black and gay, and my God loves me. I must admit that my identity achievement came well after adolescence. In all honesty, I like to believe that I am still learning and developing a greater sense of identity. Today, I continue my work fighting for the lives of minorities and queer alike, as a youth counselor and advocate in the field of social work. I have had the privilege of serving the queer community in various capacities; program coordinator, HIV/AIDS prevention counselor and educator, mentor, and community organizer. As a program and service coordinator for a minority queer youth center, I developed innovative programming while providing individual case management and streamlining the existing referral system. My experience in working with the queer community, particularly queer youth, has afforded me a wealth of knowledge and professional insight. As I am honored to have learned so much, I remain committed to advocating and empowering the lives of queers, both inside and outside of the church.

This reflection is in no way offered as an attack on the black church, nor a definitive account of all black queer experiences in the church. Rather, I offer my narrative as a hopeful account and reflection on the evidence of resiliency and the potential for progress and success. The historical context of the black church should remain as a solid foundation for the black community. However, as we progress, so must our contingent values. Regardless of social and political pressures, the black church must adhere to its key core values: love, inclusiveness, justice, freedom, and equality.

Perhaps understanding the historical construction of the black church and black culture can help the black queer community gain allies in creating social progress and change within the black church, the black community, and other oppressed and disenfranchised communities. Let us not lose another member of our community to oppression, exclusion, or hatred.

Through education and empowerment and adhering to the founding core values, the black church can lead the way for social change, calling for acceptance, inclusion, love, and protection of today's "non-traditional family." I will continue to share my experience, my understanding, and my triumph as a black gay man. I am who I am because of the black church. I am committed to providing under-served communities the tools and opportunities to foster and develop these same core values: love, inclusion, justice, freedom, and equality. My passion, conviction, and dedication in the field of social work all stem from these values. In our struggle, may we continue to rely on our past to direct and inspire our future.

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CALL FOR NARRATIVES

REFLECTIONS
NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Call for Papers:
Special Issue on Work and the Workplace

The Spring 2010 issue of Reflections will explore how social work and other helping professions have taken seriously the role of work and the workplace in the lives of our clients and communities. We are interested in narratives which address work, the workplace, unemployment, job training and supportive services, workplace rehabilitation, corporate philanthropy, and the role of social workers within trade unions and in organizing human service workers into unions. We seek submissions based upon the author's experience related to work and the workplace as broadly conceived, including narratives about the author's role in building the fields of occupational social work and employee assistance programming.

Guest Editor: Michael A. Dover, Cleveland State University School of Social Work

The deadline for submission is December 15, 2009.

Please send submissions to:

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You will be contacted within 30 days of receipt of your manuscript. If you have questions or would like to discuss ideas, you may contact Michael A. Dover at (734)645-6261 or via email at mdover@umich.edu.

Coming Out at Work: A Spiritual Journey

Ann M. Callahan Ph.D., Lincoln Memorial University

This narrative describes the author's experience of revealing her sexual orientation as a social work student, clinician, and professor. Her personal faith was integral to inspiring and guiding her through the coming-out process, which led to a greater sense of wholeness in her life. The process also inspired new insight into the role of spiritual discernment in coming out.

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
John 8:32 NIV

I was in the vesting room preparing for church. Several teenagers were in the room socializing. One of the girls started teasing a boy about wearing plaid deck shoes. She summed it up by saying, "That is so gay." I could not tell if she meant it as an insult or an attempt at flirtation. Nevertheless, my immediate thought was to say that there was nothing wrong with being gay.

I had to think twice before I silently walked away from the situation. I did not feel it was my place to lecture them on being more sensitive to diversity, but I worried about how vulnerable gay teens felt when they heard such comments. I was thankful for feeling comfortable with my sexual orientation, which might have been threatened if not for years of personal growth.

Personal growth has led to professional growth in revealing my sexual orientation at work. Previously, I regularly felt on guard about sharing my personal life at work for fear of rejection. However, hiding my sexual orientation only alienated me from myself and others. Once I started acknowledging my sexual orientation at work, I found that such authenticity helped me forge better relationships with my co-workers.

Therefore, authenticity at work required that I learn how to balance vulnerability and detachment so that I could embrace all of me all the time. At times it was difficult to come out at work, but the benefits have outweighed the consequences. This narrative shows how I have engaged in the coming-out process at work. I share my story so that others may feel inspired to come out in their own way.

A Spiritual Call to Come Out

The integration of my personal identity with my professional identity has been the product of an active spiritual life rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition. Such growth would not have been possible without two realizations: first, I came to believe in a personal God that loved me despite condemnation by others; and second, I felt that I had to live my life as God called me to live, which would require coming out.

My first, most influential, realization was that I believed God knew my heart and only He would determine my salvation. I did not feel condemned by God but, rather, that God created me this way. Through the process of prayer, I determined that one of my spiritual tasks was to accept my sexual orientation. I begged God to save me from this call, but I knew that I had to accept it despite an uncertain future.

The comfort of my contemplative life also needed to give way to the fruition of this call. This second realization meant that I had to fully engage in cultivating authentic relationships with others by coming out. I believed that in order to achieve deeper emotional intimacy with God I had to be more authentic with others. Therefore, I had to risk being open about my sexual orientation with others in order to grow.

It was not until I began to acknowledge my sexual orientation that I learned about the stages of coming out as part of identity

formation. Cass's (1979) Homosexual Identity Model is most comparable to my experience. This model suggests that a person's homosexual identity develops across the following stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis.

I seemed to experience each stage with a return to previous stages depending on the circumstances. Even though my coming out was not always consistent with a linear trajectory (Swann & Anastas, 2003), Cass's stage model is most descriptive of my experience (Stevens, 2004). Hence, this model will be used to frame my remaining reflection on coming out at work as a social work student, clinician, and professor.

Identity Comparison

I always felt different from others, but it was not until after my second year of college that I started to realize why. I was home for the summer when I began to have intense feelings for a co-worker. During our lunch hour, after much trepidation, I gave her the following poem:

Closets

Are you alone with mixed feelings
buried in every empty room
that echoes back at you?
I will show a thousand empty spaces
if you dare to enter.
One must be so careful these days
or fall too deeply
into sudden frost
that could bury our bodies
in the closets
of those one thousand empty rooms.

Anonymous (1989)

She said she could understand and gave me a knowing look. I proceeded to tell her how I felt about her, which was the first time that I acknowledged having feelings for another woman. I never really thought about the consequences of revealing such information, but I felt compelled to express my feelings somehow.

My co-worker admitted her affection for me, but she said she was already in a relationship with another woman. I was so overwhelmed by my feelings and the experience of acknowledging them that her lack of availability seemed of little consequence. For so many years I had tried to hide my feelings for women that I learned to tolerate the isolation that came with it. I realized that I felt more alive by allowing my feelings to flow, even though I did not consider myself to be homosexual at the time.

Identity Tolerance

I felt a sense of liberation in being able to share my feelings with my co-worker, but liberation quickly turned to isolation when I returned to college at the end of the summer. I did not know whom I could talk to about my experience. Within days, I saw an acquaintance of mine who seemed distraught. I asked her what was wrong and she finally admitted that she and her girlfriend had broken up. As we walked and talked, I shared my own story. We were both overjoyed about being able to confide in each other.

The risk of engagement cemented our new friendship. She introduced me to other people in the gay community. I officially came out on Memorial Day, called "Booms Day" in our area, by going to a party in the gay community. It was powerful to be around people who were open about their sexual orientation. The people I met seemed to be just like everyone else. Some were even open about their sexual orientation in the larger community, which I could not image doing at the time.

Identity Acceptance

I solicited therapy at the university's student counseling center to help me deal with my sexual orientation. By the second session, my therapist encouraged me to explore my feelings by having a homosexual relationship. I told her that I could not do so because it was forbidden by my religion. Furthermore, I did not want to engage in homosexual behavior, as it was not consistent with the type of person I wanted to be. I never returned to the counseling center again.

I prayed with my whole heart for God to take away my homosexual feelings. I realized that Jesus prayed to avoid persecution and, perhaps, that homosexuality was my cross to bear. I also knew that God had a plan for my salvation and would not call me to live a life of suffering. I had to trust God to go where He seemed to be calling me. From then on, I believed God loved every part of me, which included my sexual orientation. I still had to learn to accept my homosexuality, though.

Eventually, I decided that morally I had to stop dating men. I felt guilty for not connecting with men as they seemed to connect with me. I continued to meet other people in the gay community and went on a couple of dates with women. I struggled to accept my sexual orientation. I spent a lot of time working at my church as a student leader. There, I met another female student who was just as passionate about engaging in church ministry as I was. She became my first love.

Identity Pride

During my undergraduate years, I had a clear distinction between my personal identity and my professional identity. This distinction was easy because most of my jobs were either part-time or summer jobs that demanded very little engagement. Even after graduation, I kept my personal life hidden from others at work. I had many gay friends and had gotten more active in the gay community, but my co-workers never knew about this aspect of me.

Upon going to graduate school, I wrote a paper about my sexual orientation and shared this information with my classmates. This incident was the first time I came out in a professional environment. Thankfully, my professor and most of my classmates were supportive; however, one classmate said she could not support my sexual orientation for religious reasons. I was shocked by her immediate rejection, but I was able to remain confident despite this experience.

I proceeded to get involved in the university's gay and lesbian student group. Through this group, I visited classes with other group members to talk about the coming-out process. This activity was intimidating, but it was a wonderful experience. It helped me realize that I could share my experience with others to help them understand homosexuality and to help me come to terms with it myself. As I described my coming-out process, my sexual orientation seemed natural in the broader context of my life.

Self-acceptance eventually turned into gay pride. I continued to be open about my sexual orientation at school and more politically active in the gay community. I realized that being true to me was more important than denying myself in order to gain external validation. Gay pride challenged the internalized shame that I had felt for so long as the result of homophobia and heterosexism. I even received an award for community service from a local gay pride organization.

After graduate school, I decided to come out at work. My supervisor was already open about her sexual orientation; therefore, I felt the freedom to come out as well. My co-workers also seemed to be comfortable with my supervisor's honesty, so I did not think I would be ostracized in the process. Coming out was a wonderful experience, particularly because I could finally share with my co-workers about my significant other. My willingness to be open only seemed to help strengthen our work relationships.

Identity Synthesis

When I started pursuing my doctoral degree, I was open about my sexual orientation at school. I wrote a proposal to conduct research on how homosexuals coped with rejection by religious organizations. This proposal was well received by my major professor. Nevertheless, when a visiting professor asked about my research, I felt incredibly embarrassed but forced myself to be open about my interest. He appeared to be shocked and then followed up with questions. This incident was the only time I felt uncomfortable.

My first academic position required that I move out of state to a rural community. I commuted four hours each way on the weekends to visit my significant other. I was open with my co-workers about my sexual orientation, but I never discussed it with my department chair. It was likely that he knew, given my weekly commutes and periodic visits from my significant other. By the second year, I started having medical problems, which left me feeling even more homesick.

I was offered a good job back home where opportunities were few. It seemed I had to choose either my academic career, which I had prepared for most of my life, or my significant other, whom I had hoped for most of my life. I decided to move back home even though I felt deeply disturbed by the thought of negative consequences for my university and my academic career. Nevertheless, I knew that my relationship would die if I did not return home, as it was not feasible for my significant other to move to my location.

Despite efforts to fully embrace my work in clinical practice, I yearned for my old life in academe. A year later, nearby universities started soliciting applicants for social work faculty. I tried to describe my reasons for leaving my previous academic position in each cover letter. During my interviews, I further explained what precipitated my decision to move back to the state. I acknowledged that I wanted to be closer to my family, which included my significant other.

When I was offered a faculty position, no less at the closest university, I accepted the job immediately. I was amazed to see how this circuitous path led me back to where I had started. My significant other and I were overjoyed at the turn of events because it meant that we could have the best of both worlds by my working at a university close to home. We were convinced that God had made this possible. Now, two years later, I have continued to feel deeply grateful for my job at this university.

Hearing the Call to Come Out

Bodo's (1988) description of how Saint Francis heard God's call to ministry reflects how I heard God's call to come out. Francis began his ministry by going into the city to become a warrior. During the journey, Francis realized that this warrior path was not God's desire. He felt that God wanted him to return home. Upon returning to Assisi, Francis felt ostracized and depressed. He called out to God. According to Bodo (1988):

> *During these long, terrifying months, Francis used to go to a little cave in the hill opposite of Mount Subasio and try to think out what was happening to him. He went to the cave every day until it became home for him, the only place in which he felt comfortable...It was in the cave that Francis met Jesus and saw himself for the first time. Up to that time his voices and dreams always seemed to come from without, from a great distance. But during the agonizing hours in the cave, he began to hear a voice inside himself, a deeper, clearer voice that was like discovering a part of himself he did not know was there. The more he prayed and turned to Christ for inspiration, the deeper he plunged toward some inner force that gave him strength and peace.* (p. 7-8)

Similar to this experience, I had to detach from the judgment of others and engage in prayer to hear God's call. I believe God called me to integrate my sexual orientation with my personal identity by coming out. I wanted to avoid this call, but God gave me the strength and courage to follow through. Bodo continues:

> *Softly speaking into the soft cave's ear, Francis experienced the parched joy of release. The protective shield of dark made it easier to whisper hushed secrets into the emptiness, or to scream his pain at the cold damp walls. Every day it became harder to leave his cave and meet the harsh light of all the staring world. The farther into the cave he retreated, the more comfortably insulated he felt. "Lord Jesus, let me stay here; let me hide in the womb of this wet earth sponging me in soft, gentle mud." But everyday he was driven outside again by the panic that the light would not be there to blind him.* (p. 8)

The time came to integrate my personal identity with my professional identity. I found that I could bring my inner self to the surface and simultaneously retain emotional safety by asking God to direct the process. Coming out enabled me to have more authentic relationships. God made me whole through my coming out.

Final Thoughts

It may not be feasible or necessary for every homosexual person to come out at work. The key is to determine whether the professional cost of coming out outweighs the personal cost of staying in the closet. Even though people in my profession were likely to respond respectfully, coming out was still a harrowing experience, given my upbringing to be a people pleaser and internalization of a stigmatized sexual identity. However, I felt that I had to come out for my own spiritual and emotional health.

Now, coming out to my co-workers is like sharing any other aspect of my life. It has been helpful to have my life partner attend university events so my colleagues could meet her personally. I have come out to my students when my experience would lend insight into the lecture material. The timing of this disclosure has been an issue of continuous deliberation. I try to answer questions and provide mentorship but not to evoke student discomfort or disrespect their religious beliefs.

I have also been slow to acknowledge my sexual orientation with top university administrators. Such personal questions are not usually a topic of discussion, but I still feel a degree of discomfort when we spontaneously engage in small talk. I am reassured, though, that my university has a non-discrimination policy that protects employees based on sexual orientation. Nevertheless, I strive to be open about my sexual orientation.

Coming out has taught me that accepting myself, rather than soliciting the acceptance of others, is most important. Each time I have acknowledged my sexual orientation at work, I have felt my self-confidence grow. As I have come to accept my sexual orientation, I have also felt less threatened by people who have trouble dealing with that part of me. Additionally, I have been able to enjoy deeper relationships with people by allowing them to get to know me and love me as I am.

The love of God and others has given me the strength to acknowledge my sexual orientation throughout my career. I have to admit, though, that I still feel a hint of anxiety before I come out to my students and university administrators. However, now I consider my sexual orientation to be less of a discriminating characteristic than one of many things that I share with the greater human kind: a foundation for a significant love relationship. Peace to all those who embark on this journey.

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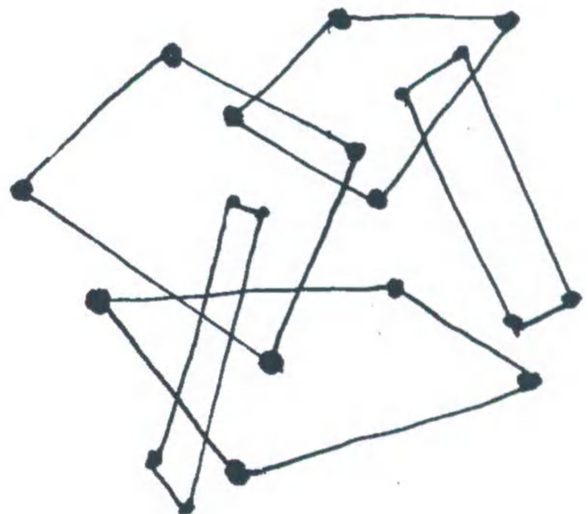

Escape Artist, Fraud, or Negotiator? My Search for the Authentic Me

Mark A. Giesler, Ph.D., Saginaw Valley State University

Despite the liberal nature of many institutions of higher education, the decision to identify as a sexual minority in academia can be a difficult one. This personal account explores the author's inside-out narrative written during his first year of teaching in a Bachelors of Social Work program in a rural area of a Midwestern state. Through a gradual process of coming out, first to his colleagues and then to his classes, the author explores the risks and assets inherent in coalescing his personal and professional selves, an endeavor that ultimately leads to authenticity.

Introduction

My reflection on the inside-out narrative, the intersection of my personal and professional selves, begins with the personal. I am a 44-year-old white male in a domestic partnership of nearly eight years. A year ago my partner and I took on the daunting and incredibly rewarding task of fostering and then adopting two ten-year-old boys. Despite any tendency to want to retreat back into the closet, I could no longer do so easily. After all, there were teachers, family members, neighbors, and co-workers who had to contend with the nature and reality of our nontraditional family.

Now the professional. Two years ago I transitioned from a career in social services to one in higher education. Hired as an assistant professor in a department of social work on a union campus, I relished in the liberating rush of job security and satisfaction; I was finally doing what I was destined to do. My previous job as an administrator and counselor for a substance abuse treatment center was fraught with identity partializing. I was "out" to my bosses and supervisees, but not to my clients. "It would get in the way of my work if I presented as gay," I justified. "It's not about me; it's about them."

