REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

"In The Whirlwind of Change"
Cover Art by F. Ellen Netting

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Remembering Our Founding Editor,
Sonia Leib Abels (1929-2019)

Darlyne Bailey, Monica Leisey, F. Ellen Netting, Kelly McNally Koney

"If we accept the significance of narratives in the construction of human experience; and consider the natural affinity between narrative reasoning and social work practice; then the discipline of narrative inquiry ought to become a central part of professional education. It may be the means to achieve the integration of research and practice." (Abels, 1995, p. 2)

Sonia Abels was Founding Editor in 1995 of our *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, first published at California State University Long Beach and since 2012 published online at Cleveland State University (www.rnoph.org). Serving as editor through Spring 1999, Sonia continued to serve on the Executive Board of *Reflections* until 2012.

In the above photo—taken at a November 2012 reception in Cleveland for Sonia and for her surviving husband Paul Abels—Sonia is talking in her characteristic, enthusiastic manner to one of her authors, the late Sam Richmond. Sam was Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and former Chair of the Department of Social Work during the formative years when Sonia earned tenure at the Cleveland State University School of Social Work, where she worked from 1970-1987. Sam authored an article in the Special Issue on Social Justice.

Long committed to the struggle for social justice, educator and activist Sonia Abels also served as Co-editor of the Special Issue on Social Justice (Volume 16, Number 3). In that issue, she and her companion of 70 years—her husband Paul Abels—eulogized her successor as Editor, the late Professor Jillian Jimenez, saying: "Social justice, in all its rich meaning, is the purpose of social work....The narratives [in the special issue] help in the memorializing. Jillian's life had full meaning for those who knew her...We honor the work done to build a more just society" (Abels & Abels, 2010, p. 2).

So, too, Sonia's life had full meaning for those who knew her. We are incredibly grateful for all Sonia brought to the lives of so many. We dedicate this current issue of *Reflections* to her, comforted in knowing her vision endures. In tribute we are reprinting the editorial letter she wrote for the very first issue of *Reflections* in 1995, titled "Salutatory." It is the last article in this issue, and is reprinted in its original form. It is as relevant today as it was then, and the narratives published in *Reflections* still bear witness to the human experience Sonia wanted each of us to discover and learn from.

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Reflections from the Editorial Team:
The Importance of Being Author-centric

Darlyne Bailey, Monica Leisey, F. Ellen Netting, and Kelly McNally Koney

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 26 Number 1 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. This issue introduces an author-centric approach to the journal's culture and shares updated criteria to be used in the manuscript review process. Most importantly we highlight the articles herein that express the overriding themes of balancing professional and personal boundaries, identifying underlying assumptions, and promoting self-awareness.

*Keywords***:** professional boundaries, self-awareness, underlying assumptions, empowerment, review process

It is hard to believe that a full year has gone by since we became the Editorial Leadership Team for this incredible journal! What a privilege it is to serve in this role, and how much we have learned in the process!

We want to begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, followed by our thoughts about the importance of being author-centric. Finally, we will provide a brief overview of the themes that emerge in this issue.

Thanking and Welcoming Team Members

We have so many people to thank, and we have new team members to introduce. First, we want to pay homage, once again, to our founding editors, Sonia and Paul Abels. Sonia's first Editorial Letter, reprinted at the end of this issue, so beautifully lays out what *Reflections* was created to be. As was true when Sonia wrote that first letter in 1995, *Reflections* provides a space wherein the narrative form is embraced as the vehicle for centering personal experience in the process of knowledge building around professional helping and social change. Much has transpired in the last 25 years, and yet, our commitment to this purpose has not wavered. We are indebted to Sonia and Paul for their vision and the dedication it took to usher this journal into being. It is our privilege to carry forward this mission so all of us may keep fitting together others' stories with our own in ways that ground our knowing and grow our work.

We are thrilled with the response our guest editors Beth Russell, Pam Viggiani, and Debra Fromm Faria received from their call for manuscripts on Cultural Humility, leading to two full issues on this important subject. Their first special issue was published this fall and the second one will be released soon. In addition, much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Lead Guest Editor for a Special Issue on Continuing Education slated to come out in 2020.

