On the Making of Female Macro Social Work Academics

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Abstract: This manuscript explores the experiences of a group of female macro social work academics using the collective biography process (Davies and Gannon, 2006). The narrative includes remembrances that the authors believe shaped who we are as macro social work academics and the work that we do. The shared stories are presented in a chronological manner and include analysis of the themes we identified as being important to the development of each academic within the group. Themes emerged pointing to a common understanding of the experiences and perhaps a view of the world. This suggested something unique in the development and socialization of women who become macro social work academics.

Keywords: social work; macro social work; selving; academic; professional development; collective biography

In May 2012, a group of 12 female social work academics gathered to share stories and remembrances of the experiences they believed shaped them into macro practitioners. The gathering was pulled together by two senior faculty members. The women they invited had shared similar experiences of feeling different from other female social work academics. The differences seemed to be linked to whether the academics identified as either clinical or macro social work practitioners. The gathering was intended to explore the possibility that there was something inherently different and shared among female social work macro academicians.

The gathering was planned using the collective biography model developed by Davies and Gannon (2006). The approach provides a way to work collaboratively to explore through shared memories a common experience. The work is done through telling, listening, and writing the experiences – re-experiencing them in a way that allows the collective to "search out the ways in which things were made evident, fixed and apparently unchangeable" (p. 5). Through the process of remembering and sharing, it is hoped that participants are able to identify the process of becoming as it pertains to the collective, not simply to the self. Group members were sent selections from the Davies and Gannon book to read and were expected to become familiar with the method prior to the gathering.

Throughout the three-day process, participants had the opportunity to delve deeply into the well of memory, recalling their own experiences at different points in their development of becoming macro social work academics. Experiences were shared verbally and in written form. We began with pre-professional memories and moved to stage setting in the educational process, motivation for doctoral work, and finally life as a macro social work academic. We began with the sharing of memories, followed by a quiet period for writing the personal experiences from an emic perspective, and then ending with a reading and discussion of the stories. While all of the verbal sharing and discussions were tape recorded, this analysis of the collective biography is based on the written stories shared.

The stories were shared in chronological order, offering the opportunity to consider aspects of our development that, although thought to be unique, emerged as themes that rippled throughout the stories in unexpected ways, reflecting commonalities of experiences that surprised us throughout the process. We believe that our process has indeed identified what may be experiences and meaning-making that is unique to *selving*, "the way individual subjectivities are created and maintained through specific kinds of discursive practices" (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 7), of macro academic social workers. Individual authors are not identified. The hope is that the individual stories will merge into an understanding of the collective

process.

The following narratives are the experiences of the participants as they were written during our collective biography process, except for the exclusion of explicitly identifying information. They are grouped in the order in which they were shared (pre-professional, stage setting, and academic life). The writings of 12 academics over a period of three days were quite extensive; hence not all the writings are reproduced here. What are shared are exemplars of memories reflecting the major themes that emerged.

Pre-Professional

These pre-professional memories include some of our earliest childhood memories of family and community.

Early memories from events in the 1950s, 60s, and even 70s grounded me through life to respect differences. I grew up in a multi-generational household that respected the worth of every individual. We welcomed unexpected guests for lunch, dinner, or even overnight stays that could extend for weeks for a relative or friend going through “a bad patch.” I never heard my mother, uncle, or aunties say an unkind or judgmental word about anyone. There was a spirit of reciprocal generosity that formed the basis of our family values.

Family members shared a common value of mutual respect for people who are perceived by the dominant culture to be different – be it birth defect, injury, race, place of birth, or income level. For years, my mother, a junior high school science teacher, was also involved with teaching immigrant populations. Every Thursday after school, she would go into Boston and teach English at night to a diverse group of newly arrived immigrant men and women from various countries. I remember many an evening meal made by one or another of Mother's students that got sent home in gratitude: foods from Greece, Italy, Mexico, etc.

I was five and about to ride the public bus alone for the first time in a Southern city in 1946. I was too young to be admitted to the local public school, but my white protestant parents knew I could read and wanted me in school, so I was beginning first grade at the Catholic School. This third day, I was beginning to travel alone as both my parents had to return to full-time jobs. I stepped up into the bus, feeling excited about school and like a ‘big girl’ to be able to go by myself. The bus driver, an older white man, stared at me with a hard face and said, “You know you got to get to the back of the bus.” Even at five, I knew exactly what he meant. I did not speak, and after swallowing hard, I, the child of white protestant working class parents, walked carefully to the back of the bus to sit with the Negro passengers. People there were kind to me over the next two years.

I was only afraid that my father, who met my bus coming home, might see me at the back of the bus and be angry. I understood the line the bus driver was laying down, and I knew in my heart that it would not be ‘right’ to say, “But I'm white.” While I did not know the word segregation, I knew injustice when I saw it; I knew from Episcopal Sunday School that God loved everybody equally, and I did not see why people could not sit where they wanted to – old people and young people. So I rode the bus for two years; people at the back of the bus talked to me and shared snacks. I stood up before my stop to get off the bus, and I never talked to my parents about the experience.

I don't remember what day it was, but I remember it was sunny and bright. I was lying on my stomach on the carpet in front of the television watching the newly elected Catholic President. There may actually be two memories blended together. When Kennedy said in his inaugural speech, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country,” something clicked on inside me. It was probably the first time I had glimpsed the feeling of patriotism in a personal way. Prior to that I had felt pride because of the election of a son of Kansas, Eisenhower, to the presidency, but this was different. It gained more power with Kennedy's announcement about his vision for the Peace Corps and what American young people could do for the world.

That day, with sunshine coming in the front window of the house, it was like some sort of clarity button got pushed inside me. I said to myself, “I must do that.” Right then, as he explained the Peace Corps idea, I knew that I had just added to the “plan” I had had since 3rd grade: go to college and then get a job

in something to do with art and architecture. I remember feeling the power and excitement of going somewhere and making a difference. I didn't tell anyone about this new next step in my plan, however, I felt great strength in the resolve to be a Peace Corps volunteer because my (Catholic) president said it was a good thing for me to do. That day, on television, he spoke straight to my soul in a way that created in me probably the most peace and hope that I had ever had in my life. It was almost a spiritual feeling of such certainty, and it was a feeling I have never experienced again.

