

# THE INSURRECTION OF SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGE

BY THE EDITORS

In this issue each author's narrative voice explores in depth the dramatic events that occurred as he/she professionally entered other person's lives, engaged in efforts to do the right thing, and confronted the moral complexity of making the "right" decisions. The authors' narratives present an opportunity to initiate a discourse with the reader — to examine and comment on the narrators' practice, and decisions — decisions, some of which were not necessarily prudent, and frequently, at a risk to themselves. Through this public disclosure the power of narratives bursts forth. Our payback to the narrator is an active response to his/her demand — to reexamine both the complexities and the possible consequences of our own practice. As John Kayser suggests, one of the purposes of making public a story about a "private experience," is to help other readers to reflect and compare their own experiences in practice and in teaching. (1996. Written in a manuscript review)

We devote a portion of this issue to a narrative that challenged the Executive Board of *Reflections* to examine its own value perspectives. Our discourse, difficult and conflictual, generated the idea to invite others to participate to examine the complexities this case presents. We invited five commentators to express their ideas about the events in "Do The Right Thing." All react to issues of law, ethics, morality, class structure, social justice, oppressed

clients, organizational authority, "right" decisions, risk, and power. Power on a number of levels, the power of the bureaucracy, the power of the professions to use their resources for social change and social control, and the power of the individual to make decisions that may have retributive consequences.

At the core is the politics of power, the power of persons and institutions to dominate the discourse of knowledge. Foucault in the 1970's and 1980's examined how language influences society's discourse and how those who control language and thus discourse, wield tremendous power. We intellectually realized that which we knew intuitively — the meaning of subjugated knowledge. Foucault spoke of subjugated knowledge as the power to both determine and limit the knowledge certain groups might have access to, or knowledge that many persons are prevented from making public.

Narratives of those without power — marginalized persons — are not listened to. Those with power use language to decide who is insane, a criminal, a deviant, to be ignored or deprived of certain rights. Bruner said that "dominant narratives are units of power as well as meaning. The ability to tell one's story has a political component." Ignored narratives in Foucault's view is subjugated knowledge. Narratives provide opportunity for an open hearing. Ungar in his review of

the film "Lone Star" forcefully uncovers this view when he says "... film has become one of the few places where one can find reliable information about meaningful insight into the immigrant experience. While politicians bash immigrants, film makers—and novelists along with them—tell us gripping immigrant stories, recording them before they disappear."(NY Times).

Foucault calls for an: "insurrection of subjugated knowledge," to present opportunities for the powerless to be heard, to provide alternative views of life, to help people see where rules and regulations come from, and whom they serve. In practice, Michael White has attempted to do this in his work with narrative therapy. The attempt is to help people construct the narratives they prefer, rather than the ones they have been led to believe they must adhere to. These range from the narratives of battered women, the poor, the aborigines—to the narratives assigned to the helping professions.

In the first issue of this journal, Jane Gorman in "Being and Doing" tells the story of the uncovering subjugated knowledge in a doctoral class on practice theory "...there were...a distinguished group, having been directors of various social service agencies. One day...I talked about the times I felt like a real social worker...and asked about their experiences. One by one students recounted times when, behind the back of the professional role, they went to a client's house with an armful of groceries, sat with a client in court, wept with a client in pain...when our dreams of the

profession met reality...came when we shed our professional hats, just to get an opportunity to be with people was exhilarating and humorously absurd."

Annie Houston's article, "Do The Right Thing," about her work in a corrections facility jars with a stronger dissonance than the incidents described above, yet reveal the same hidden concerns about subjugated knowledge in the helping professions.

We have asked five people from various fields to comment on her article. We would welcome your commentary. □

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