The move to higher education was permission granted to "make it about me," not in a way that superseded the needs of my students, but in a way that allowed me to be once and for all the authentic me. As a card-carrying member of the National Association of Social Workers and a regional representative of the statewide office of this agency, not only did I have license to practice tolerance and acceptance of diversity, I had an obligation to do so. The NASW Code of Ethics (2000) states: "Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, and mental or physical disability" (p. 9). If I couldn't be authentic in higher education, where could I be?

With these charges, both professional and personal, how is it that I still hesitate to be out to my students, colleagues, and supervisors? Is it internalized homophobia rearing its ugly head as it had so many times earlier in my life? Is it the prospect of being hired in a part of my state that had the reputation of being conservative? Is it the relative newness of the situation, simply not knowing the rules of the game as played by those with whom I worked?

As I reflect on the answers to these questions, I am aware, as others (Sedgwick, 1990, for example) have noted, that coming out is a constantly evolving, never-ending process. With each new experience, the gay/lesbian individual reencounters the trauma of earlier experiences of coming out. The

intersection of our personal and professional lives is not immune to such retraumatization. In fact, it is at this juncture that vulnerabilities may emerge the most. I account for this phenomenon in my assumption of three personas, all of which hopefully lead to the "authentic me:" the escape artist, the fraud, and the negotiator.

The Escape Artist

Gays and lesbians tend to define themselves in and by their work. Work identity is that safe equalizer that we use to prove ourselves to dominant culture. To bring the gay/lesbian identity into that safe haven is to risk that very identity.

As I reflect on my past work history, I am painfully aware of my tendency to hide in my work, to use it as an escape tactic from the risk of being out. As a high school educator and social worker in the field, I was conditioned to do so: "Parents wouldn't understand," I rationalized. I reasoned further that my remaining in the closet was in the best interest of my students/clients. Why make them the innocent pawns of a heterosexist, homophobic society I could not control?

I recognize now that while it is always wise to consider the ramifications of our actions and choices on our clients/students, it is easy to use them as scapegoats for complacency. What are the consequences of such a decision? One onerous result may be what Figley (1995) dubbed, in another context, compassion fatigue. Also called secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue refers to the cost of caring for others in emotional pain. The effects on the practitioner—which may include decreased self-esteem, anxiety, or sleep disturbance; increased interpersonal conflict; and a pervasive sense of hopelessness—are potentially damaging both professionally and personally.

To my knowledge there is no literature that connects the experiences of GLBT professionals in the workplace to compassion fatigue. But it is a logical, if not evocative, link for me to make. As a gay practitioner-professor, I am more prone to give than to receive. The therapeutic (or student-professor) alliance becomes one sided: I play a game whereby I take on the concerns of my clients/students as a way to avoid my own issues; I am likewise not willing to share with colleagues and supervisors how my clients'/students' journeys intersect with my own. Depriving myself of a voice that articulates this connection is a slippery pathway to compassion fatigue—and justification for my being a fraud.

The Fraud

Social work as a profession is an introspective endeavor. We teach our students to get in touch with their "angels and demons" before they can help their clients do the same. In some respects, the same is required of social work educators. Perhaps the act of coming out is more difficult when 35 staring undergraduates are involved. There is something both empowering and disempowering about coming out en masse. It turns the personal into the political, the intimate into the public.

My partner, also an educator in special education, begins each of his classes with an invitation: "Ask me anything you want to know about me," he says. Interestingly, no student thus far has asked him about his sexual orientation. This void speaks to the ever-present fear that the issue brings up in the classroom. Can we mention the "g" or "l" word—the elephant in the classroom?

Two studies conducted in the late 1990s indicate that students are becoming more tolerant of gay and lesbian teachers who come out in the academy. Liddle (1997) compared the teacher evaluations from sections of a course in which she had revealed herself to be lesbian with evaluations from sections in

which she had not. Contrary to her hypothesis, there was no evidence of sexual orientation bias across the two groups. Waldo and Kemp (1997) tested the premise that more interpersonal contact with gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons is related to less prejudiced attitudes. Students of the gay male instructor in the study showed the sharpest decline in prejudiced attitudes.

In their dialogue "Difficult Dilemmas: The Meaning of Being Out in the Classroom," Bettinger, Timmins, and Tisdell (2006) struggle with the notion of when and how to come out in the classroom. On the question of coming out in a course that has little relevance to the personal (such as math), Bettinger states, "Our sexual orientation or identity is part of who we are (even as it may shift) in every context. It has an impact on what we learn (teach), how we learn (teach), why we learn (teach), and what we do with the learning (teaching)" (p. 69). The author adds: "Heterosexuals don't have to choose to be silent. They are not expected to shut off any aspect of themselves" (p. 69). Perhaps, then, the decision of when and whether to come out is in and of itself a reflection of heteronormativity.

Yet, I feel that I must justify my coming out. As long as it serves a purpose that relates directly to the curriculum, it is justified. Case in point: I came out to one of my classes this past summer. "Human Behavior and the Social Environment II" is a core curriculum class that covers issues related to privilege, multiculturalism, and diversity competence in the field. The topic of the day was the many ways we define "family" in a postmodern society. I elicited discussion on this topic by surveying the myriad of family configurations my class members represented. I recorded these on the board. Without hesitating, and noting the wide array of diversity represented, I said, "I feel like I have to include my own family on this list." I turned to the board and wrote the words, "gay couple with two adopted children."

My teachable moment was part of a lesson plan that addressed a core program objective: my students' relationship with dominant culture. We are all negotiating our relationship with the dominant culture all of the time. African Americans must do so in an inherently racist society. Women must do so in a patriarchal system. Schriver (2004), in distinguishing between the alternative and traditional (dominant) paradigms, states the power of diversity in understanding the human experience: "Only by recognizing both our differences and our similarities as humans can we proceed toward reaching our full potential. The search for an alternative paradigm is at its core a search for diversity" (p. 73).

My hope in actively constructing the inside-out narrative in the classroom is to show how my journey as a gay man is in a tangible sense my students' journeys. Accordingly, my students will see that their clients' journeys are theirs. We are all at once victims and beneficiaries of the dominant culture we simultaneously co-construct and resist.

And yet there is something about the matter-of-factness of this event that may cause some gay activists who claim we have an obligation to be "out and proud" to our students to wince. To submerge it in a lesson, they may say, is to reinforce the shame that works toward its denigration. Notwithstanding the validity of this argument, I also would like to believe that doing so relays the message that gayness is "no big deal" and, in fact, ubiquitous in the social work world. I hope I am training students to not blink an eye when a client comes out to them. I hope I am normalizing gayness so that it is on an equal par with the many other strengths I possess.

On the other hand, I recognize the significance of giving voice to such an integral part of me. What message am I giving a student who is struggling with his or her own sexuality by talking about mine in such an off-handed manner? Am I a fraud for "hiding behind a lesson plan?" Perhaps a better way to see myself is as a negotiator.

The Negotiator

As a semi-out professor, I must contend with the expectation that I will be a role model for my students whether I like it or not. But is coming out "loud and proud" in their best interest all of the time?

I am aware of the recent research (Swank & Raiz, 2007) that suggests social work students are comfortable with GLBT persons or issues as long as they operate from a heteronormative context: "Levels of comfort depend on degrees of social power, as many BSW students limit their comfort and tolerance to settings where heterosexual privilege seems to prevail" (p. 278). In other words, homosexuality is tolerable as long as heterosexuality is prioritized and homosexuality is considered subservient to it. Similarly, I am aware of the phenomenon that subtle prejudice against gay men and lesbians might be increasing as blatant prejudice is decreasing. Ewing, Stukas, and Sheehan (2003), for example, found that socially desirable responses to gays and lesbians hid true attitudes towards them, which were decidedly negative.

This research reminds me that my students' attitudes about homosexuality may not always be what they appear to be. Put bluntly, how much are my students merely being "politically correct" in their assumed acceptance/tolerance of me?

Furthermore, while my department colleagues openly express their acceptance of all types of diversity, the same may not be true of my colleagues in other disciplines, not to mention those in administrative positions. In my brief stint at my place of employment, I have encountered a couple of instances of possible institutional heterosexism. The university denied the lesbian partner of a colleague a job because of supposed nepotism, despite the fact that prominent in that department is a husband-wife team. Another university professor consistently claims that she gets overlooked when it comes to funding for research projects.

It is possible that these individuals may not be qualified or "the right persons" for these jobs. It is also possible that our university administration says one thing and does another when it comes to freedom and protection of sexual orientation and gender expression. I worry that my research agenda—studies of those living "on the margins" of gender identity—will inhibit rather than enhance the promotion and tenure process. I have to this point relied on university funds to present my research at conferences, for example. But I have to stop to think how I am wording the titles of my presentations. In the back of my mind is the daunting thought, "If they *really* knew what I was presenting..."

I am caught in a fissure that sometimes feels impenetrable. Blessed by a profession and department that support me, I must tread a thin line with the more conservative administration, those who ultimately will decide my future. I am forced to negotiate my gayness. On one hand, I have to "watch my back," as my partner at times reminds me. On the other hand, in order to establish myself as a researcher and academic, I sense a need for colleagues, mentors, and the academic world to know me as a gay man. How do I be a gay academic without appearing "too gay?" How do I negotiate that sense of "me" and "not me?"

Identity negotiation is in some ways more difficult than combating outright, clear-cut homophobia. I teach my macro students, after all, that it is easier to fight when you know exactly who the enemy is. More poignant, perhaps, is how exhausting partializing my sexual orientation is. My negotiator status forces me to think about every decision I make in the classroom, office, and meeting room. Do I place a picture of my family on my desk? Do I put that "safe ally" sticker on my office door? How much do I use examples of GLBT families and individuals in class case studies? Do I chime in at campus meetings when a discussion of weekend activities with spouses ensues?

These are not atypical questions for gays and lesbians in the workplace. Certainly, they don't make me unique. They challenge me, however, to deeply consider what my responsibility is as a social activist around this issue. Because of the generally liberal atmosphere of higher education, not to mention the protection of a union campus, I have the opportunity to push the envelope a bit. But what

does that mean exactly? How much do I push the "out" without distorting the "in?" I may profess to avoid making waves, but doing so may preclude institutional change. It's a short journey from "live and let live" to complacency.

The Authentic Me

So am I an escape artist, a fraud, or a negotiator? Allow me to turn that question around. How has being any of the above impacted my personal identity? If the personal is always the political, and vice-versa, to borrow a phrase, who is the authentic me?

I am a life partner of a man with whom I parent two children and my workplace inside-out narrative has impacted both roles. In his classic model of homosexual formation, Cass (1984) identified identity synthesis as the culminating stage of gay/lesbian development:

> *Positive contacts with non-homosexuals helps create a sense of not being able to simply divide the world into good homosexuals and bad heterosexuals. With this comes a sense of people having many sides to their character, only one of which is related to homosexuality. One develops a way of life in which homosexuality is no longer hidden and public and private selves are integrated into a positive identity. (cited in Schriver, 2004, p. 271)*

As this narrative has shown, my workplace identity isn't a testament to identity synthesis as Cass envisioned it. There are students who still believe (and will say) that homosexuality is a sin. My colleagues, though accepting, may be regarded as complicit in the complacency of gay politics. A "don't ask, don't tell" mentality still pervades the halls of the administrative offices.

Far from being an impediment in my journey toward identity synthesis, however, my workplace has inspired me to explore the integration of my private and public selves. I do not feel compelled to come out in every setting in the workplace. Nor do I feel pressure to hide this part of me. My gayness is part of my identity that at once is worth speaking up for and for keeping silent.

This uncomfortable agenda has been reflected in my journey to fatherhood. The process of fostering and adopting is yet another venue that forces one to make decisions about how much and when to open the closet door. If we want to be role models for our boys, my partner and I cannot live or act out of shame. We must support our boys who, in a real sense, may be victims of discrimination or harassment. We do so by forging honest relationships with those most relevant to their development: principals, teachers, and neighbors, to name a few.

At the same time, we must teach our boys about the appropriateness of self-disclosure. There is a time and a place for discussing coming from a blended, gay family. There are appropriate and inappropriate ways to do so. My professional identity has clarified these boundaries for me. I am called to build bridges in the workplace, not because of any obligation to come out, but simply because of the need to be authentic.

I am grateful that my partner challenges me to find authenticity in all of my relationships. Because of his witness, I see the connections. Just as I am able to matter-of-factly come out in the classroom, I can interweave feelings and thoughts of being gay with my parents. Because of the role models I have in accepting departmental colleagues, I understand the importance of forging alliances with heterosexuals in my neighborhood. Because I am wary about being out to my supervisors, I carry a healthy sense of caution when it comes to my boys' basketball coaches, who may not be ready or comfortable with our family.

How has my workplace-identity construction impacted me personally? It has reminded me that to be authentic is to live with forethought, caution, and the courage to self-disclose. If I can negotiate the trips and turns of a workplace that at once inhibits and affirms who I am, I can do so in other areas of my life.

Conclusions?

As I conclude this essay, I am struck by how uncertain I remain about my inside-out narrative. I am left with some questions that uncomfortably impose on the synthesis of my professional and personal selves. As I reflect on how much further to open my workplace closet door, I must consider the following.

First, from a power dynamic, how much do I use my gayness for my benefit? In other words, do I use my Whiteness and maleness to compensate for the inferiority of being gay? Given that we are both the oppressed and the oppressor all of the time, how aware am I of the equivalencies between heterosexism and the other "isms?" Am I an ally with those who are oppressed like me or do I, like so many others throughout history, use my oppression to oppress others, even my own students? How might that dynamic play out in the classroom?

Second, in constructing my inside-out narrative, am I defying others' expectations about what it means to be gay? For example, I realize the uniqueness of my being a father who adopted children with my partner. How do I share this example without appearing to be, as others might perceive, "flaunting a lifestyle?" Do I have a responsibility to challenge others' stereotypical notions of what it means to be gay?

Third, what truly is the impact of being in and out on my students and colleagues? There is some value, after all, to maintaining critical professional distance. I don't want my students to feel as if they have to assume a certain attitude about homosexuals because their professor is gay. What do I do with that pressure that I implicitly (and perhaps intentionally) put on my students? How is it reflected in my use of curriculum? In my advising students?

Fourth, what is the impact of my inside-out narrative on my professional disposition? I have been accused of being rigid and inflexible at times in the classroom. Is this tendency related to how out I am? Will being "more out" loosen me up as an educator, advisor, and colleague? Will a more relaxed attitude influence my praxis regarding personal topics students bring to the classroom experience?

Finally, what responsibility do I have to my department and the larger college community? Swank and Raiz (2007) suggest that classroom interventions to heighten awareness of GLBT issues must be augmented by extracurricular experiences. How can I be part of a more holistic and systemic effort to combating homophobia and heterosexism in the workplace? How can I proactively model a macro practice model in an effort to initiate institutional change?

This paper has heightened my awareness of the challenge of writing about and living out the inside-out narrative. My hope is that readers can place themselves in this trajectory in a way that inspires analysis of their own inside-out narratives. I remain the escape artist, fraud, and negotiator. But it is in the conscious blending of these personas that I can be most authentic. It is a struggle that represents, in Zinn's (1994) words, the smallest act of protest. In that act are the invisible roots of the most profound social change.

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To be White, Lesbian, and Academic: Reflections on Developing and Intersecting Identities

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The following narrative describes the events that led the author to her professional career. She believes that her professional academic career and her successes as a scholar and educator can be attributed to her integrated identities as a white person, a lesbian, and an academic.

"A woman who is willing to be herself and pursue her own potential runs not so much the risk of loneliness, as the challenge of exposure to more interesting men—and people in general."
—Lorraine Hansberry[1]

I have taught identity development theories many times in human-behavior courses. While I am very clear about the limitations of any theory, especially stage-based theories, white identity and lesbian identity development theories offer insights into my own development as a scholar. Two stage theories in particular—Helms' theory on white racial identity development (1984, 1990) and Cass' theory of lesbian identity development (1979)—along with the theory of racial scripting, are the best at explaining my path. I will use this essay to reflect on the many ways that my identities shaped my growth and development as an academic, how they grew separately and merged together, and how the integration of these identities serves me now as a more senior scholar.

Becoming White

Helms (1984, 1990) offered a well-known theory of white racial identity development, outlining six stages of progression from initial recognition of difference and racism to a positive, nonracist white identity: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy. My first contact with racial difference did not occur until I was six years old. I spent the first five years of my life in Springfield, Pennsylvania, a predominantly white suburb of Philadelphia. The only diversity I recognized was that some people spoke different languages (i.e., Spanish), like my friend Michael, and that some people had different religions (our immediate family was Jewish, but my mother's extended family were Baptist because my mother converted to Judaism before marriage). My racial environs changed, however, when we moved into a new neighborhood when I was six years old.

Our new neighborhood—Willingboro, New Jersey—was just an hour away from where I had been living, but it was a world away in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. This community was one of the original Levittowns, suburban developments established by William Levitt. When we moved into our home on Eden Rock Lane in the summer of 1975, the community had been intentionally, if somewhat reluctantly, integrated (Pooley, 2008). We had Black neighbors to the left of us, behind us, and directly across the street. There were interracial couples and Latino, Filipino, and Japanese children in my neighborhood. Days after I moved in, I befriended several white girls on the street and another black girl my age who lived next door. None of the white girls were friends with my neighbor. While I recognized difference in our skin colors, I did not attribute meaning to that difference until several weeks later when my friend invited me to meet her at the local pool. I arrived at

the pool to find a group of black children playing. I could not identify my friend among the group; as I would sheepishly admit to her later, I could not tell one young black face from another. It pains and embarrasses me to write it now; after years of living in Willingboro and elsewhere, I can hardly imagine not seeing differences and identifying characteristics in people of different races than my own. I take a small solace in the fact that I was six years old. I know that at the time, my lack of experience with racial difference marked me with ignorance and confusion.