I tucked my thoughts and feelings away and went about finishing high school and going away to college. I think I actually forgot my resolve until my sophomore year in college when a Peace Corps recruiter showed up on campus and the message from my President came flooding back to me. There was no question; Peace Corps was my destiny. I needed to join. I needed to make a difference doing something bigger than myself. Becoming a volunteer focusing on community development seemed to be exactly the right way.

It was summer – warm. The windows were open. I was small enough to sit on my knees at the kitchen table where we ate dinner. I remember wearing shorts, my hair falling in my face, and my mom trying to keep it out of the way of my food. My parents both smoked then, and I can remember the smell of cigarette smoke as the meal ended and our full attention turned to the news. I can remember Walter Cronkite's deep authoritative voice followed by the voice of Dan Rather reporting from the ‘Jungles of Viet Nam.’ I remember watching body bags and hearing the body count. I remember thinking about/hearing my parents talking about people they knew who were there and how difficult these news stories were to hear. I remember wondering, “How could it be OK to do this?” I remember thinking that this was killing and that we were told that killing is wrong. It was one of the Ten Commandments, and yet our country was doing it and doing it a lot. I could not make sense of how it was wrong and yet reported as if it was OK.

Her name was Rosa, and she was the funniest kid in the second grade. I was easily distracted and served as Rosa's greatest fan as she put on her comedy show during whatever lesson was taking place that day. Rosa's general disinterest in the lesson was obvious, and my reinforcement of her behavior infuriated our teacher. Rosa wore oversized clothes and almost always smelled of pee, and, as a result, she was teased or ignored by most. For me, her spark transcended all, and we became playground buddies that year. While I was chastised for laughing with Rosa at the back of the classroom, Rosa was regularly made to stand in the corner. I was not. All was fun until teacher decided to call my mom in for that important parent-teacher conference. Her purpose was to confide concerns that other children would ridicule me because I only had “black friends.” I don't know what disappointed and angered me more, the teacher's clear attack and even misinformation to meet her needs and further isolate Rosa or the fact that my mother even entertained the conversation. It was a conversation between white women in the South. I saw red and recognized that my mother should have stood up for what was RIGHT; that was my first thought at the age of seven.

I don't remember much about Rosa after that – by the third grade, she was gone. Thinking about her still makes me smile, but with a little bitter sweetness because Rosa was my first friend who was obviously being abused at home. I did not yet have the terms like “neglect” or even worse to describe Rosa's life experience. To me, she was just funny, interesting, and compelling, and I knew in my heart that the teacher did not bother to invite Rosa's mother to a parent-teacher meeting.

Where is Rosa today? Is she even alive?

Looking back on it, I now realize that my mother felt powerless when dealing with the teacher. As a child herself, she was a light-skinned Mexican American child in San Diego schools. She “passed” as a white child because she was light-skinned, and her own mother even insisted that she not speak Spanish so as to avoid being identified as “Mexican.” Teachers were in a position of respect and power for my mother, even as an adult. On that day of the parent-teacher meeting, I can only imagine what was going through her mind!

I knew we didn't have much money, but no one where we lived did. You made do, got by – I wore hand-me-downs when necessary. Only people who

lived in big cities, like Aunt Jo in Chicago, had a lot of money. People like us had to work hard and work together to make it. When Dad came home from a union contract meeting talking about a strike, it felt OK – even while listening to Mom and Dad try to figure out how bills would be paid.

We were visiting Grandma and Grandpa that weekend. It must have been a holiday because Aunt Jo and 'the kids' were there also. I remember that we were in the living room and that the TV was on (the news). The issue of a potential teachers' strike in Wellsboro came up during the report of a garbage strike in a big city.

I remember Aunt Jo could not understand how public school teachers could be so selfish – it would put students behind, maybe even get in the way of graduation. I loved my Aunt Jo – spent many summers with her. She lived in a big house in a big city. She was beautiful and smart and sophisticated; I wanted to be like her, not a country bumpkin.

At the same time, though, this was my DAD. In my eyes, he was SO smart and he kept me safe – from what, I couldn't have said. Just – he was my DAD. So as the discussion went on (and even after it ended), I remember trying to figure out who was right, but they were both right. I remember feeling torn and not wanting one of them to be wrong.

My earliest memory of Orange Nehi was at my Dad's Union Hall. I think I was five or six or so. Dad would take me to the meetings. I remember Dad's active involvement in the union. I remember Mom packing his lunch while he was on strike as he went to the plant to picket. I remember talk of scabs and union busting and how the country had been built on the backs of the working man, who only wanted to be treated fairly and equitably. Often when the union would strike, we would close up our house, unplug our appliances, and take our small camper off to the mountains where we would primitively camp (no showers, restroom facilities, and often no running water) in Cherokee National Forest. My memories from that time are happy memories of playing in the mountain stream, biking, and finishing chores. The impact I think that had on me was an understanding that my dad – and my whole family – was "fighting" and sacrificing for the greater good, for fairness, for rights, and that the worker was equally important to the "bosses." I thought it was fun, but the message of fight and sacrifice stuck with me.

Shortly after starting 9th grade, very aware of stirrings for social justice and an end to segregation, someone I respected invited me to a youth group that met sometimes at a church near my house. She did not explain much, but said that both white people and Negroes would attend, and that all were concerned about "civil rights." I wanted very much to go, but knew my father would forbid it, so I lied and told him and my mom that it was my own youth group meeting with a few other people about a youth project. Discussion at the meeting was a bit slow to start, but moved quickly to be inspiring and electrifying – and it was my first opportunity to join in singing "Freedom Songs." I felt wonderful after the meeting and went upstairs and out of the Church to walk the few blocks home. I was stunned to see a man standing in the dark in a big raincoat and hat (looking a bit like Humphrey Bogart). My father spoke to me and said we had to get home. When we arrived he yelled and yelled at me that I was not to have any part of such meetings, that I was not to betray his family, that I was to 'stay with my own kind,' and told me to go to bed and we would talk in the morning. I don't remember if I spoke during the whole episode. I went to bed and to sleep, only to be awakened about 2:00 a.m. by a knock on my bedroom door. The door swung open and my father stood with the lights from the hall behind him. He said in a different – but still loud – tone of voice, "I don't agree with you. I will never agree with you, but you will live in a different world than I did – and it is good that you think differently." He slammed the door, and while we never spoke of the incident again, he never stopped me from engaging in civil rights work.