Many thanks to those team members who work so diligently behind-the-scenes in the copyediting and production functions of *Reflections*. Our deepest gratitude goes to 2018-2019

Graduate Assistant Rebecca Krenz and to Tara Peters—the 2017-2018 Graduate Assistant—who served as Copy Editor through Volume 25 Number 1, after graduating with her MSW in May 2018. They moved articles through copyediting into the summer of 2019. Rebecca has written a beautiful piece in this issue that will be invaluable to anyone who wants to better understand narrative writing (we think Sonia would be proud). And we can't thank Tara Peters enough for simply and quickly saying "Yes!" when we asked her to rejoin us to do the copyediting "lift" in July and August. With Tara's help, we were able to seamlessly move the first Cultural Humility issue to our Production/Publishing team.

Given Michael Dover's ability to recruit talented people, we are happy to welcome three new student team members this fall. Zoey Pincelli joins us as Copy Editor. Zoey has two years of experience with the Cleveland State University (CSU) Writing Center and has her own copyediting business. Zoey is an English and Computer Science major. Geetha Somarouthu is Assistant Copy Editor. Geetha, a psychology and pre-med student, has been working at the CSU Tutoring and Student Success Center and will be in charge of readying manuscripts for copyediting, APA style checking, and initial proofreading. Sarah Valek is Mike's Graduate Assistant. A former editor of Cool Cleveland and a student in the CSU MSW program's clinical concentration, Sarah works with Mike on getting out the issues (producing and reading final article and issue galley proofs). Welcome Zoey, Geetha, and Sarah! And thank you, Mike, for helping us build and manage such a talented team.

Our Section Editors—Julie Cooper Altman, Jon Christopher Hall, Carol Langer, and Beth Lewis—continue to volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. Theirs is a never-ending vigilance as they assign manuscripts to reviewers, keep track of reviews as they come in, and correspond with authors. We want to acknowledge the significance of what they do because we know they have so many other demands in their respective work environments. Theirs are gifts of dedication and commitment to *Reflections*.

But *Reflections* would not exist were it not for our authors and reviewers. In this issue alone, at least 22 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to authors. The importance of the peer review process cannot be over-stated and dedicated reviewers are critical players in the editorial process. Thank you for the quality and timeliness of your reviews!

What It Means to be Author-centric

We called our first editorial "Honoring the Past, Embracing the Future," and this, our second editorial, is called "The Importance of Being Author-centric." We coined this word during a conference call and hope that it will make sense once we've tried to explain!

Over the last months we have talked with the Editorial Board—the Section and Guest Editors— about the purpose and the mission of *Reflections*. This has engaged us in an ongoing sense-making process in which we have learned from the rich history of this journal, trusting the emergent process and grasping the AHAs and insights to guide our collaboration. It has become clear that *Reflections* provides a unique vehicle for authors to write about what they have learned as they have engaged in professional helping. This begs two questions: Who are considered

helping professionals and what roles do they play?

If one searches the internet for "helping professionals" this definition pops up: "A profession that nurtures the growth of or addresses the problems of a person's physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional or spiritual well-being, including medicine, nursing, psychotherapy, psychological counseling, social work, education, life coaching and ministry" (YourDictionary, n.d.). This definition reminds us that we want to attract authors from multiple disciplines and professions. They could be social workers, nurses, counselors, educators, chaplains, physicians, and play a host of other roles in which people want to make a difference in the lives of others. Helping professionals who are practitioners share with readers the humanity of their encounters. Many of the articles published in *Reflections* have been written by educators who teach in professional programs, many of whom are "pracademics," having one foot in the field of practice and the other in the academy. Their narratives often focus on helping students learn about how to practice in their chosen professions or on how to interface between the field of practice and the educational setting. Students write about what they have learned in the classroom and in the field and reflect on the implications of what they have learned as they prepare to be practitioners.

In short, we want to attract authors from multiple fields and roles to write about their experiences, about what they have learned about themselves and others in their interactions, encounters, and attempts to help. Without their very personal narratives, that reveal the deep learning that occurs in the process of being a helping professional, there would be no *Reflections*.