When I walked into the pool area and saw the group of black children, I felt uncomfortable: some due to my status as a newcomer, but more due to feeling different from the other black children. It was the first time I realized and recognized myself as "Other," as a white girl who was both racially and culturally different from my peers. I had no racial script (Williams, 2007) about African Americans at that time, and so I would begin to develop one as a young child based on my own peer interactions, my cultural environment, and my familial culture. My parents offered positive liberal injunctions about race when we were small, saying that "people are all the same" and noting that we should treat our black neighbors as equals. That said, my parents had no black friends, and their perspectives were rooted in idealism, not experience.

I took those messages from my parents, along with my developing identity as a white person with diverse peers, and created scripts to negotiate difference. The racial scripts I developed operated in my interactions with peers, teachers, and other adults. My first principal was an African American man, whom I greatly admired, and our neighbor across the street was also a leader in the public schools; I took away the message that Black people could be important and could be leaders. We had a Black History Month celebration every year at my school, reinforcing the centrality of black accomplishments and culture.

There were other scripts that were imprinting themselves on me, though I had no formal understanding of them until later in life. Our schools had economic and race-based busing and educational tracking. Students were bused into my school from a lower income, predominantly black neighborhood. While my classes were racially integrated, we segregated into different reading levels; the "gifted program" of which I was part was limited to white students, while the students of color made up the majority of the lower groups. These two processes reinforced stereotypical ideas that black people were likely to be poor and intellectually challenged. The conflicting ideas of black adults as middle-income, capable leaders, and black youth as low-income, incapable learners, somehow co-existed for me in tension with one another.

As I aged into junior high and high school, I learned that my parents' liberal injunctions (i.e., "Black people were just like us") were not enough to help me negotiate my diverse community. I had black , Filipino, Latino, white, and multiracial friends. The more time I spent with people of other racial and ethnic groups, the whiter I felt. I learned more about cultural beliefs and practices of different groups, how they thought about white people and white culture, and contrasted them with my own. I started to "flip the script," you could say, rejecting my parents' liberal assumptions and learning new understandings of how white people can and should interact in a multicultural world.

It was easier to reject my parents' perspectives and move into Helms' (1990) stage of "pseudo-integration" when I became a teenager and started to date. My parents' liberal platitudes broke down in 1980 when, in eighth grade I began to date a biracial (black - white) male peer. My parents reacted with their own racial scripts, born of fear and racism, and forbade me to date anyone who wasn't white. They talked about moving into a less diverse, whiter community. These scripts did not make sense to me, though, as many of my peers were dating interracially. Instead, I recognized the racism in my parents' responses, and I consciously rejected it. In my own teenaged idealism, I decided to try to make them live their professed ideals and persisted with dating interracially, even bringing my boyfriends home for dinner.

At the same time that I was warring with my parents:

> *...local real estate agents (seven of whom were eventually sent to jail) "helped" many in-migrating African-Americans purchase homes with mortgages—insured by the Federal Housing Administration—that were larger than they could afford. When owners defaulted on their loans, as many of them did, banks were protected against the loss and received repayment from the government. While the agents moved on to the next victims (and the next commission), the foreclosed homes typically stood vacant and boarded up, destabilizing the surrounding neighborhood. This further encouraged the outflow of white residents—between 1980 and 1990, Willingboro lost 9,000 white residents, or nearly 40 percent of its white population—and caused property values to plummet.* (quote by Brooks, cited in Pooley, 2008)

When I joined the traveling choir in sophomore year (1982-1983) in high school, I was the only white person in the twenty-person group. Our town became increasingly African American.

As the demographics of the town changed, I became more aware of the racist perceptions of residents of nearby communities. White people I met through my temple or regional activities disparaged my community for its poverty and racial diversity, asking me if I was afraid to live there. In one memorable incident, white cheerleaders from another high school refused to use our locker rooms for fear they would be attacked. I was clear that the comments and behaviors were a reflection of stereotypes about black people as dangerous, and I was angry in response. As a member of the community, I took these comments personally, believing that they reflected on me as much as on my black peers. It made me contemptuous of some of the more blatant forms of anti-black racism.

I don't mean to imply that there was not interpersonal and institutional racism in Willingboro, or that I did not harbor any racist beliefs. Racism certainly existed in my beliefs and in the larger community. Racism was something that I discussed with my friends, something we talked about in classes and personal conversations. It was something to be navigated, negotiated, and addressed. With all of the diversity among our teachers, friends, peers, and families, we could not help but discuss it.

The positive outcome of these youthful cross-racial and cross-cultural experiences is that I developed new ways of connecting with many different groups of color. As Williams (2007) notes, research has shown that early and consistent positive experiences with people who are not white leads white people to become more comfortable and less racist in their interactions with different people. This finding was true for me, especially as I related to African Americans. My interest in and comfort with African American history, cultures, and communities inspired me to move into Helms' (1990) "immersion stage," taking a number of black history and literature courses, cultural diversity courses, and critical theory courses in college. I learned so much about African American history and culture that it feels like a part of my own culture, my own American story. At the same time, I am usually aware of my own racial identity as a white person, and I endeavor to be attentive to my own racism and the racism around me. I would remain in this stage, and the focus would shift for me to identity issues of sexual orientation as I moved on in undergraduate and graduate academic programs.

Becoming Lesbian

I had fairly well integrated my identity as a white person when I began to suspect that I was a lesbian. My lesbian identity development closely followed the six discrete stages of Cass' theory: (1) identity confusion; (2) identity comparison; (3) identity tolerance; (4) identity acceptance; (5) identity pride; and (6) identity synthesis (1979).

As an undergraduate student in the late 1980s, I entered a stage of identity confusion. I continued to date men as I had in high school, but I just didn't seem to be as interested in them as were my heterosexual female friends. I began considering that I might be a lesbian.

but I could not really accept that as a reality. An undergraduate philosophy major, I lived mainly in my head, both personally and academically, and therefore was drawn to the esoteric nature of political philosophy. As my undergraduate career progressed, I became increasingly unhappy, both personally and academically. Eventually, I dropped out of school and took on a job at a rape crisis center, working alongside social workers and feminist activists. After a semester, I returned to school and continued to date men and pursue my philosophy degree.

In my last year in school, I decided to apply to graduate school in political science, as it seemed sufficiently theoretical and yet had a more practical and applied focus. I found a program, with a concentration in women and politics, which allowed me to include my interests in women's issues. This disciplinary change was accompanied by further development in my sexual identity as I made new friends in the graduate program who were openly lesbian. They helped me understand and become comfortable with my sexual orientation. I moved quickly through that stage of identity comparison (comparing myself with my lesbian peers and reading from their lesbian literary collections) to trying on the identity of lesbian myself (identity tolerance). I remember being shocked as new choices, once foreclosed by heterosexual norms, opened a new world for me. It was a time of great uncertainty and greater excitement.

By then an ardent feminist and critical theorist, I came to embrace my identity as a lesbian by recognizing it as both a personal (emotional, sexual) and political (social, cultural) identity. As I began to develop what Cass (1979) calls "identity acceptance," I dated women and started to think intellectually about the intersections of issues of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism and homophobia.

After a few short romances, I began my first serious lesbian relationship with a social worker (now my partner) who would introduce me to the field of social work. I had become dissatisfied with the field of political science as still too esoteric and removed from the lives and needs of oppressed people and the issues of the African American community in which I was raised, and social work seemed to offer something different. Hearing about my partner's work in a homeless shelter and reading her copies of *Social Work*, I found myself drawn to the academic professional discipline of social work, with its recognition of oppression and discrimination and its commitment to social change and social justice. Rather than simply theorizing about these issues as political science had done, social work offered the knowledge, skills, and values to turn theory into praxis. I found a way to connect my experiences working at the sexual assault services program with my academic interests. I quickly decided to take the terminal

Master's Degree in political science and pursue graduate study in social work.

During this time in my relationship, I also became much clearer about myself as a lesbian. I believed that my relationship would be long lasting, and with it my identity solidified. I also became more politically aware, moving from the Northeast, which had always been my home, to the South to live with my partner. As a lesbian Jew from New Jersey, the religious and sexual politics of North Carolina were a shock. All of my identities seemed contested in this atmosphere, and rejections and prejudices based on my sexual orientation were emotionally upsetting to me. I responded to this challenge by becoming more politically focused on myself as a lesbian.

I pursued the MSW and Ph.D. simultaneously, then, with my lesbian identity at the forefront of my sense of self. I was deep in the both socially annoying and personally empowering "identity pride" stage

of lesbian identity development (Cass, 1979). My pride was visible in my lesbian jewelry and t-shirts adorned with pro-gay messages. All of my courses and experiences were filtered through this identity lens. I am certain that, if asked, my instructors would confirm that my identity as a lesbian was as ever-present to them as it was to me. Yet, as a white, middle-class, able-bodied woman who had lived with heterosexual privilege for a majority of my life, I brought a sense of entitlement and an expectation of acceptance that differentiated me from many of my LGBT friends and peers. I was often surprised and hurt by heterosexism and homophobia when they occurred.

I was learning to negotiate my lesbian identity and issues of disclosure while I was in the MSW/Ph.D. programs, just as I was learning what it meant to be a professional social worker. The intersections of these learning processes caused a conflict for me when I was in my first MSW field placement, a conflict that would mark my professional life.

I have discussed this experience before—in a more impersonal fashion—in an article co-written with a bisexual MSW student about our experiences in our field placements. In that article, I write in an academic style about what was a cognitively confusing and emotionally upsetting experience in field placement. I had a summer block placement in a parenting and pregnancy-prevention program for low-income teens, a program housed in a large county social services department in a Southern state. Again, due to my stage of identity development, I had not yet completely integrated my lesbian identity into my personal or professional identity. I decided to disclose my sexual orientation to my field instructor, my immediate supervisor, and my co-workers, but not to my teenage, black, female clients. I was afraid that they wouldn't like me if they knew, and that disclosure might ruin my chance of building rapport with them. I also rationalized that the issues in this abbreviated placement would be related to race, class, and (hetero-)sexuality. I assumed that, as young black women and mothers, these clients were all heterosexual. I was wrong.

I was assigned to work with one young mother, an emancipated minor, whom I will call Krista. Krista had had a long history of involvement with a large range of social services: child protection and foster care services related to her mother who struggled with addiction; job readiness training; income support programs; healthcare and mental health programs; and financial support and childcare benefits for her own child. Her case file was approximately four inches thick. I initially found Krista as untrusting as she was strong willed, consistently challenging me to prove my competence and commitment. She still remains one of the best self-advocates I have ever met. I provided case management and transportation and advocated on her behalf with several service providers.

Somewhere in that time together, Krista began asking me questions about my personal life. Specifically, she wanted to know about my romantic life. While all of the young women in the program liked to talk about boys, and often asked the interns about dating and sex, Krista asked with a persistence and bluntness that made me uncomfortable. I found myself anxiously dodging her questions. Was I married? (No.) Did I have a boyfriend? (Not right now.) Why not? (Too busy with school.) When did I last have a boyfriend? (I don't know. Why does it matter?) What do I look for in a man? Do I like boys? Etc.

Around the same time as the questions became more pointed, I found an entry in her extensive file—just one entry—that raised a question about Krista's sexual orientation. A human services worker had noted, "Krista could be a lesbian?" When I read the entry, it suddenly came together for me. Unlike all of the other women in the program, Krista never had a boyfriend or talked much about boys. Krista wanted to know about my sexual orientation so she could reveal her own. But, as a budding social worker and fairly newly identified lesbian, I was unsure whether I should disclose my sexual orientation to her.

I sought guidance from my supervisor, who sent me to speak to her boss, who was my field instructor. My instructor, a seasoned professional who was close to retirement age and a conservative Southern woman, seemed

completely uncomfortable with my question. She asked that I not disclose until she had asked the director of the social service agency for direction. They stalled and refused to give me an answer. Sensing that no direction was forthcoming from my instructor, I reached out to my faculty liaison. She seemed unsure of how to advise me and suggested that I seek out the professional literature related to sexual orientation and disclosure in practice settings. I investigated the literature, but there was very little available to assist me in my decision.

I recall a painful moment when, during a field trip with the youth, we stopped at a fast-food restaurant for dinner. Several of the employees at the restaurant were obviously gay and lesbian, a fact that did not escape the youth or many of the other patrons. Several young male patrons started imitating and mocking the employees in an effort to gain the attention of the young women clients, adopting a stereotypical gay lisp and prancing around the restaurant. Most of the youth thought this was hilarious, and homophobic comments were flying fast and furious. I glanced at Krista, who sat stone faced. I had a moment of panic, afraid to intervene because it might make the youth question my sexual orientation, but I wanted to protect Krista's feelings. I tried to catch the eye of my supervisor and the other intern, but they would not meet my gaze or intervene. Finally, I motioned to Krista and told the others that we were going to leave, implying that I was through eating and we were impatient and ready to go.

I reached the end of the summer without any direction from my field instructor or her boss, and I again approached my faculty liaison. I told her that Krista continued to push me for information, and I was more and more certain that Krista herself was a lesbian. I thought that it made sense to disclose to her, as I could serve as a role model for the young woman. My liaison supported my decision, and, in the face of my concern that my instructor might be angry, she reminded me that she (and not the field instructor) was the person who would assign my grade.

So, on my last day in placement, I took Krista out for lunch and came out to her. She smiled broadly and said, "I knew it!" She then asked if she could introduce me to her girlfriend, whom she had been dating for almost a year. I took her home and met her girlfriend, I told them about my partner, and we discussed what it meant to be a lesbian. In the course of our conversation, Krista made many homophobic comments about other lesbians and said self-loathing statements related to her own sexual orientation, which I tried to gently challenge and counter with more affirming perspectives. When I left her that day, I was pleased that I had disclosed to her—I could see her pleasure and relief in knowing that I was lesbian. Yet, I also felt sorely disappointed in myself for waiting so long to disclose. I was angry at my field instructor and faculty liaison for not providing better support and guidance. I could have been serving as a mentor and support for her around these issues; instead, I modeled shame and fear. I had missed an opportunity.

When I returned for the fall semester, I talked to a bisexual student who had been placed in a rural mental health setting over the summer. She had had a similar experience, where she struggled with whether to disclose to her gay, teenaged, male client. She had been forbidden to disclose by her field instructor, who feared issues of transference (supposedly) and anger and blame by the teen's parents (more likely). We discussed our frustration, and, on the advice of my former faculty liaison, wrote an essay for our school newsletter about our experiences. Though critical of the social work program, the essay was well received, and several faculty members suggested that we expand the essay into an article and submit it for publication. Since neither of us could find much in the professional literature, we were excited by the idea of publishing the essay and worked quickly to get it into article form. We were very pleased when *Affilia: The Journal of Women and Social Work* agreed to publish it.

Intersecting Identities

After the article had been published and I was deciding on my dissertation topic in the mid-1990s, I considered doing a study of lesbian and gay students' experiences in field

placement. After all, there was a clear gap in the literature in this area. I talked to several faculty members about the idea, and each of them dissuaded me from pursuing that line of research. Most argued that I would not be able to get a job if I did a study on LGBT issues, especially as they related to social work education; instead, they suggested I pursue a more traditional project on some area of mainstream social work practice (child welfare, poverty, healthcare, etc.). As a "feminist" researcher with "little practice experience" who preferred "qualitative" inquiry, they argued, I had enough strikes against me without presenting myself to the

discipline as a lesbian interested only in LGBT topics (a phenomenon pejoratively referred to by some as "me-search").

Looking back, I think that most of these faculty members had my best interests at heart. Their concerns were well-placed; LGBT academics and LGBT research have routinely been marginalized in social work academia. (For example, I have been attending major national social work conferences for approximately 15 years, and it never fails that the LGBT series session winds up on the very last day of the conferences!) Further, although we recognize that social work education is the process by which we prepare future social workers, many social work scholars consider education-related research to be lightweight and secondary to more "substantial" research on social problems and interventions. But I took away a sense that, deep down, my mentors believed these perspectives themselves, and that was hard to swallow. I made my peace with the idea of a more mainstream dissertation project, but I resolved that one day I would do the LG field experience study.

Instead, I returned to the topic of race for my dissertation research. I had been working as a research assistant on an evaluation of four anti-poverty projects in North Carolina, one of which was located in Warren County—a rural, predominantly African American community. Like my hometown Willingboro, Warren County was disparaged by many in North Carolina, and the county ranked at the bottom in indicators of wealth, health, and education. The project leader was an African American woman who had hired a predominantly black staff to support and serve the local residents. Few of the white residents would become involved with the anti-poverty project; poor whites would not use its services; and more affluent whites would not support the project. In trying to understand this racial divide and its impact on the agency's development and effectiveness, I conducted a qualitative study of the project's planning and its relationship to the local history and culture.

My experiences growing up with African Americans, many of whom had grown up in the South, helped me connect with some of the southern black participants, especially the black women who were active in the anti-poverty program. I had some difficulty building a rapport with some of the Southern white participants, especially those who voiced openly racist views. My heightened awareness of white racism and attitudes of white superiority helped shape my analysis of the local white dominant culture and the historical and current divisions between the two races.

Even as I worked on this racial topic, issues related to my lesbian identity did not recede. I began teaching during my doctoral program both at a nearby BSW program and with MSW students on my own campus. My lesbian identity emerged as an issue on the first day of my first course when I was deciding what to wear. That first class began in mid-August when it was still incredibly hot outside. I was concerned that if I wore shorts or a skirt, the students would be preoccupied with my decidedly lesbian unshaven legs. I chose to wear pants and a blouse for the morning course and resolved that I would change into shorts and a t-shirt to work in my office later. It also seemed more "professional" to dress

up as the instructor. Everything went well until I emerged from my office in my shorts and walked right into my students returning from lunch. They looked me up and down, taking in my unshaven legs, and one student asked, "Why did you dress up for class? Were you stylin' just for us?" I admitted that I was, and another student laughed and said, "Ah, don't bother." I took them at their word, but I remained nervous and guarded about my unshaven legs and underarms, afraid that they might cause students not to like me.