I took my first job at the age of 15 at one of the two drugstores in town. The owner/pharmacist was a friend of my family, and my grandma had worked at the other one for many years. My primary job was to help customers, mostly older folks, find what they needed in the store. Many of them weren't used to finding things on their own – they often didn't know formal names for the things they needed, and some couldn't read. We cashed checks on Fridays for many people – sometimes we gave them an advance if it was an emergency. One customer used to come

every week. He was old and wore overalls, no shoes; he was always very dirty and he smelled bad. Sometimes I had trouble understanding what he said. Each week, he came and requested $2 worth of his "heart medicine." The pharmacist told me that this man doesn't have a car, that he gets a ride in "off the mountain" to pick this up every week.

I would ask, "Why doesn't he just get the full prescription and save the trip?"

The pharmacist would answer, "Because he can't afford it."

I would ask, "Why doesn't he just charge it?" (Lots of people charged their medication.)

He would answer, "He doesn't want to be in debt – by the way, never offer to charge it. You will offend him." This was one of my first real lessons in respecting the dignity of another person, even when your "good intentions" are begging to get in the way. I learned lessons from many people in that job; I saw abject poverty, severe physical and mental illness, and illiteracy. I saw people come in just to socialize, to talk about their "pains" and to gossip. They received help and support in a community gathering place that held no stigma. My eyes opened wider to the lives of people who were my neighbors, but whose lives I really knew little about. I am sure these experiences formed the basis of my thinking about social justice and human dignity.

One memory that I have is the Martin Luther King Birthday celebrations each year. We had a parade in my neighborhood. I especially enjoyed watching Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech later in the evening after the parade. I think this is when I began to connect the outside world (outside of my bubble) with the struggle that people of color had in their lives.

I asked my father, who grew up in rural Mississippi in the 1930s, about Dr. King. He simply smiled and said "Dr. King was a great man." Daddy never spoke about his life in rural Mississippi or his transition to D.C. in 1941. I often wondered how he and my mother were able to purchase a house in a predominately white neighborhood in 1966. According to my dad, this was a big deal for "colored" folks. Again, this was somewhat of a paradox for me. I heard Dr. King speak about so many obstacles for people of color, e.g., racism, prejudice. Yet I wondered, "How did my dad get through plumbing school? How did my mom get a scholarship to George Washington University in 1952?" She was the valedictorian of her high school class, and she also spoke fluent French. I am sure this was helpful, but nevertheless, she was still a woman of color. It seems that the experiences of my parents were not the norm. I am sure there were others who were also succeeding, but based on what Dr. King was saying, in general, people of color were not doing very well in many aspects of their lives.

We often camped at Elkmont Campground in the Great Smoky Mountains. On our early camping trips, we simply camped in the back of our pick-up truck. I always remember the excitement of pulling up into the campground. One trip, Mom got our campsite assignment (Mom always handled the "business" of the family) and jumped back into the truck so we could go look at the site. When we got to it, it was a bad site (meaning no shade and nowhere for kids to play) and wasn't close to the river. On the way to the site, we passed many open sites along the river, but Mom was told that the river sites were not available. She said that we were going back to get a different site. Apparently the rangers in the station wouldn't give her a different site because we didn't own a trailer and river sites were reserved for trailers only. I remember her being resolute that we would get a different site. I knew she was angry, but she was measured. She went over to the pay phone and called the park superintendent. A little while later, the ranger came out and said a campsite had opened up on the river for us. A couple of years ago, she told me that when she had gotten in touch with the superintendent, she stated that she and her family were being treated unfairly because we could not afford a trailer and that the park was created to serve all people, not just those who could afford a camping trailer. The park superintendent agreed with her and called the ranger station, and we were allowed to pick from the river campsites.

Another time at Elkmont, when I was about 12, my brother and I wanted to swim in a great swimming hole that was close to vacation properties that had

been included in lifetime leases when the Great Smoky Mountain National Park was created. The lifetime leases were held by some of Knoxville's most wealthy families. My brother and I would stand on a bridge in the park and see kids jumping off a rock ledge into this great swimming hole nearly salivating, but we knew then that the swimming hole was off limits for campers. One afternoon, Mom and Dad told us that we were going to swim in the good swimming hole and that we would get to walk up the river and jump river rocks to get there. I was so excited! So we trekked up the river, jumping among the rocks and wading through shallow pools. The rapids were strong at times, so we had to be careful. I remember feeling happy. When we arrived at the pool, Mom took a seat on a rock in the river and Dad went with us to climb onto the rock ledge and make sure it was safe. Once Dad jumped in and made sure all was okay for us, he gave us some instructions about where to jump and went to talk to a ranger who was motioning for him. My brother and I jumped off the rock ledge over and over and over. Later I found out that some of the vacation property residents had called the park rangers because we were trespassing. When the ranger arrived and talked to Dad, he asked Dad how we had gotten to the swimming hole. Dad informed him that we had walked up the center of the river and had not been on the vacation property. The ranger tipped his hat at Dad, smiled, and then told the women who had complained that we were not trespassing because we had come up the river and the river was not leased property. My brother and I swam, played, and jumped off the rock ledge all day. Throughout the week, Dad spread the word in the campground about how campers could access the swimming hole. Later that night, I remember Mom and Dad talking about how a number of poor farmers and mountain people were not able to secure lifetime leases and that the families in the vacation cabins were granted special privileges because of who they were. I was proud of my parents and I was struck by how sad people must have been to lose their land.

These early memories evoked strong emotional responses for writers and listeners alike. Experiences that reflected some of the discursive practices at work in the process of our individual selving emerged as themes that were influential in the development of our understanding of the world. Four major themes emerged through the discussion and later the analysis of the written memories: Respect for differences, personally experiencing the value of justice, the visceral awareness of social injustice, and the paradox of living in a world that does not reflect the values taught and embodied by our immediate family.

Valuing and respecting differences is evident in both the rural context of the pharmacy and the lived experience of the multi-generational household in an ethnically diverse neighborhood. Justice as a value personally experienced is shared by the personal responses to the speeches of President Kennedy and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. It is also embodied in the memories of childhood experiences of camping and listening to reports of killing in Viet Nam. When these two values, respect and justice, seem to be dismissed as not important to the greater society, the recognition and encounter of the paradox seems to have been essential to our development.