Being author-centric, then, means the following to us:

• Recruiting and encouraging new and seasoned authors across the generations, across countries, across disciplines/professions to share what they have learned;
• Remembering that we have a responsibility to disseminate quality narratives so that helping professionals can benefit from the experiences of others;
• Recognizing that some authors may need guidance as these may be their first manuscripts written in a narrative style;
• Being sensitive to English not being a first language for some authors and encouraging them as they prepare their manuscripts to cross linguistic barriers;
• Keeping authors informed about the progress of their manuscript through every step in the submission, review, and copyediting process;
• Finding reviewers who will provide timely, appropriate, and thorough reviews that are helpful, constructive, and formative;
• Being sensitive to the invaluable role reviewers perform by making their feedback process as easy as possible for them to complete and for authors to read through;
• Using reviews to guide authors in strengthening their work;
• Getting reviewers' feedback to authors as quickly as possible and being sensitive to the fact that many authors are in positions that require them to publish and we do not want to hold up their manuscripts any longer than possible.

Thus, being author-centric means communicating with authors in a timely and respectful manner, keeping communication channels open, and being as time sensitive as possible in disseminating authors' narratives to an eager readership who can benefit from their insights. Since timely and meaningful reviews are critically important to authors who send their manuscripts to us, we listened to what reviewers were telling us about what needed to change in the review process. We have spent several months revising the review form so that it is more user-friendly, yet still able to convey quality feedback to authors. The first step was to simplify the review process by providing concise evaluation criteria for Section/Guest Editors, Reviewers, and Authors and to streamline feedback to authors. We wanted to ensure that the criteria used in the review process corresponded directly with submission guidelines provided to our authors. Authors need to know what criteria are being used to evaluate the quality of their manuscripts, so we are listing these below:

- Narrative: The author conveys interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences in a narrative format and is clear about the author(s)' role (e.g. practitioner, recipient of service, teacher, field instructor, student, researcher, other).
- Story: The author places the narrative within the context of a well-told story that helps readers discover new ways of thinking about the personal, the professional, and the political in our lives.
- Portrayals: The author roots the narrative in the rich and detailed portrayal of key moments, examples, and vignettes that fully portray the interaction taking place between and among the people involved.
- Context: The author places the reflection within an historical context, focusing on the present, and considering the implications of the narrative for the future.
- References: The author uses references that might draw connections between the content and the published literature or that might assist the reader in understanding conceptual or theoretical conclusions about the nature of professional practice.
- Conclusions: The author draws conclusions about the need for qualitative or quantitative research related to the issues arising from the narrative.

When we unveil the new review process in 2020, reviewers will rate each criterion on a five-point scale, and there will be room for reviewers' comments as well. In short, we hope to make the review process as transparent for authors as possible so that they can use these criteria to assess their manuscripts before they are even submitted.

If you are not currently a reviewer or author with *Reflections*, we hope you will join with us in this ongoing journey to raise the voices of helping professionals. *Reflections* is a unique platform for disseminating compelling, transparent accounts of what can be learned from others who are willing to share their inner-most thoughts about their personal and professional lives.

Highlights of This Issue

Together the narratives in this issue exude humanity. The authors unmask personal feelings and expectations that constantly churn within the professional self in an authentic parallel process. They tell stories in ways that reveal the assumptions that professionals bring to their

interpersonal interactions.

Our first two articles are written in unique formats. The first is an invited review of 27 selected articles from the journal's archives, and the second is a son's interview with a father, a renowned social work educator.

Krenz was asked to select articles from previous issues of *Reflections* that especially resonated with the author. Peeling back the professional mask, Krenz reveals deep insecurities in attempting to understand the difference between expository and narrative writing. The result is a sensitive and beautiful journey through the archives. Similarly, Miller's interview with the author's father, a social work educator, provides an historical window into the life of a man who tells a story with passion, insight, and humor. The father discloses early work with gangs at a Settlement House, talks about facing the impact of a visual disability on a long career, recounts fears felt during the McCarthy era, and reflects on the emergence of Jewish social workers into the profession. In the process, both articles provide reflections on how personal and professional values interface.