As I continued to teach over the next few years, I struggled with how to negotiate disclosure of my sexual orientation to my social work students. I tried out different approaches: sometimes I mentioned it on the first day, as one of my many identities (Jewish, lesbian, Northerner, doctoral student); other times I waited and mentioned my identity as it related to the topic of discussion ("As a lesbian, I have had that experience."); other times, I never said the word lesbian but instead referred to my partner or used her or our relationship as an example. Sometimes I looked directly at the students when I came out, and other times I would turn away or studiously gaze over their heads. Regardless of the method or the delivery, each time I disclosed in those early years, it felt jarring, like an errant note in an otherwise lovely melody. I would break into a sweat, and I would feel as if my voice were suddenly louder and more strident. After the disclosure, class usually proceeded as if nothing had happened, but I knew that my orientation was now a confirmed part of how they saw me. This realization was reflected in student evaluations; several students over the course of my doctoral teaching experiences would write critically about my "agenda" and decry my "over-inclusion" of LGBT issues in the classroom.

Despite the anxiety-producing nature of in-class disclosure, I have always chosen to disclose my sexual orientation to my students. Why? Perhaps because I am an extrovert, an external processor who cannot imagine *not* talking about myself (which could explain this article, as well, I suppose). I frequently use examples from my own life, and I wouldn't want to censor myself in selecting examples. I am also political, not to mention somewhat oppositional, and I strongly believe that I have the *right* to disclose my sexual orientation. But I also feel a responsibility as an educator to disclose my orientation as a means to help heterosexual students gain insights into LGBT issues while providing support and an openly gay presence for LGBT students. My field experience with Krista let me know the costs of not speaking out. Also, as a student who attended four schools and pursued four different degrees and yet never had an openly gay or lesbian instructor, I know well a student's desire for an LGBT mentor, for support, and for a role model.

My sexual orientation again became an issue when I went on the job market. Given the *Affilia* article, I knew that potential employers would know that I am a lesbian. I also was used to being out in my everyday life, and I could not imagine taking a position anywhere that would not be comfortable with me. That said, several faculty mentors cautioned me about being "too out" in cover letters and interviews. Better to let them get to know you first as a person and a scholar, they implied. One mentor even discussed my clothing and appearance with me, acknowledging that he knew I could dress appropriately (in a way that didn't mark me as lesbian) when the occasion demanded it. Again, I was slightly hurt by the homophobic nature of these comments although I knew they were intended to help me prepare for the job search. I just wish that my advisors had acknowledged that the homophobia and heterosexism they were trying to get me to accommodate was *wrong*.

Living as a White Lesbian Academic

I have generally found academe, and social work as an academic discipline, to be accepting of me as a lesbian. Honestly, it has sometimes been more difficult to be accepted as a feminist and a qualitative researcher! I have been able to pursue and obtain internal and external funding for research on LGBT issues; in fact, my first research project after the dissertation was the study of LGBT students' experiences in field placement, funded with competitive intramural grant funds.

My findings from that study have been accepted in respected social work journals, and I was able to co-author two edited books on social work with LGBT populations with a highly regarded university press. I received tenure based on my body of LGBT-related research and writing, and I am currently serving in an administrative position at a ranked research-intensive university. All of these successes have been a result of my openness about my sexual orientation, my continuing interest in LGBT issues and concerns, and my ability to integrate my personal and professional lives.

There have been difficult moments: I was denied a position at a religious school because of my sexual orientation, my openness about it, and my public (read: published) support for social justice for LGBT people. I was informed by one program director that I likely would not be tenured at my university for LGBT-related research, and several colleagues have suggested that I move beyond the "narrow focus" of LGBT communities even though everyone says that it is important to create a defined research trajectory. (As an aside, I find it interesting that no one thinks that other slices of the general population, such as children with autism, are too narrow a population for a research agenda although there likely are more LGBT people in the United States than American children who have been diagnosed with autism.) It is challenging to find funding for LGBT-related research if you are not focused on healthcare or AIDS research, and so external funding has always been in short supply. I have also run into problems getting research projects on LGBT populations approved by Institutional Review Boards, which tend to misunderstand LGBT issues and culture and to be overprotective about LGBT populations.

The overt challenges of being an anti-racist white woman are even fewer in social work. There is a stated commitment by social work as a profession, and by our professional academic organizations, to address and eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination. We don't always live up to this commitment, but few scholars will openly discriminate against a white woman trying to pursue social and economic justice. I continue to use my experiences negotiating racially and culturally diverse interactions as a white person in my teaching, scholarship, and service. As a baccalaureate program director, I have had the great privilege of meeting and learning from African American scholars and other women of color. I try to live every day as a purposively anti-racist white woman, working to interact respectfully and responsively in a culturally diverse, racist culture that privileges whites. I do not always succeed, and my interracial relationships can be strained with the weight of racial stresses.

As an out, white lesbian, I have found support in a variety of places. Established LGBT academics like Joan Laird, Jean Quam, Jeanne Anastas, Cathryne Schmitz, and Mary Swigonski have served as role models for me, along with up-and-coming leaders like Darlyne Bailey, David Jenkins, Karen Fredriksen-Goldsen, and Deena Morrow. Groups like EFLAG (the group in the Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) for LGBT issues), the Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression (the group in the Council on Social Work Education), and the LGBT Caucus have helped provide me with a community of LGBT scholars, many of whom are committed to anti-racism as well. LGBT peers have provided a good deal of support and guidance for me; they showed me what was possible for LGBT academics, and many have become trusted colleagues, scholarly collaborators, and friends. My heterosexual colleagues, especially women of color and other intentional white and male allies have been especially helpful even as they remind me of the need to be collectively committed to eradicating all oppressions.

I believe that I have now achieved what Cass (1979) called "identity synthesis" across my integrated identities. Rather than being defined only by my sexual orientation, as I was during my "pride" stage, my lesbianism is an integral part of who I am as a scholar, a teacher, a white woman, and a person. When I gained media attention as an advocate for a local domestic partner registry, I never once worried about support from my Dean or my colleagues. I approach disclosure to new students as an

everyday occurrence; the disclosure, while still a little louder note than the rest of the melody, is no longer jarring or scary to me. That is not to say that disclosure is always easy, but by now, most people in my university and in social work education know that I am a lesbian—or they will when they see my curriculum vitae, so I don't have to wait for that shoe to drop.

My identity as a white anti-racist is, in many ways, more challenging to maintain. I work at a school that is predominantly white—we have very few faculty and students of color. It is easy to forget my whiteness in a culture that normalizes and erases it, and claiming myself as white and anti-racist can be jarring in this culture. Nonetheless, I have worked to establish support programs for students of color, students with high financial need, and first-generation college students like myself. I have worked with our staff to develop recruitment strategies that open the doors of college to those individuals who have been shut out from higher education due to work schedules, life circumstances, and a lack of experience with higher education systems. I try to maintain my relationships with colleagues and friends of color and seek out cultural and educational opportunities to spend time as a white minority.

I am glad that I have focused much of my scholarship in the areas of LGBT and diversity issues. My knowledge of LGBT communities, histories, and policies has developed significantly, and my passion for this area has not waned. I write about intersecting oppressions, specifically those affecting African Americans and other people of color. The ability to focus on my areas of interest, and to develop specialized knowledge, has allowed me to be more productive than I might have been had I followed a more traditional path. It has not been an easy journey, but I believe that by accepting and integrating my identities, I have been able to make scholarly and administrative contributions that I hope can improve the experiences of LGBT people and people of color and those whose identities intersect.

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(Footnotes)

[1] The title of this article is also an homage to a work by Lorraine Hansberry, a collection of her writings entitled To be young, gifted, and Black (1970). Hansberry, best known as the playwright who authored A Raisin in the Sun, was a Black lesbian. She wrote many works on the intersections of identities, oppression, and liberation. Her work, along with work by LGB African Americans James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, has provided support for me in my own thinking and in my personal identity development.

Learning Race

Barbara McQueen, MSW, Simmons College School of Social Work

The author describes her experiences as a white woman learning about race, including white privilege. She relates experiences of teaching about racism and the unexpected backlash from white students. She articulates the necessity of this continued conversation about race as part of a commitment to social work values and its mission.

Some of my most difficult and exciting professional learning comes from my efforts to learn and teach about race. I feel up against my own ignorance on a consistent basis. It brings up feelings of fear and vulnerability. I know that I will make mistakes, reveal my biases, and demonstrate my blind spots. I am aware that what I identify as a critical moment of growth may seem inconsequential for someone else and expose my naiveté. But I have come to a point in my life in which it is more important to speak about race than it is to be seen as "right" about it. My fear of being judged is less significant than the commitment I feel to be a voice that says: Race continues to be a salient issue in the experiences of every person in the United States today. Racial justice simply cannot wait for us to have done enough work to be perfect on this issue.

Learning about Racism: A Dance

My learning about racism has been a step forward, step back kind of dance, punctuated with periods of being frozen in space. At times, my frozen state has lasted for years. At other times, it's short lived; a stopping to resume breathing and see how I am being changed by the most recent catalytic events. If I think of this dance less metaphorically and more formally: the story of my racial identity development, marked by a series of events, moves me from one point to another. In my professional life, these events occur in my clinical practice, in my supervision of professional staff, and when I am advising students and teaching. I believe that if we are paying attention, our work offers us learning opportunities every day. On matters of race, I have an intention: to see, to observe myself, and to reflect on my experience. This intention means that when the opportunity presents itself, I do not turn away, but go to it to learn what I can, to teach what I can, and to make a difference where I can.

I teach a course called "Dynamics of Racism and Oppression." I teach this course as someone who sees myself with some expertise, but I am also a novice. The practice of teaching, like the practice of clinical social work, involves mutuality, a willingness to be changed and affected by what occurs in the process. Thus, every time I teach this class, I commit myself to entering this terrain of mutual discomfort and uncertainty. There is no place to hide behind being "the expert" who knows "the truth." The more I do this work, the more deeply I occupy the place of: "I don't know the answers here." I believe that as social workers our capacity to remain present in the discomfort is an essential; this skill is greatly called upon in teaching this course. The spring of 2007 offered me a critical event in my own process of racial identity and also one of my lowest moments on this journey, bringing profound doubt and a stabbing hurt.

By Kathy Lay

Teaching about Racism

This low moment occurred oddly enough after I finished teaching what I thought was my most successful class on the "Dynamics of Racism and Oppression." I am a white social worker who has been teaching this required course to master's-level social work students since the spring of 2004. I feel called to teach this course in part because *I* need to talk about race. That spring's was a large class of nineteen and my first all-white class. The students were disappointed about the lack of racial diversity in the classroom. I celebrated the opportunity we had to consider the meaning of our whiteness without being concerned about the impact of our ignorance on students of color. With my fifth time teaching the class, I felt a growing confidence in my ability to connect with my students and to teach to where they were. Their papers were, overall, the best I have ever read, as most of these students honestly grappled with their racial identity and their nascent consciousness about what it means to be white in a racist society.

The term ended. I graded finals and entered my final grades. Then I read the students' course evaluations. As I read, I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach. Had I been in the same room as these students? How had I so misinterpreted their experiences? The disconnect between what I thought was happening and what their comments indicated they had experienced made me dizzy. The anger expressed by some of the students was vitriolic. I wondered about this anger and how it related to what I have come to think of as a perfect storm of discomfort for white students taking this course. The first ingredient for the storm is that despite the end of legal segregation, our residential communities are still deeply divided along racial lines. This segregation means that far too many white people grow up without developing any significant relationships across race. The second ingredient is startling on its face, but not really surprising: white people have been socialized not to talk about race, and social work students are not exempt. Many white people have the idea that, not only is it unacceptable to talk about race, but talking about race or noticing racial differences is inherently racist. The final factor is that students know what they *don't* believe (I have yet to meet a student who actively supports a white supremacist position) and have ideas about what they *shouldn't* say or think. But, they don't really have anything proactive to take its place.

Although I saw in their papers their growing awareness of racism and white privilege, perhaps I didn't appreciate the depths of the bind they were in. They can't talk about race, they have little or no experience with people of color, and, in an ironic twist, their intellectual appreciation for diversity and social justice may further serve to cause them discomfort as they begin to recognize the gaps between their values and their ignorance. So when I read the comment: "Barbara is an unqualified teacher," how did I interpret it? I was both deeply hurt by their anger and strangely shamed by the fact that I had not intuited their feelings. How could I put together the growth I had seen in my students with the fury coming my way? Did this material make them so uncomfortable that they didn't know what else to do but blame me? Or, am I failing them in some way I don't understand? The phrase "race traitor" came into my head. It is not a phrase I ever have had occasion to use; it is not part of my common vocabulary. But that was how I felt some of my students had perceived me. When I spoke about my evaluations to my current department chair, an African American man, he said out loud the same phrase.

Race Traitor

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Gove, 1986) does not offer a definition for "race traitor." However it defines race in the following way: "...a class or kind of individuals with common characteristics, interests, appearances or habit as if derived from a common ancestor." It defines traitor as: "...one that violates his allegiance to his nation...by aiding its enemies." Putting these words together would have white people place people of color in the place of the enemy, and a race traitor violating her allegiance to her own people by supporting people who are racially different. To the extent that the

interests or well being of white people overlaps with the ideology of white supremacists, then being a race traitor should be a good phenomenon.

But, my experience of being seen as a race traitor brought a powerful sting. I wondered about that. Of course, the very idea embodies one of the essential dilemmas I feel in teaching this class: we use the language of race—of black, of white—at the same time that we are challenging the very idea of race as anything other than a social construction. But perhaps it is more than that. Perhaps it goes to the heart of our experience of belonging and of being comfortable. And, perhaps there is a parallel between the disconnect I felt reading those evaluations and the feelings the students had when I challenged the assumptions of belonging. As white people, they live in a society that privileges whiteness. This course suggested that the world was not as they had seen it, that racism was not a word that belonged only to the past and that there were aspects of their identity they had never considered that were vitally important.

Challenges to belonging felt like part of my landscape last spring. In addition to feeling shaken as far as my identity as a teacher, I was also aware of growing increasingly alienated from many white people who didn't see the salience of race, didn't recognize our privilege, and didn't see the injustice of racial discrimination multiple times every day. I struggle regularly with despair over how intractable structural racism seems to be. At the same time, I feel deeply dispirited about how white my world continues to be. Despite my decisions to live in Boston, an urban area with significant racial and economic diversity, to send my children to Boston public schools, and to teach this class, the most significant relationships in my life are with other white people. I do not mean to whine, and I will understand if my colleagues of color find it difficult to muster any sympathy, but it is not easy to make new relationships across race. When compared to the violence, losses, and denied opportunities that have been the faces of racism for so many people of color, this moment of mine pales. But it was (is) a real moment that falls under the heading: what racism means to me and how it has an adverse effect on my life every day.

Racial Identity Development

So, returning to the idea introduced in the beginning of this narrative, my learning about racism and the process of my racial identify development are marked by a series of events moving me along my journey. Thus, the "event" in my class that spring was one in a line of life events that have brought me from one place to another. The place I began was the Bronx. Despite being part of New York City, the neighborhood where I grew up was a segregated place: a white, Irish Catholic, working class enclave where being Italian was considered different. I remember one single black family in our neighborhood, and two black classmates at the small public school I attended down the hill from my house. I was told that they chose to be bused to our school from wherever they lived because our school was better than the one in their neighborhood.

Many people have written about racial identity development and the different processes for white people and people of color (Carter, Helms, & Juby, 2004; Hamilton-Mason, 2001; Helms, 1985; Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1992). Helms (1985) describes the Disintegration Status for whites, which she characterizes as "disorientation and anxiety provoked by unresolvable racial moral dilemmas that force one to choose between own group loyalty and humanism" (p. 185). I entered this status early on, as I became aware of the gap between rhetoric about racial equality—not to mention Christian love—and the reality of racial discrimination.

I had the good fortune to attend a public high school in Manhattan that drew students from all over the city. There I developed my first cross-race friendships. Also, I learned to talk about race, to notice that my black friends had different experiences and attitudes than I did, to engage with them about the differences between us. One of our differences was about police officers: as someone who had grown up with a father who was a cop, as were many of the adult men in my life, cops are good. For my new friends, this "cops are good" was not true for them. But my high school friendships

with black peers were not my closest and most enduring. Although there is a thread running through the next fifteen years of my life of reaching across difference, when I started social work school in 1987 my life had returned to whiteness. That is, my most significant relationships were with other white people; however white my life, I still felt an emotional, intellectual, and political passion to understand race and the role of race in my life and the lives of others.

Social Work: What Does Race Have to Do With It?

When I became a social worker, I brought with me this passion for the relationship between individuals and the social-cultural context in which we live. How do we make meaning, interpret our experience, and develop our sense of who we are? What do race, gender, class, and sexual orientation have to do with it? Prior to coming to Simmons as an adjunct faculty member in 2003, I was leading professional development and supervision groups at local hospitals and other clinical training sites. During this work I experienced two critical incidents in my journey.

In the fall of 2001, I led a group for social work and psychology interns at a local training site in the Boston area. The six members and I were all women; six of us were white and one of us was black, a South African-born woman who had been in the U.S. for about a decade. Early on in the group, she took some real risks by speaking quite directly about the role that race played in her training and professional life thus far. In the training site, she occupied the "only" place when it came to race; she was the only black person in the trainee group and the only black person in a professional position at the clinic. While I listened supportively, I did not actively pursue what difference (across race, discipline, etc.) might mean to us as a group, nor did I actively keep race on the table. And, midway through the training year, without a word to anyone, she left the site and, by extension, dropped out of the group.

As the leader of the group, I wondered what responsibility I had for the fact that this woman had not spoken about the level of her dissatisfaction with the training site. I thought about early statements she had made about the impact of race and racism on her experience as a black woman in the mental health profession. I do not hold myself singly responsible, and I am not at all sure that I could have done anything that would have changed the outcome. However, the experience led me to consult with colleagues and to reconsider the role of the leader when faced with racial differences. Starting from a point of view that saw the leader responding to group material, I came to believe that a group leader has a responsibility to raise the question of race and, further, that I had failed this group by not actively making race part of our discussion.