Stage Setting

The collective biography process had been planned to include a stage setting discussion and a discussion about our motivation for doctoral work. The memories of these two sessions were similar enough to combine them into one category: stage setting. These experiences span lived experiences from our entry into the work force, post baccalaureate degree, to our desire to enter a doctoral program in social work.

In 1979, I graduated from college with a BA degree in Psychology and a minor in Special Education. Six months after graduating, I had not found a job, so I went back to school and completed the requirements for a teaching certificate in Special Education. This seemed like a natural fit since Special Education had been my minor in college and teaching school was valued as a “good job” with status among the African-American community. After completing the certification process in 1981, I got my first teaching position at an elementary school in a small rural town in southwest Georgia. I remember the position as being advertised for a resource teacher in the special education program to provide instruction for children with intellectual disabilities. Upon my arrival, what I found was a self-contained classroom of five- and six-year-olds,

some with physical limitations and some had intellectual challenges. All of the children had failed kindergarten and/or first grade, and it was pretty obvious that no one else wanted to be bothered with them. The first couple of days I was there, the children sat quietly and just stared at me. A few months after working with the children, I began to see that the intellectual disability that they had been labeled with was not the issue, rather the real issue was lack of socialization skills (it is important to note that the children primarily lived in abject poverty; none of them had been in a structured environment prior to coming to school, and their parents had no more than a 9th grade education). I began to ponder the question, “How did these children get into special education?” I started asking questions of my fellow teachers who had had some of the children in class prior to my coming and my principal, who was a member of the community, about the children's entré into special education; they all just kind of glazed over my question. Instead, they responded, “The children are not able to handle a regular classroom.” I then decided to review the children's cumulative records, and that is where I learned the shocking and very sad realities about each of these young people's fate. The cumulative records had missing or incomplete documents on all of the children: no Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for some, unsigned IEP's by parents for others (a few files only had the child's last year report of grades). Essentially, the children had been targeted by the system to fail, to never have a chance at a fair education. I literally gasped for air! I experienced a range of emotions: disbelief, sadness, anger; for a moment, I even felt helpless. Once I was able to collect myself and focus, I began to ask myself what could I do to help these children. I thought, if I could just talk to the parents to find out what they knew about this process, then possibly I could help to change the situation, but, the question was: “How could I reach the parents?”

I began a note writing campaign to the parents, requesting to meet with them. I would pin the note to the children's clothes before putting them on the bus to go home. While I felt this was a long shot, I thought it was all I had. Weeks passed and no one responded, and finally one day after school, I had a parent and her teenage daughter show up; it was at that time I started to believe there was hope. I began meeting with that parent on a regular basis to explain the special education law and the importance of an IEP. After some time had passed since my meeting with the parent, my principal found out what the meetings were about and forbade me to continue; but I did not stop! This resulted in being transferred to the middle school.

At the beginning of the next school year, I arrived at the middle school to a class of 7th and 8th grade students with intellectual disabilities. After the first couple of weeks at the new school, it became clear to me that I was out of my comfort zone; working with 13-, 14-, and some 15-year-olds was not my strength. So, I stayed as long as I could bear it; this was tortuous. Finally, one Friday afternoon at the end of the day, I realized that I could no longer do this, so I wrote a note stating I was not coming back, placed it in the desk drawer, and never returned. I had made a decision that the only way I was going to survive was to leave. Afterwards, I was scared that the school district would come after me because I had signed a contract, but my survival took precedence.

As I look back, I can see a theme happening here where choices I have made stemmed from the economic reality of the labor market. Just as when I graduated from college and there were limited job opportunities in the field of criminal justice that led me to graduate school in social work, there were limited opportunities in macro social work upon graduation with an MSW. Many of my friends did not have jobs and took anything they could get, regardless of the field of practice they specialized in school. The public child welfare agency (DSS) was one of the only “games in town” – the jobs were plentiful, the pay and benefits were relatively decent, and so that's where many of us went. I saw it as a “stepping stone” to administrative practice down the road. I became a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker thrust into a role I knew nothing about. I had never even taken a clinical course on working with children or families, and I was terrified of screwing families up worse than they already were.

I soon realized that no matter how hard I tried, there was actually very little I could do to help keep children safe, and that the system itself was unbelievably screwed up. I found myself

questioning everyone and everything in the agency about policies, procedures and why things couldn't change. Maybe because I was so outspoken or maybe because the powers that be thought I might be a liability with families (given my stellar clinical skills), the day my supervisor walked into the office, packed some boxes and walked out, I was told to move into her office as the new supervisor. Now I was terrified for a whole different reason, but at last, I was now in a place where I could begin to make a difference! From there, I kept moving up the administrative chain and, with each move, had more opportunity to make changes, even if it was only one small battle at a time.

After a while, I knew I needed some research to guide me, but could find little readily available and had little time to look for it. So the idea of going back to school started to grow within me more and more.

After I received my BA degree in Sociology, I wondered "What am I going to do now?" I knew that I wanted to help others. I had studied about all of the many social problems in my sociology courses. I decided to work with the homeless. I applied for a "Life Coach" position at the House of Ruth. This is a well-respected homeless shelter for women in Washington, D.C., which is my hometown. The job title was Life Coach. I worked the 4:00 pm-12 midnight shift. This was exciting! I never worked at night before. My parents were outraged. They were so worried about my safety. Of course, I had to call my parents periodically during my shift to address their concerns.

I remember one social worker specifically. She had just graduated from Columbia University School of Social Work. I was so impressed. I really looked up to her. I wanted to be like her. I also began to feel that she was doing the type of work that I would like to do. I did not feel that I was having the impact that I envisioned. I did not realize that I was "doing social work." I also learned from observing my colleague that there are a specific set of skills involved with helping others. I wanted to be like my colleague. I wanted to learn more about the helping process. I applied to Catholic University School of Social Work. I remember being so proud of myself when I received my acceptance letter. I knew I was on my way to achieving big things – so exciting!