Next are three articles that focus on how challenging it can be to balance professional boundaries with personal feelings. Radis honors the memory of another father (a mental health case management supervisor) in a narrative that reveals how vulnerable the author feels when the father is dying and the social worker who comes to the bedside is a field student. Feize joins Radis in agonizing over being cast in the light of vulnerability while desperately wanting to keep professional boundaries intact. Having immigrated to the United States from a war-torn Middle Eastern country Feize is no stranger to conflict, yet in writing a dissertation this author experiences a surprising resistance to coming face-to-face with self-awareness. The tension between personal and professional boundaries is met at every turn in Nguyen's article on Hurricane Florence's impact on Wilmington, North Carolina. Not only does Nguyen's family have to evacuate the city, but when they return students, faculty, field agencies, and clients are in disarray as they seek to return to any semblance of normalcy. All three articles illustrate the incredible flexibility it takes to deal with balancing professional and personal needs in the face of human hardship.

The next three articles demonstrate how underlying assumptions frame the work that helping professionals do, and how critical it is to recognize what those assumptions are. Faubert calls us to dig deeply, to explore how epistemology, which concerns the study of knowledge and the sources of knowledge, is relevant to helping professionals. Epistemology reflects how the beliefs individuals hold regarding the certainty of knowledge, the process of knowing, and the justification of claimed knowledge have an impact on actions and behaviors. Clay provides the reader with an excellent example of how assumptions inform the world of policy practice. Using interviews with providers to highlight how assumptions underlying a business model differ from those undergirding a person-centered care approach, Clay reflects on the role of fee-for-service in behavioral health and the unintended consequences that occur on the frontlines as practitioners negotiate the need to meet new regulatory standards. O'Meara provides a brief, engaging narrative on experiential learning during the summer months between school years and brings the theme of underlying assumptions into focus at the local level. O'Meara's description

reveals what can happen during the summer when assumptions about different forms of learning are used to enrich meaningful engagement in naturally occurring environments outside traditional school settings.

Articles by Olson, Jarolson, and Eltaiba offer insight into crossing cultural boundaries. Taking an auto-ethnographical approach and grounding the narrative in the literature on studying abroad, Olson sets a context in which BSW students and faculty members spend a six-week summer session in Japan. Attempting to teach in a very different environment from the traditional classroom, Olson is pushed to examine long-held assumptions about teaching and learning. Jarolmen uses experience in traveling in South Africa for an international groupwork conference on bridging racial divides to reflect on the nature of culture and the beliefs that form one's worldview. Seeing social work as respecting individual autonomy, yet formed around collectivistic orientations, Jarolmen combines historical background and present experience in South Africa to reflect on different ways of knowing. Having taught in Australia and the Middle East, Eltaiba offers a perspective on teaching in diverse cultures. The author reveals methods and approaches to teaching social work practice, respecting diversity and being in touch with the values Eltaiba brings to the educational and practice experience. Deeply rooted in understanding the importance of cultural values, these three articles highlight interactions and experiences that lead to unforgettable insights.

All these articles are about the empowerment that comes from self awareness. The authors share their personal fears and revelations as they move in and out of personal and professional roles. They offer the reader an opportunity to reflect on their own approaches to helping as they engage in the parallel process of respecting professional boundaries and disclosing their own humanity. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!

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With Gratitude...

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We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors.

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Personal Narrative of Narratives:
Writing to Understand the Art of Narrative Essay

Rebecca Krenz

Abstract: I, a graduate assistant for *Reflections*, write a personal narrative about my experience reading the archives of the journal's published narratives. Given the task of looking for good narrative examples, starting with the most recent issue and reading my way back, I identify narratives that speak to me. Still parsing out the difference between narrative and exposition, I write in narrative style about the narratives and my reflections on them. In the process, I share my experience grappling with feelings of incompetency, inadequacy, frustration, and fear, along with my own growing understanding of the nature of narrative. In writing about this collection of narrative gems, found in *Reflections* between 2014–2018, the hope was to help prospective authors create their own way of merging their clinical experience with the narrative world.

Keywords: narrative, personal, professional, student, *Reflections*, vulnerable, tender exchange

Introduction

In my short time working at *Reflections*, I have had the opportunity to understand the heart of what we do—to sincerely know the person who sits in the professional's chair, to see that person's humanity and the experiences that guide them through our field. Here, at *Reflections*, we want to hear the stories of the working professional's inner life: What did it feel like to take in the difficult news your client brought to the session that day? How do you feel when you go home? What is the story your own body told in moments of deep interaction? How do you navigate from client to client, from session to session? Often times as clinicians we feel a need to avoid our feelings. The joke here in the office is "remember to keep a box of tissues nearby." However, what if the deepest treasure lies in the emotional connection our work provides? Rather than shying away from our emotions, perhaps, we can be willing to reveal and examine them—do the very thing we ask of our clients. At *Reflections*, we want to see the person behind the professional mask. Here, we ask you to tell us how you are human.