The following year I had another opportunity to consider my role as a leader in a multiracial group when the training group included two African American woman and one Spanish American woman as well as three white women. From the first meeting, I introduced difference—including race in a list of several—as one of the key elements of our experience. Throughout our meetings, I asked questions about the race of staff or clients being spoken about. I made an effort to highlight race as an important topic of discussion and to actively welcome it as such. The group richly grappled with their differences: professional differences between psychologist and social worker; racial differences between black and white and between black women who were at different points in their racial identity development; life circumstances between mothers and non-mothers. The group felt very successful. In end of the year evaluations, the members noted how difficult, and yet how powerful, it had been to have difference welcomed and explored rather than denied.

Then I had another experience that demonstrated the step forward, step back dance of my learning about racism. I created a workshop for the Massachusetts Chapter of NASW biennial conference on "Talking About Race." The good news is that the workshop was well subscribed. The bad news was that, in my naiveté, I imagined that I would be talking to other white people. Instead, the room was filled with a rich, multiracial group.

As I began to talk about how essential it is to talk about race in professional work, I could see nods from many of the white attendees; but the people of color in the audience were not nodding. My lesson was too basic for them. I believe this incident reflects a fundamental difference in how people of color and white people are socialized and acculturated in our society: people of color do talk about race, while white people are instilled with the belief that talking about race is racist. I noted the difference in the room, but as the entire experience of presenting was such a huge reach for me, I couldn't work it in as skillfully as I would have liked. It was a very humbling experience (dare I say humiliating?). But, it did not shake my conviction that it was essential for my white colleagues and me to move beyond this prohibition and learn to skillfully engage across and about racial difference.

Stepping Out of Our Comfort Zones

When I began at Simmons as an advisor in the fall of 2003, I quickly made an appointment to talk with the person who was then chair of the "Dynamics of Racism" sequence about teaching. I had no previous teaching experience, so she tried to caution me about the challenges of this curriculum. She stressed how difficult it would be when I faced rough spots, to know to what extent they were about my inexperience as a teacher and to what extent they were about the material. Wise words, but I was determined. I felt I had both something to teach and more to learn when talking about and across race. Most significantly, I believed that I had something to offer white students, many of whom I knew had also grown up in segregated neighborhoods.

A key element of what I hope to convey to my students—perhaps, in particular, the white students with whom I work—is that stepping out of one's comfort zone is one of the fundamental requirements for doing good and effective clinical work. It might also be the first step toward cultural competence, toward being a good colleague to a multiracial cadre of other social workers in the effort to create a more just society. I want to let them know that being comfortable with discomfort is an essential social work muscle, and that they can dare to be uncomfortable and still survive. Obviously, this message is not easily heard in first year of social work school. But, as I grow my own capacity for compassion, and as I stay on the path by continually pushing myself out of my own comfort zone, I hope my message will ring true and feel not only possible, but necessary.

Last spring, after reading my students' evaluations and feeling a drowning wave of not belonging, I talked with and got support from colleagues—both white and of color—about the evaluations. I had a conversation with a white friend who also does anti-racist work. She listened with compassion and then, with the same compassion, challenged me to step out even further. And I co-taught with an African American male colleague the course in the summer after that difficult course. I also came to appreciate the ways in which teaching this course keeps me honest, keeps me walking the path that my privilege would otherwise allow me to avoid.

Double Consciousness/Psychosis

Racism in our society breeds a kind of psychosis. People of color have lived the double consciousness described by Du Bois (2007) and have struggled to integrate themselves and to be seen as whole. They have felt the power of race in shaping the way others have perceived and received them as they have faced stereotypes, discrimination, and even death. At the same time, they have been fed the myths of meritocracy, colorblindness, and equality for all. My commitment to seeing race has led me into a different realm of psychosis, and it is not pretty. It is a world where it is hard to trust one's perceptions, where one is regularly misunderstood; where one is attacked.

I have to believe that willingness to experience this psychosis, and my efforts to metabolize it, are part of what is required to dismantle racism. Teaching this course has meant making myself available to be shaken, to be misinterpreted, and to be attacked. But, it has also inspired me, allowed me to develop relationships with a wonderful group of

colleagues, given me the opportunity to connect with students on a subject I feel passionately about, and helped me to grow. It keeps me very organically on the path I am encouraging my students to walk.

Recently, I was talking with my husband about how students seem to blame me for the discomfort they feel as a result of what they are learning in this class, and how hard it could be to be a target when I have my own discomforts and doubts. He told me it was the job I had signed up for: "You didn't sign up for the kissing booth; you signed up for the dunk tank." So I guess this assertion is true. I believe we each have a responsibility to take leadership on matters of race, no matter how imperfect we may be. And, this daring to be imperfect and uncomfortable is one of the essential practices of social work, and of social change.

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Call for Papers

REFLECTIONS SPECIAL EDITION ON ISSUES OF PRIVILEGE

While the topic of oppression and marginalized populations has historically been the focus of multiculturalism in social work education and practice, there has been increasing attention in the last few years from scholars and practitioners on the topic of privilege and its role in maintaining systems of stratification. This attention has primarily focused on white and male privilege, but has broadened more recently to include social class, heterosexual, able-bodied, U.S./American, citizenship, linguistic, size, Christian, educational, and positional privilege. The journal *Reflections* seeks narratives on the impact of privilege on the practice of social work and other helping professions, as well as the education, training, and supervision of practitioners.

We seek narratives from the perspectives of students, educators, practitioners, and clients that address general issues of privilege, or issues related to specific types of privilege. Narratives may address, but need not be limited to, the following questions:

- What has the process been of coming to recognize the impact of your privilege on your personal and professional life?
- How have you come to reconcile the inherent tension between your marginalized and privileged identities?
- What resistances have you encountered in your own process of recognizing privilege? How have you worked through those resistances? Where do you still struggle?
- How has privilege impacted your professional relationships with colleagues, students, clients, therapists, supervisors, and supervisees?
- How has privilege impacted your personal relationships with partners, family members, friends, and social networks?
- How does privilege shape the classroom experiences of educators and students?
- What approaches, techniques, and strategies have you found to be effective in educating others about issues of privilege?
- What does privilege look like in higher education? In private practice? In community practice?

Mail manuscripts by June 30, 2009 to:

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Insider-Out/Outsider-In: A White Woman's Reflections on Attending a Historically Black University

Melinda W. Pilkinton, Ph.D., Mississippi State University

This narrative describes positive educational experiences of a white woman at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The author's particular experience of being an outsider or "the only one" is explored here. Points about differences in classroom settings, relationships with professors, and instructional characteristics of the HBCU as related to a Predominately White University (PWU) are discussed. Changes in the author's pedagogical approach to social work education are noted.

In 2001 I was accepted to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) to pursue a doctoral degree in social work. My most recent degree up until 2001, Master's of Social Work, was granted in 1976 from a Predominantly White University (PWU). Thus, I had no experience with being a minority student. I am a white, middle-aged woman who had practiced social work for a number of years, but had many anxieties about being intellectually competent enough to perform adequately in Ph.D. courses. Nonetheless, I was attracted to the school by the quality of faculty who taught there, and by the financial aid incentives offered by the school. The HBCU had numerous professors who possessed immediate name recognition in the field of social work education; for this reason, and others, I applied for admission.

As a disclaimer, I make no pretense of special knowledge about attitudes, behaviors, experiences, or cultural differences between African American and whitepeople. The experiences and observations reported here are my personal perceptions and are not generalized in any fashion.

Background and Preparation

It was a good time in my life to return to academia. My significant others were entrenched in their own studies and businesses, and were less dependent on me as a spouse and mother. While I had enjoyed a viable social work practice for over two decades, I continued to identify heavily with traditional female social roles. But I felt that I needed to do something for *me;* to expand my mind and take a different tack in my career path. I reasoned that the family members who were accustomed to my caretaking would learn to fare for themselves, and while change is never easy, thankfully, they rose to the occasion.

From a personal standpoint, I was worried about being able to do well academically; after all, I had been out of school for 25 years. The anxiety and concern I felt about my potential for academic achievement was my primary focus as I entered the Ph.D. program. The prospect of statistics, research, and writing courses were frightening eventualities; the expectation that the educational journey to achieve the Ph.D. would be rigorous was at the forefront of my concerns.

I did not give much thought as to how I would "fit" with the school. I hoped that I would find supportive acquaintances within my cohort. But, I tried to prepare myself that this might not happen if I was too different: too white, too old, too middle-class. My previous educational experiences at three PWUs had taught me to conform to whatever norms were in place, and I expected that life at an HBCU would not differ significantly from those experiences, at least in terms of educational functioning. I had little expectation of great friendships formed during my matriculation; I

reasoned that students would be entrenched in their studies with little time for socialization.

I asked an African American colleague who was also a student at this particular HBCU to help me prepare for the upcoming experience. In addition to describing coursework, texts, and expectations of various professors, he shared stories about how other white people had fared (or not fared) in the program. But I did not "get it." It was hard to understand what those experiences had to do with me and what I was trying to accomplish. He warned me about maintaining a good attitude (i.e., open, flexible, optimistic, pleasant) and to be aware of others' perceptions and scrutiny of my behaviors. But he also encouraged me—rather tepidly in those early days—by saying, "You'll do fine." His words seemed vague and I was not quite reassured.

Beginning Experiences

Not long after enrolling at the HBCU, I began to notice some differences in my previous educational experiences at PWUs and those at the HBCU. One of the first differences I noticed was the level of social politeness and warmth that African American students and faculty exuded. My previous educational experiences in PWUs did not include this warmth. At the HBCU, faculty and students greeted one another warmly and business was conducted after appropriate greetings were exchanged. This norm differed considerably from my experience at PWUs where professors often entered the classroom and began a lecture with a cursory greeting, if any at all. Similarly, PWU professors often left a classroom without speaking to anyone in a personal manner and frequently seemed either distracted or irritated if asked a question by a student. This difference has been discussed in the literature (Cooper, Massey, & Graham, 2006) as possibly related to a heavy research agenda at PWUs, rather than the teaching focus of HBCUs. However, all the professors at the HBCU I attended were heavily involved in both teaching and research, some having prolific publication records.

Another difference I noted was that of collegiality and friendliness. As classes got underway and socialization not only occurred but was a regular part of the experience ("Where are we going for lunch?" "Do you need anything from Kinko's?"), I was surprised. At PWUs it was a common occurrence to walk along a sidewalk and have no interpersonal interchanges with other students, faculty, or visitors on the campus. In contrast, at the HBCU individuals greeted one another politely (including me): neither age, race, class, nor gender seemed to affect the friendliness of greeting one received.

My previous experiences with higher education occurred at small universities and colleges. I had attended undergraduate school at two different PWUs: a women's college with an enrollment of about 3,000 students; and a coeducational university with an enrollment of about 10,000. My graduate education occurred at a PWU of about 8,000 enrollees. The HBCU where I studied for the Ph.D. had about 7,000 students at the time I was enrolled. I do not believe that the size of the university or college was a major influence on the different levels of collegiality that I experienced. If intimacy of setting is a prerequisite for increased collegiality, then the women's college of 3,000 students would have been more cordial and welcoming. I did not find this collegiality to be the case at that particular women's PWU.

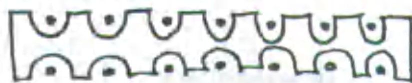
Perhaps universities are less formal now than in the decades I attended. Research indicates that less formal methods are more satisfactory for students and produce increased understanding of the material presented, as contrasted with long lectures that are often boring or irrelevant to the contemporary student (Beishline, 1997; Bethune, 2006; Biggs, 1999; Costa, van Rensburg, & Rushton, 2007; Heath, 2000; Wakefield, 2001).

Frequently, the HBCU students would take breaks between classes or go to meals with each other. I was always included. On one occasion, our professor wanted to eat at an African American restaurant in the city, a short distance from our campus setting. He had driven his large, immaculately restored,vintage American car to campus that day and wanted to drive the students to the restaurant. We set off from campus on the

interstate, in this iconic automobile, listening to Motown music, sitting on plush dark green upholstery. It was blissful. When we arrived at the restaurant, the staff did not seem happy to see us. They had planned to close soon and were quite irritated with our requests for substitutions on the menu items or to refill our beverages. As I listened and observed the manner in which our professor handled the conflict with the wait staff, I was struck by the differences in his approach and the approaches I have seen in my own social circle. He took the lead with our interactions and made amusing comments as the wait staff grouched at us about our requests—even coaxing a few smiles from the staff. We did not get the substitutions we wanted. But I remember thinking how unpleasant the meal could have been without this style. And how often my family and friends have left a restaurant if the service staff was unfriendly or seemed unwilling to serve us.

Notably, this professor is a very urbane and well-traveled intellectual. He may have experienced such episodes numerous times and dealt with them accordingly; however, the impression that he made on me that day was indelible: that one can enjoy encounters with others, even when not entirely pleasant, and maintain one's dignity and enjoyment of life simultaneously. Parenthetically, never had I been invited to dine with a professor in a PWU. That level of socialization was foreign to me.

On another occasion, I dined with two African American males: a professor and another student. As we entered a delicatessen occupied entirely by white people, they stared at us, creating the awareness that I was in the company of the only African Americans in the business. We ate our meal, had pleasant conversation, and lingered over coffee. Not once did my companions seem uneasy or glance about at other diners (as I did). After we left the restaurant, I commented to them about the irritation that I felt at being gawked at by other patrons and asked them if they ever felt similarly. They shrugged and said, "You get so used to it that you don't even notice after a while." I wondered if I were not a member of the majority culture would I have become accustomed to that level of scrutiny by total strangers.



Building Community

The sense of community and relationship that was created by these outings and other experiences increased my understanding of my professors and cohorts. I felt included, even though I was an outsider; trust and respect developed over time. bell hooks (1994), well-known feminist theorist and educator, wrote about the community of education. hooks' ideas were shaped by the philosophy of Paulo Freire who struggled to achieve education for oppressed populations in Brazil (Bauer, 2000; Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; Lutz, 1993). hooks' ideas also strike me as similar to the Aristotelian and Socratic idea that learning occurs depending upon the relationship between teacher and student (Muir, 2000; Tate, 2007). I benefited immensely from the community that developed and the relationships with my professors at the HBCU and experienced exponential academic growth.

hooks (1984, 1994) and Freire (1972) noted the responsibility of academics to raise the poor and oppressed to higher levels of empowerment. As a feminist, hooks included men (including imprisoned African American men) in her outreach (Lutz, 1993). She viewed no topic as "sacred:" all is revealed, discussed, and processed both in her classrooms and in more public arenas (Bauer, 2000). This pedagogy is also similar to the philosophies of Plato and Socrates; the idea of the discussion going wherever it might, without a plan but with considerable analysis and critique (Muir, 2000).

Perhaps the professors that I encountered at the HBCU believed in and practiced the individual connection that is apparent in Socratic pedagogy as well as in hooks' works. Our discussions were free range: pop culture, theories, movies, books, food, cars… the list was seemingly endless. As the semesters progressed, from first year to second, and then

to Ph.D. candidate, I felt included in the community of educators and students.

Differences and Similarities

In my first semester of classes at the HBCU, a perplexing difference that I observed was that I was not called on in class to answer a question or provide input until after the African American students had spoken. As I had this experience regularly, I thought about how their experiences at PWUs must compare. Were they called on last? Or were they ignored by faculty? As students at PWUs, were they fulfilling a societal expectation to not speak up first? As a white student at the HBCU, was I fulfilling an expectation not to be more assertive? Was I "people-pleasing?" I had no reference point in my cache of life experiences to place this phenomenon. I decided that I would not be offended but would continue to observe and see if the practice continued. And, it continued throughout my matriculation with few exceptions. However, this experience caused me to reflect upon my ethnocentric expectations of being up-front and visible to others. This practice also made classroom participation (a highly valued component) much more difficult; I had to reach deeper into the material to find something of value to contribute to the discussion. Thus, in a real sense, this practice yielded better honed study skills and an enriched understanding of much of the material required for the classroom.

There may be other explanations for my experience with being the last called-upon student in the class. However, I am flummoxed to decipher what they may be. While enrolled at the HBCU, I was a member of a small cohort with negligible differences in our chronological ages. While I possessed more social work experience and was the only clinical social worker in the cohort, other students had experienced more variety in their career paths and had worked outside the field of social work, whereas I had not. Both male and female students were present in almost all of the classes. I was about the same chronological age as about half of the professors in the school of social work, with the other half being older and considerably more experienced in social work education. Most of the professors to whom I was assigned were female.

Thus, I believe that neither age nor gender issues in the differences that I experienced figured into the equation. Possibly, the practice was unintentional on their part, and I was sensitive to the effects of "the only one syndrome" noted by Cooper, Massey, and Graham (2006) in exploring the experiences of Black persons who attended PWUs. I identify with their discussion of feeling different in a fundamental way from their professors and peers at the PWUs they attended.

Although I have remarked on the differences, I found many similarities between the HBCU and the PWU where I work now. The quality of the education that I received at the HBCU was impeccable. There was the rigor of the research and statistics classes, fierce dedication to the APA writing style, intimidating classroom assignments, and the exhausting process of preparing for comprehensive examinations. The education that I received was life changing. My worldview has been altered and I am a happier, more fulfilled person. I feel tremendous respect and admiration for the professors who taught me and I emulate their teaching styles in my own work.

Effects on Teaching Style

In my current role as a full-time assistant professor at a PWU, I teach classes with a notable percentage of African American students. Most of the people in the classes are traditional college students with a very few non-traditional students. Many of the African Americans are first-generation college students, as are a sizeable percentage of the White students. I agree with hooks (1994) and Freire (1972) that educators have a responsibility to address oppression and powerlessness in education. I believe, like hooks, Freire, and others that education should be liberating for people whose voices need to be heard (Narayan, 1999).