Another set of memories surround my realization that many social ills were essentially ignored in my religious experience. In college and seminary, I was learning about family violence. What I learned confirmed what my mom had anecdotally noted on many occasions – that our southern Appalachian county was one of the worst counties in the state for domestic violence and child abuse. It began to dawn on me that I had never heard this discussed in church, and I was in church ALL the time, essentially every time the doors were open. The minister and the Bible study leaders talked about sin, but it was of the personal variety – drinking, sex, dancing, cursing, etc. The emphasis was on punishment and repentance in the form of a jeremiad, but not once did any religious leader from my childhood or adolescent years denounce family violence. How could we not talk about it? If this was impacting so many people in our community, why was the church silent? The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the unspoken rule was that what happened in a family was private and was entrusted to the man, who was viewed and religiously endorsed as the head of household. Not only was the church silent, but it also was complicit in the social problem.

I walked into the auditorium and found a seat in the middle and began looking around. The room seemed filled with what seemed like hundreds of pretty, young twenty-something women and a few young men. I didn't see women like me. I felt old and out of place. I began doubting my return to school. How would I manage? There was so much information already – what if I was the only person in the room without prior social work schooling? They accepted me without a BSW, but maybe they had made a mistake. I realized that I didn't really know what a social worker did, or what social work was…I was probably in the wrong place…

I don't really remember much about what happened during the morning long orientation, except for the welcome from the Dean. I remember that he began by defining social workers – he said that they were change makers. That they work to end social injustice and move the world towards fairness. He talked about the many 'isms' in our world and the work that we would be prepared to do through the

program. Oh, I thought – so that is what I am! I am a social worker! And, I realized, I had found a home.

I am so afraid to speak up in class. Every class is a new assessment opportunity. Is this an instructor who lectures a lot? Thank God! I can be invisible; no attention will be focused on me. Oh gee, this class grades on participation and the instructor calls on people. Don't make eye contact! Look down. Hide behind someone. My stomach hurts; I feel so fearful. Am I shy? Is this abnormal? Geez, that student is so smart! Why couldn't I have said that? I'm so stupid, there's nothing I can even think to say.

And now [Ann McConnell] has asked if I'd be her research assistant on her dissertation work. She's even gone to bat for me to give me field credit for the time I'm doing those life satisfaction surveys in the community. But what do I really know about collecting data or even about research? I've got to confess. I can't even sleep at night for worrying about this. She is not going to want me to do this if she finds out how ignorant I am. What am I going to do?

It is the day of our appointment when I'm supposed to meet with her to tell her whether I'll do it. I could be sick! I am so afraid she'll find out how stupid I am. I drive to campus in a panic and am at her office door early – too early. I go into the restroom and hide until it's time.

And as I sit down, I see *The Gerontologist* and the *Journal of Gerontology* on her credenza. God, she is smart! What a clipped, even, precise, direct way she talks. No southern accent, no hesitancy. She will never understand. But I have to tell her the truth. I can't dupe her.

I blurt out, “First, I need to tell you something.”

“What's that?” she asks, eyebrows slightly raised.

“I'm not sure I'm smart enough to do this. I just don't want you to think that I know what to do.” There, I've said it. Oh God…

“That's exactly what I said to my advisor. We all feel that way,” she says matter-of-factly. “Now, let's talk about our working together.” She stops, looks at me.

I am dumbfounded – relieved. I would cry, but I never cry in public. “Okay,” I say, and we begin our planning together...

Before my Hebrew Prophets class one day, the professor brought in a newspaper article that discussed biological differences between straight and gay men. He then wondered aloud about what such scientific findings meant for the Christian church and community? How were we to take in that information given that the stance of the church had been to denounce homosexuality? He then read a quote attributed to Karl Barth, that when interpreting the Bible, we are to “Hold the Bible in one hand and today’s newspaper in the other.” Around the same time, one of my college suite mates had stated that all homosexuals go to hell. Though we shared similar religious roots, I could not agree with that. I couldn't understand how a God who we claimed to be all-loving could condemn someone, particularly if his or her sexual identity was not a choice but a biological reality.

My first-year field education placement in 1970 was with the Pasadena, California Public Schools. It provided a remarkable opportunity to observe a multiplicity of macro forces at work that affected students, parents, teachers, the School Board, and the whole city administration of Pasadena. It was the first year of federally court-ordered school integration in the country using cross-town bussing ordered by Judge Manuel Real as a remedy for racial discrimination in the Pasadena Public Schools. When we arrived, the community was in social and political turmoil. Teachers were unhappily being re-assigned to different schools after spending long, often comfortable tenures in certain posts. Students were confused and afraid, and the School Board was embroiled in a recall election.

This was not set up as a “macro” field placement. It was a school social work placement organized as a Student Unit for six students – four second-year and two first-year students – and led by a full-time field education faculty member known regionally as a school social work practitioner. The Unit was structured traditionally to offer MSW students practice experience with individual students, student groups, and family groups. There were weekly Unit

meetings and individual supervision. It was a collegial and high-functioning Student Unit with outstanding mentorship.

I did all the required interviews and process recordings, but I felt these interventions were quite off the mark in terms of identifying causation and problem solving. I was far more interested in identifying and understanding what the external forces were in the social and political environment that brought the city to this crisis, what systemic and social policy factors were at play to help turn things around, and what research was being done to help document interventions that worked and those that didn't.

Poverty is not the story of someone else.

I returned to the graduate school to complete my master's degree. My primary interests were on feminization of poverty and welfare reform in Korea. The previous public assistance system covered only children and elderly adults who lived below the official poverty line, categorized as the deserving poor because they were considered not able to work. After the national economic crisis, the public assistance system in Korea was expanded and restructured to include the so-called “undeserving poor.” This refers to the working poor, aged 18-64, who were able to work but lived below the poverty line. For the receipt of public assistance benefits, they were required to attend government-supported job training programs or show work participation. There were extensive discussions on the welfare reform and the appropriate poverty line in policy and research domains.