After reading the selected manuscripts (see below), I could not stop thinking about them. I carried them home in the confines of my mind to mull over. It has been inspiring and extremely humbling for me to read these written confessions of growth, sorrow, camaraderie, hurt, vulnerability, and personal triumph. As a master's student, I have been in the field for only a short time. These manuscripts have shown me things I rarely learn in the classroom. They have given me guidance and the answers to questions I did not know how to ask.

I hope your reflection on these narratives inspires you as well. Writing in narrative form is not our norm. As clinicians, we are taught to write matter-of-fact statements of what happened without feeling or speculation and then press *save to the client's file*. There is a reason and purpose for this, but that is not what we want here; that is not the purpose of *Reflections*. Here, we ask you to bring us into the office, share with us the tender exchange, walk us through the

moments when you get into your car to head home, and tell us what it brought up for you—of course, while keeping your clients' information anonymous and only sharing as much as you wish. The question I have for you is this: How deeply are you willing to let the rest of us in?

Beginning my graduate assistantship at *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, I truly struggled to understand narrative writing. Wanting to learn more, I began to read each manuscript published, starting with the current issue and reading my way back through time. I hoped to better understand what narrative writing really is. After making a list of my personal favorites, I began what I considered the daunting task of writing one myself. My thought was to write a personal narrative of the author's narrative and my reflections on it, and to embody this writing style in my current position as a helping professional.

A Night to Remember: An Autoethnographic Window into Facilitating a *Dinner and Stories* Event for Healthcare Workers – Susan Breiddal

In the narrative "A Night to Remember: An Autoethnographic Window into Facilitating a *Dinner and Stories* Event for Healthcare Workers," Breiddal (2018), a health care counselor, experiences firsthand the beauty, awe, and sorrow accompanied with end of life care. In our culture, there is an inevitable but strangely taboo facet of life, namely many individuals' great efforts to avoid acknowledging death. At some point, we all will face it, whether it be the loss of a loved one or the end of life for ourselves.

Brainstorming ways to create communal self-care for fellow palliative care workers, Breiddal decided to invite other health care professionals, across all disciplines of work, to her house in hopes of creating a supportive environment. The main objective of this event was to create a group of helping professionals who work in palliative care, in an attempt to prevent burnout and create support through the commonality of their work.

This manuscript reminded me of the essence of what we, here at *Reflections*, want to envelop: community, commonality, and support: "I am inviting everyone to move away from the mask of professionalism and toward a more personal way of being" (Breiddal, 2018, p. 57). Another moment in the manuscript I enjoyed is where Breiddal (2018) brings me right into the room:

> At that moment, I catch the slightly sweet aroma of garlic, mushrooms, and cheese that is drifting in from the kitchen. It smells so good! I've asked the participants to let me know ahead of time what they like, and I've custom-made the dinner based on their responses. I think they are really going to enjoy the meal, so I'm excited. (p. 59)

In this delicious moment I can almost smell the food; I feel as if I am sitting at the table, my mouth watering, on the edge of my seat with anticipation of what the evening will bring. I also love how I know exactly what the author is thinking and feeling, giving me both visual and emotional narrative stimulation while I read.

"A Night to Remember" reminded me of the importance of being vulnerable with other practitioners. This example of professional community support reminded me that on the dark

days—when I am feeling empty and drained—I am not alone. All I need to do is create connection with others who are doing the same. We must all remember—while trudging the road of life—that its unexpected bumps and detours can be challenging. However, if we find true and meaningful connection with others, we will find the resources we need to make it through. It is so powerful to know we are not alone.