Some of the powerlessness and oppression in the university is subtle. For instance, first-generation college students have challenges that need to be addressed in the

academy. hooks (1994) wrote of this phenomenon in her personal experiences at Stanford. Others (Clarke/Keefe, 2006; Oldfield, 2007; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007) have noted the chasm that exists between the uninitiated first-generation students and those of families who are prepared from an early age to enter the university. These students benefit from the philosophies of hooks, Freire, and others in very personal ways.

My personal experiences as a first-generation student and later as the only White student in my cohort have altered the ways I approach classroom participation. I am much more sensitive to the learning patterns, styles, and needs of all students, with particular attention to those of African Americans and first-generation students. Possibly, the mid-life experience of being a student once more has now sensitized me to the needs of students in general.

However, I believe it has been important to make a few adjustments in my interaction and teaching style to improve the quality of the classroom experience for the students I teach. For example, I learn the names of all the students in class and use their names when addressing them to provide a more personal level of communication. I have adopted the practice of greeting everyone in class and taking a few minutes to speak with them prior to the beginning of the lecture. I have noticed that often the students do not speak readily in class unless asked to do so. I try to encourage their participation without embarrassing them or putting them on the spot by saying, "[Name], would you like to comment?" and if they do not care to comment, to quickly move to someone else. This practice seems to elicit more participation in classroom discussions on an equitable level with the other students. And I often tell the story of my experience at the HBCU so that students will realize that we all have something to contribute to each other's learning and that no one race, ethnic group, socioeconomic group, or culture predominates.

Unsettled Question: Insider-Outsider

However, one area involving my education remains unsettled. When white people ask where I received the Ph.D. and I give the name of the HBCU, they invariably ask, "Why?" I have found no successful response to this question. My questioners either change the subject of the conversation or they suggest that I could have attended a PWU. I do not feel compelled to explain the motivations for my choice. I received an excellent education, made contacts with people I would not have known in any other avenue of my life, and experienced a different way of learning. If my goal was to do something for myself in pursuing this educational path, then I think that has been accomplished. Now, I eagerly share what I learned with the students (white, black, or other) who attend the PWU where I teach. And, I remain receptive to learning from them: insiders and outsiders alike.

As I entered the HBCU to study for the doctorate in social work, I expected to be an outsider; I did not expect to have the opportunity to be included and accepted on such a nurturing level. I did not expect the insider experience. While I seldom take sufficient time for self-reflection, it is necessary for personal growth and development and, in this case, has underscored my gratitude for my experiences at the HBCU: both as outsider and insider.

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"I Was in Foster Care, Too." One Social Worker's Journey from *Promise* to *Practice*

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This narrative describes one social worker's journey through the child welfare system and the use of personal disclosure in practice context. First, the author describes how he came to be in foster care and the experiences that led to the "promise" of being a social worker. Next, the author discusses the fulfillment of this promise and the beginning of his work in Child Protective Services. Finally, this narrative explores the positive and negative aspects of personal disclosure in social work practice.

Currently, approximately 510,000 children are in foster care (National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, 2008), all with stories as unique as mine, yet with similarities. Oftentimes I tell my story, and I can be heard speaking the words, "I was in foster care, too." I speak them every time I get a chance. I speak them to the children for whom I work and the professionals with whom I work. I use these words in earnest attempts to comfort others and, in a peculiar way, to comfort and compel myself. These words have therapeutic meaning. They give me hope that my practice decisions are making a positive impact on others. I do not ignore my past; I embrace my time in foster care and claim it as part of my identity, in hopes that others will do the same. Hear my journey, even as it continues: *"I was in foster care, too."*

Birth of a Social Worker

While my employment in its current human service context began only five years ago, my journey as a social worker began in 1981, the year of my birth. I was born in a small town in south-central Kentucky. The stigma of a "forbidden relationship" between my black father and my white mother brought a multitude of tensions. Facing a family with racist values and with limited other options, my mother decided to place me for adoption.

I do not know much about this early period in my life. As an adult, I learned that I spent a short time with a potential adoptive family in Nashville, Tennessee. To this day, I have not met any of my maternal relatives face to face; however, a few years ago, I had the chance to communicate with my maternal aunt. This opportunity came through a haphazard meeting between my aunt and one of my classmates. This classmate, a very dear friend, is from the small town where I was born. During this meeting, my aunt shared stories of how she and my mother drove to Nashville for visits. As I understand it, before the adoption was finalized, my mother had a change of heart. And, as my father now describes it, she "wanted you back." During one of these routine visits, my mother took me from the prospective adoptive home. This removal was not planned or arranged, yet my parents felt it was necessary. My mother, father, and I relocated.

My mother and father married shortly after the move; my two younger sisters were born from this marriage. I remember spending time with my mother and father. We often took family vacations and both of my parents supported our typical children's activities. But, contrary to outward appearances, my life at home was in turmoil. My father had violent mood swings and took the frustrations of life out on my mother. I began to think that domestic violence was part of a "normal

family." I vividly recall the helplessness I felt as a child because of these countless incidents and felt that I should have been able to do more; yet, I found myself powerless to stop the abuse perpetrated against my mother. I distinctly remember making plans to harm my father so that he could no longer hurt my mother.

When I was five or six years old, my sisters, mother, and I went into hiding at a secluded domestic violence shelter. My mother made the stay at the shelter sound more like a fun family vacation than the actuality. The time we spent there was hellish. Few kids were at the shelter and none of them were my age. As I recall, we never left the shelter; the days were extremely monotonous. However, my mother always managed to keep her positive attitude and never showed that our situation bothered her. She was always strong in that way. While her world seemed to be crumbling around her, she managed to hold things together for us. Eventually, my father convinced my mother that things had changed. We returned home. Things did not change. The beatings continued, but my mother stayed. In 1989, my mother died. Years earlier, we had been involved in a very bad car accident causing her a serious head injury. As a result, she began to experience epileptic seizures. One night while my mother and I were asleep on the living room couch, she had a seizure and passed away. I did not wake up. I never had a chance to say goodbye or tell her that I loved her. I was eight years old.

Journey into the "System:" Promises Made

This event was the end of my family as I knew it. Soon after my mother died, my father succumbed to a substance abuse problem that had plagued him for some time. The drugs that he had been using did not numb the pain of my mother's passing. He became addicted to crack cocaine.

Thus, my journey in the "system" began. From ages seven to nine, I shared time living with a number of relatives and family friends; however, most of my time was spent with my paternal grandmother. Although those were mostly happy times in my life, those years were unstable. I never knew what was next. Would I be staying with my father? And if so, would I be left to care for my younger sisters? As I grew older, I started to hang with an "in," yet dismally misguided, crowd. I began to get into more and more trouble.

On one of the days that I happened to actually make it to school, I had an unexpected visit from a social worker from our local social service agency. The worker showed up during one of the many, albeit short, periods when I had moved back to live with my father. This social worker visit was a critical incident in my journey. I was called into the counselor's office, a common occurrence given my absences from and behavioral tendencies in the classroom. Entering this familiar office, I immediately noticed an unfamiliar young woman sitting in the corner of the office. She sat at a table with a small manila file folder in front her. Shuffling through papers, she began to speak as if she already knew me.

"How are you, Justin?" she asked. "Good," I replied. I asked her why she wanted to speak with me. Introducing herself as a social worker, she told me that she was there to "check on my well-being." As she and I began to stumble through very uncomfortable questions about my living conditions, I remember feeling overwhelmed with so much that I wanted to tell her.

I wanted to tell her about the times when I sat at home scared and immobilized because I did not know where my father was or when he would return. I wanted to tell her about my father's angry mood swings that often precipitated violent behaviors, mostly directed at me. I wanted to tell her the stories of being shuffled between family members and friends and not knowing where I would stay from night to night. I wanted to tell her of the sacrifices

that my grandmother made in order to care for my sisters and me. I wanted to tell her about my struggles in coping with my mother's death.

I wanted to tell her. But I couldn't. Not because I didn't want to, but because I didn't know how. The meeting with this social worker could not have lasted more than ten minutes, and then she was gone. I remember most vividly my feelings of hopelessness and helplessness as she walked out the door. I remember thinking that she must not really care. I remember thinking that I was a bother to her because she had much more important things to do than talk to me.

At that moment I made a promise to myself. I did not understand exactly what a social worker was, or even what one did. However, I did know that they helped people, and in this case, a child. I told myself that I wanted a job like that. I promised myself that I would do everything in my power to get one. Funny how one can make life-altering decisions at eight or nine years old; but I did. I promised myself that I would always try to hear what children had to say, both spoken and unspoken. I promised that I would help children in situations like mine. I promised that I would become a social worker.

Soon after the social worker's visit, I had several stints in out-of- home care: first with family friends; then, in a state foster home. My sisters remained in the care of my grandmother. But, by the time I was 12, my delinquent behaviors, coupled with the resentment that I felt for my father, meant that I was far beyond my grandmother's control. I ran away several times during this period, mostly staying with various friends. This way of living lasted until I was about 14 years old.

A Family

Fortunately for my sisters and me, my paternal biological aunt and her husband, who lived in Germany at the time, heard about out situation. They decided to adopt me and my sisters, bringing us to live with them and their two small children. To this day, I cannot find the words to express the gratitude that I feel towards them for taking us into their home and hearts. Honestly, I had almost given up hope that anything good would come from my life. But they had not given up, and as I soon learned, they would not give up. It just wasn't in their character.

Aside from the obvious culture shock of moving to Europe, the transition into what I referred to then as a "real" family was extremely challenging. I remember starting at the new school as a gregarious teen. I excelled in athletics and my grades were decent. I found it very easy to make friends; yet I struggled with acclimating to the environment at home. For the first time in years, my life was stable. I had two caregivers who provided for the needs of my sisters and me. I was used to making all of the decisions, and this parental role was the source of many problems in the home. I was used to having all the power, which was an aspect that I was not willing to give up easily.

Soon after I enrolled in school, both of my "new" parents attended one of my sporting events. While it was obvious to others that they were both black, it was equally obvious that I was not. On the following school day, I was bombarded with questions like "Who were those people?" I wanted to tell the story, but it was complicated and difficult to explain. It seemed that the more questions I answered, the more questions they asked. When the inquiries became too much, I found it much easier to explain away the circumstances of my life by simply saying, "*By the way, I was in foster care too*!"

While I flourished in athletics, my classroom conduct left much to be desired. I often found myself in all sorts of trouble. At the beginning of my junior year, I was expelled for brandishing a weapon during a fight. To me, this expulsion seemed an opportune time for my "new" parents to send me back to the states. I expected them to give up; but they didn't. With their unwavering encouragement, and a few correspondence courses, I was able to graduate from high school with my classmates in 1999.

Promises Kept

After high school I attended college in Kentucky on an athletic scholarship. After my first two semesters, I sat down with my coach

to discuss selecting a course of study. I thought back to my childhood experience with the social worker in the corner of the office asking uncaring and awkward questions. I remembered the promise that I had made to myself.

I wanted to be a social worker. I wanted to help people the way that others had helped me. I wanted to talk to children about their situations. I wanted to listen to their stories of abuse, neglect, abilities, and dreams. I wanted to share with them my story of adversity and promise as a child. I wanted to instill hope in them and let them know that anything is possible. And if need be, I could tell them: *"I was in foster care too!"*

For the next three-and-a-half years I studied the various social work theories and practice models that are standard for many undergraduate programs. After graduation, I set on a personal quest to make a difference in the profession. This pursuit led me to accept a position with Child Protective Services. After training, I was promptly put into a position as an investigator. Among myriad duties and tasks, the primary focus of my work was to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect directed towards children.

Soon after starting this position, I received a rather serious referral that ultimately led to the removal of a child. I remember going to get the child from a local emergency shelter, attempting to explain to this child why he was being taken into foster care, and, furthermore, explaining what would happen after he was in foster care. I attempted to explain a "broken" system that I didn't fully understand myself. As I sat with the child and he began to cry, I struggled to console him. As I stuttered and stumbled over my own words, I considered my own experiences. As we sat together and talked more and more, we found common ground in a declaration that I had used so many times. I simply told him: *"I was in foster care, too."*

The more I told my story, the easier it became to tell. Time after time, I recalled the events that led me to social work. I found my history often gave me a unique credibility, not only with the children, but with professionals as well. Soon after my first experience in placing a child in out-of-home care, I attended a treatment team meeting related to another teenager with whom I had worked. This meeting was held to discuss the teen's progress and explore options for future treatment plans. However, the overall attitude of the team yielded little hope that this teen, in foster care at the time, would do "well." With fervent anger and empathy, I stood in place of and for this child. I advocated, trying to think of the words that he would use to implore the team members not to give up on him. During this meeting, one of the treatment directors questioned how I knew so much since I was so new to my job. I calmly stood up, looked squarely into his eyes, and made a statement that I was all too comfortable with: *"Because...I was in foster care too!"*

Personal Experiences and Practice Situations: Intersections and Boundaries

My personal experiences, particularly the time I spent in foster care, have an immensely positive impact on my professional practice. When inordinate importance is placed on more traditional, objective, forms of education, we risk losing the value of personal experience. I choose to look at my experiences not as a hindrance, but as an asset. These experiences give me a unique ability to truly empathize with the situations that I encounter in practice on a daily basis. Further, they offer another perspective to colleagues who may or may not have had similar experiences.

Personal experiences must be used as a discretionary tool for practice, not a directive blueprint. Recognizing the importance of personal experiences and using them to inform and impact practice is crucial. Even in early studies, the disclosure and sharing of personal thoughts and feelings to clients were recognized as important practice skills (Shulman, 1978). However, as Fook and Askeland (2007) assert, it is equally important to recognize the power in disclosing these experiences, which can have both a negative and a positive influence. I'm careful not to liken my experience to any other: that can be dangerous and disempowering. I choose to look at every situation differently. Likewise, I only

disclose personal experiences when I think that they can be of benefit to my audience, whether client or colleague. Every situation and outcome will be unique to the individuals involved, and should be treated as such. My personal experience informs and affects my practice; my practice knowledge helps me use these experiences most effectively.

In closing, I hope that my narrative can inspire others to share their own. Personal experiences are important and can have a positive impact in any practice situation, no matter the context (Cain, 1996). My own experiences have had tremendous significance on the work that I do. These experiences are motivating: they let me know that in all circumstances, hope can be found. So, when my days are long and I feel fatigued; when I think I cannot make another phone call, or conduct another home visit; when I get frustrated by the bureaucracy of working in a governmental agency; and when the challenges of my duties began to take a toll, I stop, I sit back, and I remember….. *"I was in foster care too."*

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When Work Comes Home and Home Goes to Work: Child Welfare Social Workers As Foster and Adoptive Parents

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If you are both a child welfare social worker and foster or adoptive parent, family members and friends outside the field assume you have special skills when it comes to parenting. Your children also think you should be much better parents because you are, after all, child welfare social workers. Whether trying to advocate for macro policy issues, carry a caseload, or manage one's family, there can be a disquieting disconnect between what textbooks teach and what children do. As two child welfare social workers whose collective experience spans two generations, the authors of this narrative became foster and adoptive parents for children with special needs. They found a common bond through the intersection of their professional and family experiences, and share what happened when work-place knowledge came home, and home life went to work. This narrative describes the lessons learned, as well as recommendations for the field of foster care and adoptions.

Eileen's Story: Four Decades, Still Learning

I became a child welfare worker for a county child welfare agency 40 years ago. This was not a career calling. My qualifications were a Bachelor's degree in history and a driver's license. I was 22, and relocated to a mid-western city 2,000 miles from California where I grew up. I sought any job where a college diploma was required, so it was suggested I contact the "welfare department." I didn't know exactly what that was. I was fortunate to grow up in a family where my college professor father was home every night, and my mother packed our lunches and made dinner. I was a middle-class white girl whose biggest concern was having best friends and boyfriends. I never really thought about children who were not lucky enough to grow up in nurturing families, much less the realities of white privilege.

But there I was on my first day at work, with a list of 50 children in a foster care caseload. My job objective: to get those kids off the list through return to family or adoption. No problem, I thought, until my second day at work. Then I went to see a foster mother who had been fostering since before I was born. We had a disagreement. The case record said a child in her care was one year old. "No," said the foster mother. "She's 3 ½." Although I was from the government and there to help, this foster mother didn't want any of it. I didn't stay long. Returning to the agency, I told my supervisor, a brand new MSW, about the "argument."

Supervisor: "Did you see the child?"

Me: "Yes, you told me I had to see the children."

Supervisor: "How old did the child look?"

Me: (anxious): "I don't know, the record says she's one year. I didn't learn ages as a history major."

Supervisor (being patient): "You can tell a lot about the ages of children by their behaviors. What was the child doing?"

Me (trying to understand): "Well, she was riding her tricycle most of the time."

Had it not been for this supervisor and her ability to integrate what Kadushin (1985) would later explain to be essential administrative, educative, and supportive roles, I would not be a social worker today. And no one, least of all me, would believe I could grow up to be a foster and adoptive parent of children with special needs. Many years later,

after I had earned both MSW and DSW degrees, and become the national program director for family foster care, adoption, and kinship care at the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), I was invited back to the same agency to give a talk at the annual foster parent recognition dinner. That foster mother, still there, recognized me. She said, "I can't believe you're still around. You were the dumbest worker I ever met." I tell this story at the start of my child welfare classes, a reminder of how amazing it is to have a job that lets us "learn for a living" (Rapp & Portner, 1992, p. 223).

My professional child welfare and personal fostering/adopting lives first intersected in 1977. I moved to South Florida, and found a child welfare job from a newspaper article. There was a new program, funded by the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), at the Behavioral Sciences Institute at Nova University in Ft. Lauderdale. The goal: to teach foster parents how to be mental health workers. I called the program and found they needed a curriculum developer. I didn't know much about curriculum development. But based on my child welfare worker years and my social work education, I was able to create a model that pioneered the integration of foster parent recruitment, pre-service training, assessment, and selection. It caught on around the country, becoming known as the Nova Model (Pasztor, Burgess, Smith, & Fields, 1978.) I had the privilege of being invited to many states for implementation. But the model was based on book learning and work experience.