I was working on the master's thesis, examining the effectiveness of the workfare program under the new anti-poverty policies. When I was busy collecting data from working-poor female program participants, one of my best friends called me. She was my childhood friend, and we went to the same middle and high schools before college. She told me that she was getting divorced. She started to tell me about her stories, which were totally new to me. Her mom was a victim of domestic violence for a long time. One of the big motivations for her early marriage was that she wanted to escape from the abuse in her family and start over with her new family. However, her husband was financially irresponsible and he did not take care of her and their baby. Even when she was pregnant, she lacked food and nutrition most of the time. She tried to work part-time to support herself, but it was not enough. She finally divorced with custody of her baby. With her limited education, career history, and young child, she struggled and had a very hard time making ends meet. Eventually she found a job and worked as an office secretary. Her earnings were slightly over the poverty line, but she needed to be on welfare to receive other public benefits such as child care subsidies. Her employer was considerate enough to understand her status and agreed to only officially report part of her earnings and instead pay the remaining amounts in cash directly to her. It was very confusing. I was a graduate student who was studying the public assistance system and proper poverty line for working poor families. I met many clients and working poor families in social work fields and research projects, but my friend's hardship hit me very differently. My friend was not a free-rider. She did not mean to deceive the system. She was a hard-working mother living just above the poverty line, but the existing anti-poverty system could not deal with her continuous difficulties. It was frustrating, very frustrating to me.

I'm sitting at the edge of the swimming pool at the Girl Scouts' Camp Daisy Hyman in the spring. I have my feet in the water and it feels relaxing and refreshing. On one side is the director of Catholic Charities and on the other side is the Director of the Mental Health Association. We have a big jug of white wine between us, sipping out of the jug because we didn't bring glasses. We had just spent the day at the camp in a retreat hearing from two male social work professors about how to run our agencies more efficiently. This retreat had been sponsored by the United Way, and I was the chair of the United Way Executives Association, of which we were all members.

It was twilight and very peaceful, but I felt exhausted by the stimulating day and from everything that I had been doing to “go after” the United Way money in the 42 United Way offices in my region of my state-wide agency. I had been mesmerized by what I had heard during the day. These two men made it sound easy to organize an agency and evaluate its programs. It was so clean

and neat and controllable, and I had just come out of messy politics, hard decisions about staff, and all those different United Way proposals.

Sitting there with the refreshing water between my toes and two of my closest professional colleagues in the city, I decided that I didn't want to run an agency anymore. I wanted to know what those two professors knew. I wanted to learn from them and then teach folks like they taught us. I blurted out to my two friends, “I don't want to do this anymore. I'm going to get me a Ph.D.” Both of them responded, “I'll drink to that!”

I felt relief. I had found my way out of confusion, exhaustion, and uncertainty. Soon, with the help of a Ph.D., I would really “know” and teach others.

In my reading, I came across a conceptual model that seemed to fit all of the pieces together such as stressors, role performance, mental health outcomes, and mastery. At the same time, I had just received a pre-doctoral fellowship from the American Sociological Association. Dr. Len Pearlin, the famous sociologist at the University of Maryland who actually developed the Stress Process Model, would be my mentor during my doctoral program. Wow! I was so scared and afraid. Am I smart enough to converse intelligently with this phenomenal scholar?

Dr. Pearlin embraced me. It turns out that he had a friend who passed away from sickle cell disease. He was excited about the journey that we would take in terms of applying his model to women of color. This was a pivotal point in my development as a scholar. During our weekly meetings, he encouraged me to think about the broader implications of my research questions. What about funding from National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH)? What about the policy implications of my research? How will this affect the implementation of the Sickle Cell Disease Control Act? These were very challenging questions, and I was using my brain in ways that I never had before…..and I liked it.

When I was working at a community development and affordable housing nonprofit, I always looked forward to meetings and programs sponsored by the City's Community Development Alliance. The organization consisted of affordable housing developers and community development corporations that worked within and across neighborhoods and was anchored by the City's office of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). These LISC folks thought big, and conversations centered on neighborhood and systems level interventions to impact low-income households. It was exciting for my 26- or 27-year-old self. One spring, LISC sponsored a presentation by Bill Strickland, developer of the Manchester-Bidwell Training Center in Pittsburgh, an art and vocational training program in an industrial area of Pittsburgh. I was filled with such hope and energy during the presentation. What struck me most from his slide show (literally, he brought in a box of slides) was the way he viewed those who took part in the programs at his center. He put water fountains in the public spaces and filled the space with fresh flowers. He seemed to view this as an intervention itself. This was a stark contrast to what I was seeing at my organization. Clients were discussed disparagingly. Even though there were legitimate cost constraints that dictated house design and interiors, client choices and requests were often ignored with little to no explanation as to why. At the time, much of my job was fund development. The way we pursued, discussed, and treated our current and prospective funders was in stark contrast to the way we approached those we served. I was left with the question of what would happen if we treated people like they deserved flowers? What would happen if larger scale interventions institutionalized the inherent worth of every person?

As a community specialist for the County Planning Department in 1979, I suggested the County conduct a Family Impact Analysis to assess the facts from the residents' point of view. I wanted to give the farm workers a voice. However, I was branded as “biased” in favor of farm workers. From my perspective, they needed a constituency – support from public or private decision makers and awareness from the rank and file county employees that the farm worker families were clients too, but powerful global actors were determining patterns of land use and the fate of workers. Public employees and developers considered all developers, financial institutions, public officials, and the Catholic Church to be neutral cost/benefit actors. Where was fairness? Equity?

Once again, I went scurrying for more knowledge. I went into Los Angeles to find a weekend seminar or some certificate program that would help me understand the politics of local land use but found nothing. I went to the School of Urban and Regional Planning, and the Dean said they have no short-term program, but if I wanted to consider the Ph.D. program, I would find what I wanted. So I applied, was accepted, and awarded a full-tuition fellowship, and I was on my way.

I walked into the kitchen. My mother had just finished her phone conversation. She said, “It's your cousin, Bernard…he is in the hospital again…his sickle cell.” I was very sad about this, yet I felt an enormous sense of curiosity. I thought to myself, “How do you cope with episodes of pain, the disruptions in life?”

I asked Bernard after he was released from the hospital. He said, “I really don't know how I deal with the pain...it has become a normal state of being.”

I then started to think about women. How do they cope, especially with being mothers, wives – roles that they are expected to perform? How do they perform when they have a condition that brings on unpredictable episodes of pain? I started to look at the research and I did not find much on women of color. I remember Bernard saying that stress seemed to bring on the painful episodes. I became consumed with the studying about the concept of stress (especially the biological or physiological aspects of stress).