[Remembering the Forgotten Flood](#) – **Priscilla Allen & Amy Wright**

In the narrative "Remembering the Forgotten Flood," Allen and Wright (2018) bring the reader into the heartbreaking aftermath experienced by those living in Louisiana during the thousand-year flood. Amy, a doctoral student, shares an account of the emotional energy, anxiety, and depression following the flood. She began a three-month journey to rebuild her house with her partner, only to discover there were no available contractors to repair the rest of the house. While Amy's story tells of a long but successful repair, another individual was not so lucky. Alan—a single man accompanied by his three dogs and painting houses for a living—describes his struggle with homelessness and tough choices for his canine companions:

> I stayed there with my dogs, and I helped them paint their outside kitchen. Out of the blue, after the work was done, they asked me to leave. I've been staying with Lilly ever since. Two of my dogs have been staying with other people, and I don't think I'll get them back. My house is still gutted and I am still homeless. (Allen & Wright, 2018, p. 11)

This manuscript reminded me of my experiences as a BSW student interning at an agency that provided residential housing for individuals who were homeless. Many times, I would encounter clients who had fallen victim to circumstances outside of their control, leaving them in a situation with nowhere to call home.

[Men and Miscarriage: An Insider's Story from the Outside](#) – **Jeremy Brown**

Often when discussing miscarriage, one can find many articles and self-help books for women to aid them in their experience. Brown's (2018) narrative "Men and Miscarriage: An Insider's Story from the Outside" tells this from a different perspective: the grieving father. Brown narrates how he grieved his wife's miscarriage, from the moment he heard the news his wife was pregnant, to watching other women in his family grow life inside of them while he grieved the one he and his wife had lost. There was always a silent stream of words never leaving his lips. When I read, "It was painfully clear that family, friends, and even health care providers didn't know how to respond to a man's pain from miscarriage" (Brown, 2018, p. 27), I realized this man was bravely pouring his heart out to show helping professionals a huge gap in practice. I felt guilty, as a woman, knowing this person was courageously willing to show his pain in hopes others would make a greater effort in supporting men during the miscarriage of their children. This is an excellent example of narrative by walking the reader through the parts of miscarriage where our helping practice turns a blind eye.

[Disclosure in Teaching: Using Personal Mental Health Experiences to Facilitate Teaching and Learning](#) – Rosalyn Denise Campbell

Disclosure in teaching can create the space for students to come forward about their own personal experiences. It allows new social workers to see how their professors show up in practice as humans with struggles too. Campbell's (2018) narrative, "Disclosure in Teaching: Using Personal Mental Health Experiences to Facilitate Teaching and Learning in Clinical Social Work Practice," illustrates this:

> "When I attempted suicide…" I had said it. I did not mean to say it, but there it was. I was standing in the classroom responding to a student who struggled to understand despair that fueled a client's suicidality, and I had said it. I had just disclosed to my students that I had attempted suicide. (p. 44)

While reading this I noticed myself holding my breath, waiting for the next moment. Personally, as a social worker who provides education for middle school and high school students, I felt the moment of dread when I have said something I wished not to say. I appreciated this moment of deep vulnerability in the story. This is what it means to be human in front of your class and own it. This was not a section of course-required reading explaining how self-disclosure can be helpful under the right circumstances, but a personal display of someone bringing their whole self, their life into their classroom.

[What's Your Number? An Example of Micro and Macro Practice in the Era of Police Accountability](#) – Jandel Crutchfield

Crutchfield (2018) reminds us of the "summer of hate, 2016" in the narrative "What's Your Number? An Example of Micro and Macro Practice in the Era of Police Accountability," re-shining the light on the horrific incidents where many unarmed Black Americans were being gunned down by police officers and no one was claiming any responsibility. Crutchfield (2018) begins to tell us how this affected life at home:

> As a Black American citizen and a social worker, I could only think of Ida B. Wells and the despair she must have felt at the stubbornness of society to acknowledge and address lynching of Blacks. I knew I wouldn't launch an international campaign like she did, but the least I could do was speak out. (p. 35)

This had me look back on my reaction to these gruesome killings. I remembered feeling compelled as a White American to find ways I could use my privilege to elevate others' voices. Later on, Crutchfield and a friend Tony decided to take action within their community. During the planning Tony remarks, "Even if only five people show up, it's worth it!" (Crutchfield, 2018, p. 36). I went home that day still thinking about what I can do in my own community. How can I create an impact in my everyday living? This manuscript reminded me it is about making the effort, rather than feeling defeated by multitudes of disaster and never showing up.