Then Along Came M

Thirteen year old M had been a little girl on that first caseload list. As best I could, I worked with her mother for several years to attempt reunification for M and her little sister, as they had always been placed together. When that was not possible, the two little girls were placed adoptively. As school-age children, they were one of the first "older child" adoptions being done at our agency in the early 1970s. I was distressed to get a call from my years-ago supervisor, now an administrator, that the family had kept the little sister, but returned M to the agency, because of her behavior: like a commodity that didn't meet the expectations of the buyer. M was now in her second institutional placement, coincidentally in South Florida. The agency was hoping I might visit her.

My husband and I started having M on weekends. It was difficult taking her back; the quality of care was so poor, as this was not a residential treatment center. Once, while we were cooking breakfast, she told us she wouldn't eat it. "I'm not eatin' nothin' cooked with a fly swatter." She had never seen a spatula, as meals in the institution were brought to the children on trays. My husband suggested, "Maybe she should live with us." I had been afraid to make the suggestion. Child welfare "practice wisdom" said a child shouldn't be older than the marriage, and this teenager would be a decade older than ours. We all took a chance: the agency, the two of us, and, most of all, M. We became licensed foster parents, and training was waived because I had written the training program. It wouldn't have helped; M hadn't read the book and didn't follow the agenda.

We moved from South Florida to Michigan, a culture shock. I started teaching at a local undergraduate social work program, and continued training and consulting nationally. M developed her own special skills. She could break doors, it seemed, just by looking at them. "I hate you, you never let me do what I want, you're not my mother/father..." usually preceded the slam. And we would say, "You're right, we're not your parents, but we love you and want to take care of you." Sometimes it was tough to say. Sometimes it was tempting to say, "Well, leave then." But my training program said, "Never threaten a child with rejection." It helped to overhear her tell a friend, when asked if we were her "real" parents, because we didn't look quite old

enough: "Well, they're not my biological parents. But they're real to me."

Her testing continued. My husband could go to work and deal with other issues. But for me, issues at work seemed to blend into issues at home and vice versa. Once, after teaching about adolescent pregnancy earlier in the day, M casually disclosed at dinner, "I think I'm pregnant." My reply, "That's not possible, I'm a social worker and can't have a pregnant teenager." Inside out! What would my colleagues think? We had many discussions about sexual activity. But she had gone on a two-week visit with a former teacher/big sister with whom she had been close. When I asked her why she didn't use birth control, she said it wasn't available. When I asked why she didn't discuss birth control with the young man, she said, "I couldn't talk with him about things like that. I didn't know him well enough." Turns out, she wasn't pregnant. But, inside out – I added a new activity to my foster parent training workshops.

The struggles with school continued. We continued the challenge of parenting an adolescent with enormous loss issues, which manifested in even larger angry behaviors. M had questions about her mother, her many other siblings, and why "the welfare" had taken them away. We located her birth mother, and M decided she wanted to live with her. At the age of 17, M left us to live in another state in a poor neighborhood with her birth Mom, a sweet person, but overwhelmed by poverty, a dual diagnosis, and six children. M wanted to take care of her, typical for adolescents in foster care. We drove her, it broke my heart. My colleagues said, "Leave the door open for her to return." We did, and so did she…many times: once with a seven year old child; more recently, at the age of 46, with no money and no teeth. But we're still together. She has new teeth, and now we're working on finding that missing adopted sister. We've gone back to the "welfare department" where I first worked and she was in my caseload. Now its name includes family services. The adoption search worker has a degree in criminal justice.

Being a Parent Versus Having a Baby

My husband and I moved to the Washington, D.C. area in 1980. I kept training and consulting, as the early 1980s were filled with promise for child welfare. The Federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) had been enacted. Preventing the separation of children from their families was mandated, foster parents were being routinely trained. My Nova training program was field tested for application with prospective adoptive parents. And my husband and I were thinking about being parents again. I was working full-time and getting my DSW degree, my husband was working long hours and weekends. Who would take care of a baby? I needed to give birth to a six year old who could go to school right away.

So we sorted out the difference between having a baby and being parents. I felt that as a national foster and adoptive parent curriculum developer and trainer, I could "walk the talk." My husband, whose grandparents were murdered in the Holocaust, reminded me that several million Holocaust victims were children. Perhaps we should adopt a Jewish child, support a life when so many had been taken away. So we searched for this child. Between Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia, there was just one: a ten-year old boy who had been in two residential facilities since the age of six, because his family could not manage his behaviors.

The home study was done. No training was required, as I had written the program. The pre-placement and placement process began. This would be an open adoption, controversial at the time. There was still a lot of legal and casework secrecy surrounding adoptions. Family and friends were surprised to learn that, when the adoption was finalized, the original birth certificate would be sealed and a new one issued. This would list me as the birth mother, even though I was far away at the time and place of his birth. The government would rewrite history.

While our son's birth mother was deceased and birth father not involved, there was a maternal grandfather to whom he was attached, living not far from us. So each week, we would drive 60 miles to the facility, pick up

our son, drive back to D.C. so our son and his grandfather could visit. Then we would drive our son back to the facility, and come home again. During these four-hour rides, we got to know each other. Quite important, Grandpa got to know us, and give his only grandson "permission" to be our son. It was an exhausting, but valuable process. During these drives, our son told us that, while visiting, he would call us by our first names. But the day he moved in, he would switch to "Mom" and "Dad." He just didn't want to commit until he was sure it would happen. The paperwork process took almost a year. I tried to be patient. But I didn't want our son to have his 11th birthday in the institution. I finally called the director of the agency that had custody of him, the one where I had trained the staff, to advocate for a speedier process. The intersection worked.

Theory Versus Practice

Many things were unsure from the start. He slept with his shoes on his pillow every night. We didn't really understand why, and he wasn't talking about it. We decided to overlook it. We had bigger battles to fight, like his not using the F-word when my parents visited. But every night we'd say, as we tucked him in, "Our family is a safe place for you. No one is going to hurt you here. No one is allowed in your bed but you. This is a safe place for children." After three months, the shoes came off the pillow. We waited a few days and then commented on how nice it was that the shoes had a new parking place on the floor. He replied, "Where I used to live, you never knew who would try to mess with you at night." So his shoes were his weapon. And I had a child who slept under my roof for 90 nights before he believed we were telling the truth about his safety.

Life with our son was a 24-hour a day challenge. He rarely slept. He needed special transportation to special education school. He had all the behaviors that go with attention deficit disorder, plus highly sexualized behaviors that just stumped us. He didn't like the sleeping arrangements, suggesting we rotate bedrooms so he could take turns sleeping with each of us. I couldn't always be clear about whether adoption was "an issue" or "the issue," as explained in the Kinship Center's *Adoption Clinical Training* (Roszia, Silverstein, Pasztor, Clark, & Ward, 2004). Once, in the car, he said, "Let's talk about condoms." He was not yet 12 years old. I gave the only appropriate response for a mother, "Go ask your father." "No," he replied, "I have to talk to you." Automatically I switched roles from mother to social worker. Was this related to sexual abuse or adoption or just pre-adolescence? "Why," I asked, "do you need to talk with me and not Dad?" "Because," he said, with exasperation, "You know more about condoms than Dad." Trying to use a calm, social worker voice, I said, "I'm wondering why you think I know more about condoms than Dad." "Because," he said matter-of-factly, "you're a child welfare social worker, so you know more about talking to kids than Dad does."

One benefit of the intersection between personal and professional life was helping my parents understand and accept his behavior, as they found his "excess energy" overwhelming. My mother suggested Little League, so I had to find a way to help her understand he just wasn't ready for team sports, much less one that used a bat. So I invented the "jigsaw puzzle child" activity. I explained that children have eight parts to their development: chronological age, appearance age, I.Q. age, academic age, emotional age, social age, whether they are an ethnic match with their families and share customs, values, and traditions, and their life experience age. For most children born with good genes and a good environment, all those pieces match: a child ten years of age looks ten, processes information like a ten year old, is in 5th grade, etc. But children who have experienced the tragedy of abuse and neglect, are like "jigsaw puzzles" in that their pieces are different and don't fit together. Our son's pieces were fragmented. His chronological age was 10, but he looked eight. He processed information like an eight year old, but his academic age was preschool, he couldn't read or write. His emotional age was that of an infant, meaning that naturally he didn't trust anyone. His social age was preschool. He was an ethnic match,

but we had zero years of shared customs, values, and traditions. His life experience age was preschool to 17; he was sheltered in some ways, but also had seen things akin to R-rated movies.

By putting each piece on a separate piece of paper and then trying to piece them together, it was like a puzzle. My parents understood that analogy, my colleagues liked it, and, inside out: it went into my foster and adoptive parent training programs (Pasztor, 1986; Pasztor, Polowy, Leighton, & Conte, 1991; Child Welfare League of America, 2005).

Give Back the Diploma

Our son's 12th birthday was marked with the start of what would be many psychotic episodes. Our lives were changed forever as we became involuntary immigrants to a frightening country of illness (Lipsyte, 1998). At the hospital, the intake worker began the social history. When she learned he was adopted, she said, "Your child is catatonic, he may never leave a back ward. You should consider returning him to the agency." As with M's former adoptive parents, this time a social worker, one of our own, viewed adopted children as a commodity that could be returned if "flawed." Her diploma on the wall indicated a social work degree. I suggested she give that back. And we contracted with a licensed clinical social worker in private practice to help us navigate what we learned would be a scary, unhealthy mental health system.

I decided to quit being a social worker. How good was my degree and credibility as a national child welfare curriculum developer and trainer, helping others in the field, when I couldn't prevent mental illness in my own child? A social worker colleague and friend told me, "Your son may never get well. He may never come out of that 'back ward.' But if you quit now, it's a loss of both a child and a social worker. Maybe, by writing about your experiences, even if your son doesn't get better, another child and family can be helped. You have to turn this awful loss into a gain." So I wrote another training program for foster and adoptive parents while he was in the hospital, and one of the most well-received activities is called "The Pathway Through the Grieving Process" (Pasztor, 1986; Pasztor & Leighton, 1993).

The "pathway" explains that our worst losses involve health, a loved one, and/or self esteem. When these losses occur, a grieving pathway kicks in. It begins with the first stage of grief described by Elizabeth Kubler- Ross (1969). But then the pathway takes us from shock or denial to "praying for a miracle." From "praying for a miracle," the pathway travels to two sides of the same coin: anger and depression. From there, the pathway goes to "understanding" instead of "acceptance." For example, I didn't want to accept that my son was so ill, but I understood what happened. My father-in-law, a concentration camp survivor, would never accept that his right to be a citizen of his country was denied him, or that family members were murdered, but he understood how it happened. My son and daughter, as they got older, have realized they never have to accept that their right to a normal childhood was denied them. But they have come to understand their birth family issues that made it impossible to grow up there.

After the "understanding" stop on the pathway comes "coping." This enables us to go through the tasks of daily living. But to be a really effective foster parent, adoptive parent, or social worker, we have to get to the last stage on the pathway: "being a loss manager." This means traveling the pathway (usually many times). But, instead of getting stuck in a stage of denial, or praying for a miracle, or anger, or depression, we become willing and able to manage loss well enough to help others. That's essential. This activity is now incorporated into training programs that are used to train caregivers and caseworkers across the United States and in over a dozen other countries (Pasztor, 1986; Pasztor & Leighton, 1993; Child Welfare League of America, 2005.)

The Intersection

My son, now in his late thirties, battles bipolar disorder. I struggle with the awful reality of a horrible intersection: no amount of love, money, or social work skills and connections can help him have the normal life he wants, needs, and deserves. Earlier I

mentioned that social workers are fortunate to have a profession that allows us to learn for a living. I am privileged to learn every day from my students, colleagues, journalist husband and, most of all, my adult children. A big difference, however, is that the others chose their roles. My children had no say. For as much as they have shaped my life for the positive, and we love each other, I would have preferred that they had not endured the abuse, neglect, foster and residential care, disrupted adoption, psychiatric hospitalizations, and so much more sadness. In exchange, I would gladly have forgone my opportunity to become a more knowledgeable child welfare social worker as a result of being their mother. As I write, teach, and train: being a foster or adoptive parent is a privilege, not a right. But for a child to be protected and nurtured, that's a right, not a privilege.

Monica's Story: My Calling

I come from a long line of ministers, teachers, social workers, homemakers, nurses, and housekeepers: helping professionals and para-professionals. As a teen, I wanted to go to art school, but folded to family pressures. I was blessed to have both parents at home and available. I had my rebellious years and made bad choices, which made me stronger. As the child of an African American father and Polish/French Canadian/American mother, I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in middle class neighborhoods around the country, but was drawn to classmates who came from "the projects" where most poor, hardworking African American families lived. Throughout my teenage years, my parents kept my sister and me well aware of national and global challenges around the world. I went to college with the goal of becoming a social worker, and having a strong moral conviction to be of service to others.

After completing my MSW degree, I began my child welfare career in Washington, D.C. in the early 1990s. I found myself in the midst of a bureaucracy whose mission was to ensure the safety of children and to strengthen families. This was compromised due to the lack of available resources and funding needed to truly help people. As I completed my monthly home visits, I saw the faces of the families I had known growing up. I saw them desperately wanting to raise their children. They were committed to their children's well-being. However, they were stressed from not having the ability or resources to cope and provide. They often resorted to substances to stay in denial and ease the pain. After two years as a family reunification social worker, I successfully helped just one family get back together. It appalled and disgusted me that most of my families wanted to be together, but they just couldn't meet the court mandates. I married another MSW degree social worker, and gave birth to two daughters. We decided to move to southern California to be near our extended families, realizing we needed that village to raise our children.

For the next thirteen years, I learned and matured as a social worker in the southern California child welfare system. I carried an adoption caseload, and then focused on recruiting and preparing adoptive families. My program was targeted at helping African American families adopt African American children who for decades are documented as languishing, drifting, and growing up in foster care (Brown & Bailey-Etta, 1997; McRoy, 2005). I flipped through pages of waiting African American children of all ages, mostly boys, who had no families to provide them with essential needs: being protected and nurtured, having developmental needs met, having relationships with birth families supported, and being connected to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991). I was dismayed and sad. By now I had my last birth child, a son, and I knew our family had a place for another son. I knew in my heart that I would become an adoptive Mom to one of those waiting little boys.

Theory Versus Practice –
A New Generation

My last child welfare agency role was as a trainer. I had not yet met my co-author, but I became a trainer for the curriculum she developed. I learned even more, being exposed to incredible information during this time; gaining a real understanding of how legislation,

policy, and funding impact child welfare systems. I began to train child welfare workers on all kinds of issues in my attempt to strengthen their knowledge and skills. And I became afraid. I was worried that one of those workers would come to my family, and judge me as a person, wife, and mother, and assess my ability to parent. I was scared that a twenty-something, fresh out of college, driving a fancy car, still living at home, would make a decision about whether or not my family was "qualified" to adopt one of the thousands of African American male children in the foster care system.

Cognitively I knew that social workers are just like the rest of humanity: some good and some not. It was a role of the dice determining who came into your family's life with a badge and a lot of power, someone who had authority but no attachment, while I had attachment with no authority (Pasztor, Goodman, Potts, Santana, & Runnels, 2002). I didn't want to be judged by someone with no more than a Bachelor's degree in some unrelated field and a driver's license. I also had to admit that I had once been that twenty-something worker, too. I overcame the fear because I knew there was a child waiting for our family.

My husband and I talked a great deal about the impact of adding another son, especially on our three birth children now ages 14, 13, and 8. We had also taught those adoptive parent preparation classes so, like my co-author, we received a waiver to not have to complete the required adoption classes. We certainly felt competent to integrate a new child into our family. Who else but two MSW degree professionals who collectively had been involved in over 100 adoptions could be more aware of the challenges and joys he would bring? We talked with our children in great detail about the impact and changes adoption would mean for them. Our extended family members were also supportive; two of my husband's siblings were adopted. We felt ready, and began our journey in January 2005.

Our home study/family assessment process was actually wonderful. I had a good relationship with the social worker assigned to us. She was a veteran adoption supervisor, knowledgeable and kind. By the time we completed our study, we already had another social worker, this time new to the field but eager to learn. What an intersection of personal and professional issues. My husband and I taught her about the adoption process. I wish we could have charged by the hour. Our study was completed in September 2005, a relatively quick time frame. But, unbelievably, the wait to get matched with a child was incredibly long. This was amazing, given that we requested to adopt a school-aged African American boy, and we were open to practically everything in the child/parental background. I remembered being an adoption social worker and telling parents, "You will be matched with the right child at the right time." I now found myself hearing these same words from our social worker. It's outrageous that there are thousands of ready and waiting children and families, but the matching process continues to move on a timetable established by a bureaucracy, rather than one that respects the developmental needs of children.

In June 2006, we finally were matched with the six year old who was to become our son and our children's brother: "the right child at the right time." I found myself having to bite my lip as we moved forward with the placement steps required to meet him. His foster mother was threatened and uncomfortable and did not want to meet us. Had I been the social worker, I would have encouraged the foster mother to join with us by focusing on what would be best for the child, while helping her grieve his leaving so she could give him permission to attach to us. We were able to help her see the benefit of at least having phone call and letter contact.

Our youngest son integrated into our family relatively smoothly in the first six months. At just six years of age, he was a veteran in moving from family to family. He was initially separated from his birth family when he was four years old. Our family was his fifth in two years. One family was pre-adoptive. "It didn't work out," we were told, another illustration of treating children as commodities to be returned like an outfit that doesn't look good on you. He had spent a third of his life moving from family to family during those critical formative years. The social,

emotional, and developmental impact this has on children is tragic, and the life-long journey for processing all of this is arduous and immense.

Catch-22

Initially, our three birth children were the ones who struggled. I couldn't imagine that they would have such a hard time accepting him into our family, given all the preparation that we did. After all, we were the experienced adoption social workers! All three of our birth children were significantly jealous and angry. In retrospect, there should have been more information in our training programs about the feelings of foster and adoptive parents' birth children.