Most of the shared written stories were in this section. Recollections of the beginning of the journey to social work seemed to focus on lived experiences of value paradoxes, potentialities about one's “fit” with the profession of social work, and growing confidence in one's abilities. From wondering what it would be like treating clients as if they deserved flowers to realizing that poverty was not a problem that only ‘those people’ experienced to observing the reality of underserved children in public schools, the felt need for more knowledge as a response to the problems experienced was common. Returning to school for an MSW and then a Ph.D. seemed firmly grounded in the belief that education would provide a way to respond competently to the value paradoxes encountered. Knowledge would provide a way to efficiently run agencies, respond to inequalities, and confront value incongruities. Schools of social work provided supportive space and mentorship for exploration and study, encouraging the belief that it was possible to find ways to move towards a more just society; it was possible to make a difference as a woman.

Academic Life

The last area of discussion focused on the experiences of the collective biography members in the world of academia. One important note about this section is that while group membership spanned the life cycle of an academic (from new assistant professor to professor emeritus), the majority of offerings in this section are written by those who have been academics long enough to gain tenure.

Social Worker or Academic? During our retreat, one of the participants asked this question. As we were getting ready to set forth for our next writing exercise, I decided to focus on this question. As a social worker, I do not see myself as a social worker OR an academic. It does not occur to me to differentiate the two, and I don't! I would never consider engaging in research without informing “change” and “practice” as a goal.

Furthermore, I see social work research, in the end, as an act of social justice as we define and refine social thought that is informed and oriented to change and ultimately liberation through knowledge and progressive ideas. In recent years, I have come to think of my work as that of human rights defense – the right to health care, housing, quality education, and so forth. I have come to think of human rights defense as a result of my macro practice orientation. I draw upon both my formal training and practice knowledge. Call me idealistic, but human rights are exactly why I chose social work, and that's why I continue to choose academic social work. It is just impossible for me to differentiate social work or the academy – I do both.

In the past nine months, since my transition into faculty life, it seems to have gained momentum. I have always been proud of calling myself a macro social worker. To me, macro social work *is* social work. So, when I walked into my first meeting at

my new university ready to embark on teaching future macro social workers, I felt slapped in the face when our Associate Dean announced at the faculty retreat that the macro social work program was in danger of disappearing. This has set into motion a host of feelings that move beyond the normal fears and anxieties of being a new junior faculty member. As someone who easily sees many sides of an issue, mostly at once, I am used to feeling like an outsider of sorts. Entering into a faculty position, I am feeling excitement, doubt, and insecurity. Senior folks tell me that this is normal, but now, the additional understanding that, as a macro faculty member, I am likely to experience further marginalization is unsettling. But, macro social work *is* social work. As I try to absorb information from all of the voices sent in my direction in my short academic career, I struggle to hear my own. What does success look like for me? What does integrity look like for me? What are my values, and how do I adhere to them without letting others' experiences cloud my own vision of what is right? Mostly, how do I get through each day of this early career without letting the anxiety of constantly being put into someone else's box separate me from myself?

After I moved to the U.S. and began to pursue my professional career in the different cultural context, I have lived with the label of minority, foreign-born people of color. When I found myself unconsciously feeling pressure that I should work harder than others, I recognized that I belong to a minority group. I tend to be more responsible for what I do, so that my behavior and work would not give negative impacts or misunderstanding on Asian women. I used to be sensitive to gender issues and patriarchal hierarchy in the past, but probably not so much now. No, indeed I am still so, but in the interplay of gender and race, the filter of race seems to come first in my professional work. I may be preoccupied to work as a foreign-born minority and do not have room to feel a gender lens yet. Not clear, constantly changing. I knew I would continuously battle race and gender biases. It's not easy, therefore, I feel I should address them in my personal and professional agenda. I believe my little steps would contribute to reducing the subtle exclusion of minority women. It will be one of the ways that helps the next generation of minority women meet a brighter future.

I have spent the last academic year overworked, overwhelmed, wallowing in what I perceive is the demise of macro practice at my school, anger at the corporatization of my university and the academy in general, sadness over the loss of how things were when I first started this profession as my second career, and wallowing in career indecisiveness.

I don't like being a “wallflower,” so I feel torn between reframing my outlook and making the best of the new reality, or leaving the academy and starting the consulting business that has been monopolizing my thoughts lately.

No one in my school has “gone up” for full professor in six years. The Dean is getting a lot of questions and pressure from the new president about what's going on and why the Associate Professors aren't moving forward. I'm getting pressure from the women full professors that it's time to do this. The reality is that none of us think we can make the grade in this new paradigm that has evolved before our eyes. We are a strong, successful group of excellent teachers, researchers, and organizational citizens (probably to a fault), but most of us do not have a track record of large amounts of federal funding and a “gazillion” publications written using large datasets with the highest level of statistical wizardry. We are all afraid of the humiliation of being found “not good enough.”

For me, I always thought that this final promotion would be part of my career trajectory, so yes, I'm torn and confused. When I think about what would be involved to move forward, the cost-benefit analysis that I have done in my head, and the daughter that I would have to keep telling, “Sorry honey, Mommy has a lot of work to do again,” it hardly seems worth the price. [Amy] says it's not worth it, don't do it. But I can't shake the feeling that I'm copping out or that the junior faculty I'm mentoring would see me as a loser. So the internal battle continues, not only for me, but for my associate professor colleagues as well who are caught in what feels like limbo or a “time/paradigm warp.”

As I sat and listened to the conversation this afternoon about being an academic vs. social worker, I found myself becoming frustrated. This dialogue underscores what I am seeing/feeling about

my current school. I became a social worker because of my commitment to change, bringing change to systems that were unfair and unjust. My decision to pursue academia spun from my experiences in those unjust systems that are referenced here. I wanted to generate knowledge building among students, teaching real world applications grounded in theory. The goal was to teach students how to use their knowledge and information learned in the classroom to fight injustices. I also wanted to use my knowledge to explore, examine, and develop initiatives that would empower those most affected by these injustices.

Now, it feels like my desire to continue in this vein is being challenged by those who are in power, those who are running the institutions. So, I pose the question: What does this mean for me as an academician? Do I conform to their way or do I go? If I go, what happens to that commitment I made to bring about change? If I stay and move in the direction that the "powers that be" are enforcing, then I would have to give up a part of my authenticity just to remain in an environment (academia) that I perceive is hostile, lacks understanding about knowledge building, and is being driven by money. Do I lose that part of myself? This is really hard; I really like being in academia, but I also remember the words spoken by my father about integrity and being true to yourself. So, again, do I give up that part of who I am that enjoys teaching and examining, exploring phenomena that are important to me to satisfy the whims of academia, or do I remain true to myself and continue with the work that fulfills me?