[Streams to Ocean: Bridging the Micro/Macro Divide](#) – **Heather G. Howard**

In the narrative "Streams to Ocean: Bridging the Micro/Macro Divide," Howard (2018) recounts:

> This past year has been a new chapter in my life, full of bittersweet transition. I have a wonderful husband, father, and three beautiful sons, the oldest of whom left for college last year. However, it was the first year the two most important women in my life were absent from me. My daughter began her first year of college, and my loving mother's long battle with chronic illness finally ceased when she passed away. (p. 65)

When reading about social work practice, the moments of personal disclosure always make me pause, go back to read again, and get settled into the story. I find it intriguing to hear about the "outside life" of helping professionals. I wanted to know, "What's the secret to showing up for clients while showing up for ourselves?" The illustration and personal connection in the very first sentence is what drew me in. It reminded me of my own experience of bittersweet transition my junior year of college. I was 25 years old, new to Cleveland State University (CSU), and struggling with deep loss unlike anything I had ever known in my young adult life. Remembering the overwhelming gratitude of my acceptance into CSU's Social Work program, while each morning struggling with crippling emptiness of grief, I felt a connection with Howard's words on the page. I could relate to the human experience I was reading, and it made me want to know more.

[Animals as Agents to Inform the Intersection of Micro and Macro Practice](#) – **Maureen MacNamara**

MacNamara (2018) begins her manuscript, "Animals as Agents to Inform the Intersection of Micro and Macro Practice," by telling the reader what it was like growing up as a child with disabilities. Unable to participate in activities, usually because others cast her out, she found companionship in animals, who provided encouragement and support. Before entering social work, MacNamara was a high school vocational instructor and had been given the opportunity to combine the two things she loved most: animals and education. She illustrates her observation of touching interactions between the students and their animal companions and their impression on her. This is one of my favorites:

> As Jim became more frustrated he began to handle the colt roughly, jerking on the halter and shaking his fist. Rather than let them hurt each other, I offered to help. Jim glared down at me from his 6-foot-tall frame and said, "You think you can do this, you're too short." I agreed that I was short, but I bet him I could get the horse to put his head down. The boy laughed and handed me the clippers. With gentleness and soft reassuring words I enticed the horse to lower his head and I quickly trimmed his mane. The boy was astonished but wanted to recover his pride. "Well," he blurted, "that's a girlie way to do it." I smiled and explained that not everything needed to be a battle. I told him that if he wanted this horse to go fast on the track, then he had to get the horse to work with him, not against him. (MacNamara, 2018, p. 90)

This recollection, like several others in the manuscript, let me see how we can model behavior for our clients. The story of Jim goes on to show his progress. Jim becomes the leader for the other students, modeling how to interact with the animals. I appreciated the insight into the "behind the scenes" moments. The narrative expressed times when MacNamara had an opportunity in a particular moment to make a lasting impression, which allowed her students to grow. I enjoyed reading the recollection of the growth MacNamara saw in her students.

Herd to Horse: A Focus from Macro to Micro, Lessons from the Nokota® Horse – Christine Carapico McGowan

In the narrative "Herd to Horse: A Focus from Macro to Micro, Lessons from the Nokota® Horse," McGowan (2018) tells of a heartwarming change for two children brought by their interaction with the horses. She begins by walking you through recollections of Timmy (p. 99–100), a shy and socially awkward child outcast by his peers. Timmy is a natural with animal connection; McGowan (2018) narrates this strength when saying, "Timmy began to laugh and laugh. The horses literally were following him around in play" (p. 100). In this description, I can imagine myself watching the interaction between Timmy and the horses. I wanted to know more. I wanted to see how this would play out down the road for Timmy at school. Reading through the narrative I could see the beginning, middle, and end in this client scenario. It had me walking away thinking, "What ways can I think outside the conventional box when encouraging client strengths?"

Reflections on Social Work, Social History, and Practice Experience: "It Ain't the Same if You're Poor" – Alice Skirtz

In her manuscript "Reflections on Social Work, Social History, and Practice Experience: 'It Ain't the Same if You're Poor,'" Skirtz (2018) recounts several interactions with clients who left a profound impact on her. As a social worker new to the field, I found these exchanges between Skirtz and the client to be beautiful, tender moments. For example, Skirtz (2018) tells about a young mother "who walked nearly two miles to [her] office wearing a cotton dress, a thin sweater covered by a denim jacket, and flip-flop sandals protecting her from the 30-degree snowy weather" (p. 131). This put me right in the office with the two of them. The dialogue ends with, "Tears rolled down her cheeks when she revealed she had left her infant in the care of a neighbor she barely knew to protect him from the bitter weather" (Skirtz, 2018, p. 131), emotionally pulling on my heartstrings.