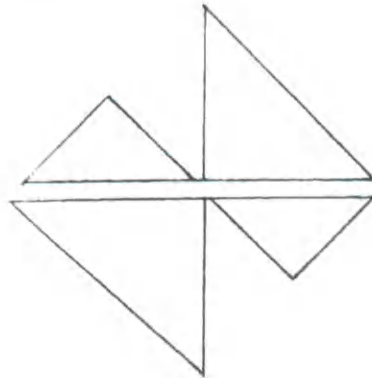
The two agency social workers – our adoption worker and our son's social worker – had no good ideas about how to deal with this, other than to assure us that things would work out over time. I found myself in a Catch-22, thinking that I should know what to do, how to respond, how to help them bond with each other, how to stop the anger. But I didn't want to disclose this because I was, of course, supposed to know what to do. Thankfully, our son's therapist was able to figure out billing so that she could see all the children!

As "best practices" in child welfare were evolving, the idea of "teaming" was in full force. From inside the system, this seemed like a great idea – more heads are better than one, right? But from the adoptive family's point of view, however, this can be crazy-making. Our family had an adoption social worker. Our son had his own adoption social worker, and he had a regular children's social worker. There was a dependency investigation social worker, and there was a court social worker. From the family's perspective, too many chefs in the kitchen make a really bad stew! To have five workers dealing with our family on a regular basis was not only overwhelming, it was irritating. This was a definite scheduling nightmare for families with school-age children and working parents trying to accommodate the bureaucracy's hours of operation. This was particularly upsetting when the workers had limited knowledge and skills about how to support our family. Their main focus was to collect the necessary information to complete their casework and court requirements, and make sure the child was safe. It was particularly difficult for my husband and me, finding ourselves often in the teaching mode, instead of being taught.

This became magnified when we were training the very social workers who were coming to see our family each month. In our sessions, I taught our adoption worker the importance of making contact with the birth mom and dad to get as much background information as possible. I taught our son's social worker about the importance of maintaining significant relationships in a child's life; and she slowly began to stop thinking about us as "different" because we maintained weekly contact with our son's birth parents. In fact, we taught the court social worker that adoption does not have to be adversarial. Termination of parental rights does not have to mean termination of parental relationships. In fact, his birth mom and I helped the social workers understand that we not only cared about our son, but we cared about each other, as well. It really made me think about the fact that California is one of the states without title protection for social workers (Pasztor, Saint-Germain, & DeCrescenzo, 2002). This means that individuals with degrees in anything, like criminal justice or history, can be called social workers, just based on their job description. Where was boundary-sensitive, competency-based, outcome-driven, standardized practice?

Within six months, the honeymoon was over. Our son had an internal alarm clock that told him it was time to change families again. Day and night, he began to act out his emotional confusion. We handled the day challenges like champions; the night terrors were harder. Watching him writhe in emotional pain, unable to find words, and unable to be comforted was absolutely heartbreaking. For months we cried side by side, night after night. Finally, slowly, his words came: "Why don't I live with my mother?" "Why did I have to live in so many homes?" "Why didn't I just come here first?" "How come I don't see my brother?" We began to piece together his life, with honor, respect, and dignity. This was something that all of the dozens of social workers in his life

had not been able or willing to help him process. Or perhaps they just didn't have the resources in time, given caseload sizes.



Making Connections

Then our adopted son experienced the loss of his birth father, which was devastating to our whole family. This death was the culmination of so many losses for him in his short seven years of life. One of the most amazing and healing aspects of his father's passing was our entire family attending the funeral together. At the church service, we were met with an outpouring of love from a large and wonderful extended family system: brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles, cousins, grandparents, and friends. We were astonished to learn that two members of our son's birth family were actually already foster parents in our county system. Why hadn't they been contacted to adopt him? Perhaps the new Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 will help. It requires that all relatives be notified when children are entering foster care with the aim of making possible safe, nurturing connections for relatives or extended family members that children may not even know they had. Our son found much acceptance, inclusion, and love from his paternal family; and so did the rest of our family.

I have started training child welfare workers on issues of full disclosure, supporting them to fight their own fears and have difficult conversations with children. As explained in the "Pathway through the Grieving Process," it is essential to get to the stage of "understanding" in order to at least cope, if not become an actual loss manager (Pasztor, 1986; Pasztor & Leighton, 1993). We have to help children use the present to deal with the past, in order to go comfortably to the future. We must talk with children about why they can't live safety with their parents, because what children don't know they make up, and what they make up is usually worse than the truth. Child welfare workers need to explore possible important extended family members. We need to help children understand why they sometimes have to move, and ensure that they don't internalize this and blame themselves. We must let these children know that their hearts are big enough to love all their parents: birth, foster, and adoptive. In turn, parents' hearts are big, too. After all, parents can love all of their children – all at the same time (Pasztor, Polowy, Leighton, & Conte, 1991). Giving full disclosure to children and families is essential; all members of the foster care and adoption constellation must fully and continuously understand what happens when child welfare knocks at their door (Roszia, Silverstein, Pasztor, Clark, & Ward, 2004). Child welfare social workers must value a family's worth and promote resiliency, in the best interest of children.

Our youngest son was eight years old when his adoption was finalized in December 2007. My family is blessed and my heart is full of love. Our son, his birth mom, our entire adoptive family (including grandparents and other relatives) and friends marched together around chairs at his ninth birthday party, after he had slept soundly through the night. I know this is only the beginning of our journey together. I am thankful that I can say I'm a mom and a social worker: educated, experienced, ethical. The intersection of these roles has helped me continue to be the best mom and social worker I can.

Why We Shared

We are grateful to *Reflections* for the opportunity to share our stories. We would not have thought to connect with each other to take this risk without the "Inside Out" call for papers and the examples set by our colleagues who have written for previous special issues, especially "end of life caregiving." As we read

each other's stories and shared the intersection of our personal and professional lives, we discovered how much we had in common, even though we come from two different generations. We both grew up with nurturing parents, and identified as a religious or ethnic minority. We both had fathers who were university professors, albeit one in aerospace and the other in social work. We both took children with special needs into our families, children who had been in the foster care system for more than half of their young lives. We both saw children treated as commodities, selected and sent back if they didn't please the "buyer." We both worked in a system that moved according to a bureaucratic nine-to-five clock, no weekend clock, when children and families are on a 24/7 schedule. We were both frustrated by unskilled workers intervening in our families, though at one time both of us were unqualified, as well. There's also the coincidence that one of us became a trainer for a program the other designed, without ever meeting. Most significantly, we both committed to honoring and respecting our foster and adopted children's birth family histories, keeping whatever safe, nurturing connections might be possible.

So we have some recommendations. First, let's find more foster and adoptive families for children who are waiting. In the United States, there are approximately 500,000 children in out of home care, and approximately 130,000 children wait, each day, for adoptive families to provide safe, nurturing relationships (U.S. Children's Bureau, 2008). The disgrace of disproportionality makes this especially true for ethnic and sexual minority children and youth (Belanger, Copeland, & Cheung, 2008; Hill, 2008; Wornoff & Mallon, 2006). In the U.S., there are over one million diverse professional social workers (Whitaker, Weismiller, & Clark, 2006). We are single, married, with partners, of color, white, gay, straight, older, younger, with children already, and without. We know the dynamics of attachment, separation, loss, and behavior management, and we know how to access resources. Many more of us could make excellent foster and adoptive parents, so let's recruit more of our own profession to bring these children home while supporting, to the fullest possible extent, their relationships with birth parents and kin. We should also focus on children and young people who are in therapeutic residential treatment centers, but need foster and adoptive parents to come to when they no longer need that level of care.

Second, from a macro perspective, there's a story—we're not sure where it comes from—but it's about a town where villagers, picnicking on the river's edge, were horrified to see a baby floating in the river. They rescued the baby and, as they were celebrating the rescue, they were astonished to spot another baby. They rescued that one, and then another and another…saving hundreds of babies from the river. Along came a couple of social workers—educated, experienced, ethical—who observed the extraordinary situation and said, "We're going up the river to stop the babies from coming." We must advocate for the policies and practices needed to stop children from ever getting into those unsafe waters.

Third, at-risk children and families who have special needs must be served by individuals who have, in addition to personal strengths, specific skills and system supports. This includes both the casework and caregiving workforces. At minimum, they must know how to be comfortable talking about the uncomfortable, and helping children and families travel that grieving process pathway. This workforce must be loss managers. We can't help children with their life stories, issues, and behaviors if we don't know how to proceed, aren't willing to try, and don't have the caseload size to be able to succeed. According to the National Association of Social Workers, less than 30 percent of child welfare workers have professional social work degrees (BSW or MSW) and, in public child welfare, that can be as low as three percent (Child Welfare League of America, 1999). At-risk children and families deserve to be served by social workers who are trained to fulfill the six major principles of the NASW Code of Ethics (1996, p. 1): being competent, having dignity, understanding the importance of human relationships, having integrity, providing service, and advocating for social justice.

Acknowledgements

Appreciation goes to the following colleagues and friends who provided thoughtful comments in support of our manuscript: UCLA School of Social Welfare Field Faculty *Joycelyn Crumpton*; CSULB Department of Social Work Assistant Professor *Dr. Yolanda Green*; and journalist/author *Sonia Nazario*. Heartfelt thanks to our respective children, spouses, and parents for lessons learned and love shared.

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FROM HOPE TO ETERNITY: A REVIEW OF *MILK* - A FILM BY GUS VAN SANT

Benjamin Shepard, Ph.D., City University of New York (CUNY)

Decades before Barack Obama talked about "the audacity of hope," or Bill Clinton proclaimed he never forgot about "a town called hope," Harvey Milk declared, "You have to give them hope, hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great," (Shilts, 1982, 363). In so doing, he served as a protagonist in one of the great political dramas of U.S. social and political history. One of the first gay politicos to be the elected to public office, Milk's work straddled the line between political campaign and social movement. To balance these competing impulses, Milk shared the stage with a generation of organizers, tapping into their wanderlust for a better world. As those who felt the yearning for a new kind of political culture during the recent presidential campaign can testify, such politics can be profoundly enticing, especially when social actors can find a place for their own participation in such a story.

Certainly Sean Penn, who played the title role in Gus Van Sant's compelling biopic, was able to do so. While Penn is more physically attractive than Milk, few who have followed Penn's career doubted he could generate the pathos to reproduce Milk's story. What surprised me was his capacity for social eros. With the real Cleve Jones standing right behind him, joy and justice pulse through Penn's rendition of Milk's "This is What America Is" speech. Faced with the first incarnations of the ascendant and intolerant Christian Right, which would dominate the Reagan years, Milk defiantly reminded his opponents that the "pursuit of happiness" is a core part of U.S. social and political life.

> *On the statue of liberty it says: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free..." In the Declaration of Independence, it is written: "All men are created equal and they are endowed with certain inalienable rights..."*
>
> *For Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Bryant and Mr. Starr, and all the bigots out there, that's what American is. No matter how hard you try you cannot erase those words from the Declaration of Independence. No matter how hard you try, you cannot chip those words off the statue of liberty (Shilts, 1982, 371).*

The film captures the giddiness of the crowd in hearing these words. Part of the vitality of the speech, of course, was that Milk was not only offering a transformational narrative, he was asking those who heard his words to participate in a culture changing narrative. This was the story of a country and a movement which many wanted to be a part of. As he repeated over and over again, the story was not about Harvey Milk: it was about a movement of many, many leaders. As a movement actor rather than a mere politico, Milk was able to reconcile his previous two losses in runs for public office before his successful 1977 run. For Milk, social change work was about more than scoring a goal or winning an election, it was about shifting social and cultural mores. This was Milk's strategy

to beat back the 1978 California ballot Proposition 6—which would ban gays from teaching in public schools—better known as the Briggs Initiative. Rather than cower, apologize for queer sexuality, or suggest queers were just like "hets," Milk challenged those who blamed gays for violence against children to look at themselves, their churches, and larger patterns of socially accepted structural violence. Rather than buck to the advice of policy professionals to tone down the rhetoric and back away from the controversial issue of gays and children, Milk directly challenged the phobias propelling this stigma, linking this hatred within a long ling of U.S. assaults on otherness, from the Salem Witch Trials to the McCarthy hearings. And of course, Proposition 6 failed.

Contrast the recent unsuccessful campaign against prop 8 to repeal gay marriage with the successful campaign against the Briggs Initiative and a number of points become clear. The first was that queers could be successful by defiantly challenging forms of bigotry. This could be far more successful than arguing from the vantage point of the status quo. The second lesson was that, unlike the campaign against Prop 8, the campaign against Prop 6 was based on a bottom up model, which called for mass participation of the grassroots early and often, rather than adherence to established political leadership (also see Hollibaugh, 1979/2000; Jones, 2000; Shilts, 1982, Shepard, 1997). The point of considering such history is that it often tells us as much about the present as it does about the past.

The film captures Milk recruiting young organizers, such as lesbian Anne Kronenberg, who coordinated the 1977 campaign, and Cleve Jones, who at the time was a 23 year old street vagabond. Jones and Kronenberg would become two of the most effective street organizers in the campaign. In watching the film, one is able to observe a strengths-based approach to accessing the rich potential of those around him. Social workers and community organizers who hope to tap the assets of those around them could do well to learn from such an example. Building on these lessons, Jones, like many in the campaign, would go on to take a leading role in organizing, documenting, engaging in direct action, building organizations, and providing services for those coping with the AIDS carnage which would start to strangle the city only months after Milk's assassination. To do so, Jones literally built a tapestry of memories of those who were lost. In 1987, he helped create one of the largest pieces of folk art in the world with the "Names Quilt" (see Jones, 2000, Shepard 1997). Part of what helps the film is Van Sant's obvious affiliation for those around Milk. Cleve Jones, who consulted on the movie, first told me about Van Sants' project in an interview I conducted with him in 1995.

Gus Van Sant is certainly not the first drawn to the grand narrative of Milk's life and the era it helped represent. Randy Shilt's 1982 work is the best extant biography of Milk's life and times. From 1993 – 1995, I conducted oral history/life review interviews with people with HIV/AIDS in San Francisco. Years before effective treatment options were available to those with the virus, I was struck by how many of those I interviewed looked back at the Milk era as perhaps the most important event of their lives. Their connection to this story helped them hold onto meaning, no matter how tenuous. Many interviewees did not even make it to the summer of 1996, when effective HIV treatment became a reality. This—the AIDS onslaught—is the ascending shadow of the Milk era. Back in 1995, Cleve Jones recalled sitting on a Ferris wheel with Ann Kronenberg in 1980, only months after Harvey was lost and the riots which followed. The two looked back in awe at what they had been through and wondered what else could happen to him. It would not be long before they would find out. Within a few months, in 1981, they both started reading about a mysterious cancer afflicting homosexuals in San Francisco, L.A., and New York.

If I have one criticism, it is that the film fails to grasp the anger or the riots which followed the manslaughter charge against Dan White, who shot Milk and Mayor Moscone in cold blood at San Francisco City Hall. While 30,000 supporters held a candlelight vigil for Milk and Moscone after their assassinations,

supporters were disgusted to hear the news that their murderer would only face a short jail sentence. Many expressed their anger with rage: burning police cars and setting fire to city hall in an evening known as the White Night Riots. In 1995, I had the pleasure of interviewing Hank Wilson, one those who participated in the riots. Wilson actually helped light the matches and also coordinated throwing them into the police cars. A long time gay liberationist, Hank Wilson was one of the most thoughtful activists anyone could ever meet. In the years after the riots, Wilson would take a lead in organizing against the AIDS onslaught. While others from this cohort ran for office and got involved with politics, Wilson would spend much of the next 15 years educating and providing housing and harm reduction services for social outsiders afflicted with the disease; all the while supporting the work of ACT UP. Outside of activism, Wilson managed the Ambassador Hotel, an SRO hotel in San Francisco's Tenderloin. His life very much involved the interplay between radical service provision and social movement. He died just weeks before *Milk* was released nationally (Highleyman, 2008).

In many ways, the enduring legacy of the Milk era is the means with which those involved tapped into the voices and passions of countless friends, lovers, neighbors, and quiet heroes, who helped transform a small neighborhood and its quirky politics, and turn it into a culture changing story full of rich, quirky, compelling heroes. I have long believed the lesson of San Francisco's Gay Liberation years was that gay rights became human rights, a story for everyone who saw a hero and friend in one of the pieces in Cleve Jones' quilt. *Milk* helped capture much of this culture changing ethos.

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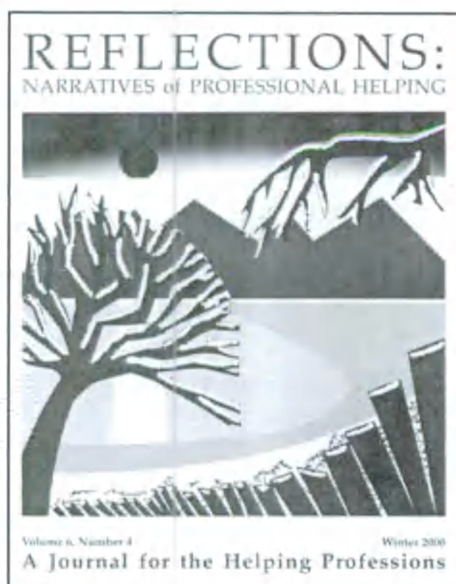

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NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping (ISSN 1080-0220) is published quarterly by the University Press at California State University, Long Beach under the auspices of the Department of Social Work. Annual Subscription Rate: individuals, $40.00; libraries and institutions, $65.00; outside USA, add $15.00. Single copies: $10.00. Payment: check, money order, or credit card (Visa or MasterCard, please include number and expiration date). Please send to **REFLECTIONS: CSULB; 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840-0902.** We remind subscribers to please immediately notify Reflections of address changes, providing both new and old addresses. Please allow six weeks for address changes to take effect.

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Periodicals postage paid at Long Beach, CA.

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