I am in the Dean's office. It is annual evaluation time, a time for dealing with metrics that seem to change from year to year. I had spent little time on this report, simply providing the "facts" when in other years I had enjoyed creating a rich narrative about my activities and accomplishments. While sitting through the discussion of my accomplishments this year, my mind wandered to earlier years when the preparation of the report, while not much fun, really helped me to focus on my work and my worth. I felt a certain amount of pride about being able to report to my superior about how I had spent my time during the year.

This year it was different. The process and the conversation went well, but I knew that I did not provide the most thorough or thoughtful report. I provided the information that was required and no more, because it didn't seem to warrant more than that. I was frankly surprised at the tenor of the conversation. It was pleasant and there was no pressure, no questions, and very little critique. In the midst of the conversation I began to consider that it might be going well because there are no real expectations of me.

Have I become irrelevant? I don't feel irrelevant until the Dean seems to say that our curriculum is not good and is in great need of revision because our students are not graduating with the needed skills. "Besides," he says, "When you retire, there will be few faculty able to support our current curriculum."

I wanted to stand up and stamp my feet, "What do you mean that our students don't have the needed skills?" Our MSW graduates are working all over the state, and our doctoral students are doing some wonderful things in lots of different arenas of social work. I am proud of what we have accomplished, but I kept trying to see this from his perspective. Our curriculum might be considered non-traditional and perhaps very different from what he or new faculty were exposed to in other programs. It was developed from the ground up based on what the faculty thought was needed to prepare students for the work. Had the times and expectations changed so quickly to make a curriculum with great outcome measures and results useless?

I left the session deflated because it did not appear that there was any assumption that a new faculty might be asked to teach something that would require them to learn before teaching it. It felt like the expectations for them around teaching had become minimized, just like it appeared that the expectations for me around funded research were minimal. I was a "short timer," and had minimal usefulness; more precisely, I left feeling irrelevant. It was like the last ten years of my research and scholarship no longer counted. It no longer counted in the very context where material had been developed and tested to be sure it was relevant for the students and the communities or academic environments where the students would practice. I felt like giving up. Getting angry would not help. It was then that I realized that irrelevance may just

have a type of liberating effect. What I was doing may not have any importance in the current academic milieu; however, no one was stopping me from doing what I believed in, and what gives me great pleasure, so according to one of my beloved mentors, I'll just "keep on keeping on."

We sit in the conference room as the subcommittee of a standing committee. Monday mornings are always meeting days, and I usually dread them. The one good thing is that once noon arrives, we are done and the week will have officially begun. The Dean holds up a piece of paper with a clever-looking chart on it and announces that it is only a draft of the proposed dashboard produced by the Provost's Office.

"Dashboard?" I think, "Where had I heard that word before…and recently." My spouse had rushed in from the hospital just last week. When I said hello, he had headed for his computer and said, "I need to put this on the dashboard before the end of the day." Dashboards seemed to be a rage – if you can simplify all the products into a pretty one pager, then all's right with the world. My skepticism dripped...

"What's a dashboard?" one of the other faculty members asked; this brought me back to the meeting with a jolt. The dashboard was passed around, and it had the usual expectations covered, but one young faculty member asked, "But where are the books?"

The reply was quick, somewhat dismissive, "Oh, textbooks aren't scholarly and books aren't refereed publications."

There was a long silence during which the young faculty member looked stunned, even confused. "But when I was hired, we were the School that wrote the textbooks that other schools used."

No one said anything, then the Chair switched the topic to other business. It was there that I realized how far things had come. The value of what I had been doing was not only lessened, it had been erased. I toyed for a moment with the possibility that I was being erased too – vacillating between how freeing it is to be released from the shackles of mattering in the system to the ultimate humiliation of being obsolete. The irony of it all is working feverishly to do what I thought I was supposed to do and finding out it was totally disrespected within the very system I had worked to please, and since I had persisted in defining myself by how much I could "do," there was the frightening possibility that I had no idea how to separate my "being" from my "doing." I didn't even drop off the dashboard. I had not made it onto the dashboard!

Run away as quickly as you can, but you are a southern woman, do it with grace for God's sake! Hang on to the tattered threads of your integrity and get the hell out!

Reflected in the writing of these experiences, life for those who were tenured female macro social work academics is currently not living up to the unspoken promises of the social work education system. After finding a home for the recognition of social injustice, the realities of being part of the system of social work academia no longer feels congruent to the hope once felt in academic homes. Providing the education once sought – how to affect systemic change – no longer seems valued within social work academia. Feelings of discomfort and of not belonging have returned, ironically within the place that once felt the most congruent with strongly held beliefs.

Discussion

The continuing themes identified in the written narratives from the collective biography process seem to indicate that there were some discursive practices that shaped and continue to form the experiences of these female macro social work academics. Pre-professional shapings were often grounded in values traditionally expected of social workers: social justice and respect for differences. Experiencing the disconnect between what the world should be and what the world is appears to have left an indelible mark and perhaps began to develop a lens through which those paradoxes were highlighted and upsetting.

Personally experiencing the disconnect between what ought to be and what is continued as the women moved into adulthood. Social work's history and the language used within MSW and doctoral programs provided the hope and expectation that change was not only possible, but

supported by other social workers and social work academics. Movement towards doctoral education was based on the recognition that knowledge was needed to continue to strive for change. There was a sense of hopefulness as eyes were opened to possibilities.

Ironically, the hope of being the source of change, extending knowledge and sharing it with students, has often resulted in feelings of otherness and not belonging. The values of social work have not always been experienced within social work academia where the focus is not necessarily on preparing for change and shaping change agents, but on furthering the goals of the academy regarding grant money and preparing individuals for the workplace. Critically important to these macro social work educators is finding the value in what they believe in, even if the systems in which they operate do not always project those same values.

The stories also make explicit the intersection of gender, class, and race. In the early stories, these positionalities are linked with power resulting in change making. Whether it was a mom demanding fair treatment or a woman of color recognizing the importance of her history, each woman seems to have linked her own inherent power to making a difference. Later stories, those of more senior faculty, exhibit a different experience of power. Power is no longer linked to making change in one's community, the academy. Academic survival is dependent upon using one's power to meet the demands of the market – not in change making.

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