I spend my time in school discussing theories and intervention application, but what my lectures do not discuss is how the stories our clients tell affect us. Many times, we are trying to help our clients in a broken system which allows us little room to really help the situation. It reminded me of a time during my BSW when I was asked to attend a client's staffing at Child and Family Services. I remember my client hearing the heartbreaking news she would not have a chance for custody of her oldest child as she protectively cradled her swollen belly, encasing her unborn child in her hands, while silent tears rolled down her cheeks. I was unprepared for how I would react to this. Struggling to understand all of the acronyms used and watching my client crumble, I did my best to keep up with the conversation. Never in school had there been a lecture about

this. As I have learned through reading these narratives, we learn from other helping professionals' personal experiences. When the staffing concluded, another social worker in the room pulled me aside afterwards to share her experience. These are the gems of other people's experience I hold near and dear to my heart.

Another example of excellent narrative is when Skirtz (2018) revisits a client's comment about jail, "'You know Miz [Author], at jail they have three meals every day… yes ma'am every day.' In all of his 19 years, he had rarely had three meals every day" (p. 131). This reminded me of moments when in session with a client, I think to myself, "What am I really doing to help this person?" These are just a few examples of why I choose to add this piece to this narrative list. Skirtz did an excellent job of illustrating real life heartfelt moments she encountered in her practice.

Schools Fall Short: Lack of Therapeutic Continuum of Care in Public Schools – Katherine De Vito

Schools have implemented counseling and behavioral skill programs for students. In the narrative "Schools Fall Short: Lack of Therapeutic Continuum of Care in Public Schools," De Vito (2018) tells a story of one student, Kyle, who needed great help. Kyle's plight was a lack of connection from either of his parents. He lived with his guardians, who were his biological grandparents. Struggling with wanting a strong adult attachment and his peers taunting him in school, Kyle ended up in a situation which led him to in-school counseling services with the school social worker, Katherine. Describing the end of their first session, in which Kyle explained the reason behind a fight with another student, De Vito (2018) reflects, "Those words sent chills down my spine as Kyle promptly got up, turned around, and left my office" (p. 5), she continues to follow the journey of Kyle and his progress through counseling. Each time, she recounts fine details from the session:

> Kyle would come into my office, sit down in the chair with his head hanging down between his legs, in complete silence. I felt like I was doing nothing, but that is how the attachment bond began to grow. (De Vito, 2018, p. 8)

Thoughts like these have run through my head. I felt myself exhale a breath I did not know I was holding. Her words took me back to moments with clients when I have watched them walk out of the room thinking to myself, "How have I even helped?" It took me back to the beginning of my internship, when I went over the results of an HIV test with a client. As the session drew to a close, I was scraping my mind for something I had missed, feeling as though they might leave no better than how they walked in. This narrative reminded me that sometimes moments with a client are just that: moments of connection. We are not superheroes; we are humans helping the world through connections and practical coping skills. This earnest account walks the reader through the journey of a social worker with her client and how sometimes there can be joyful and distressing unexpected turns along the way.

Reflections on the Impact of Privilege, Marginalization, and Story on My Social Work Practice, Research, and Pedagogy – **Mary Elizabeth Tinucci**

In Tinucci's (2018) narrative "Reflections on the Impact of Privilege, Marginalization, and Story on My Social Work Practice, Research, and Pedagogy," she intertwines self-discovery of being a student, experiences of being new to the field, and the beginnings of being an educator. This manuscript tells the transition from one role to another with a deep vulnerability I admire and wish to one day have. Tinucci (2018) begins by showing the reader her experiences growing up: "I remember finding photos and asking my dad, 'Who is this?' He would respond quietly, 'That's your Grandpa,' or 'That's your mom's sister, but don't ask mom about them'" (p.77). Then she later writes, "It was clear from his responses that I was not to know about these ghosts" (p. 77). When reading interactions like these, I am pulled into the author's personal story. The social worker in me wants to hear more, wants to get deeper into the person's experiences.

Next Tinucci (2018) reflects on her first job as a school social worker: "The first day on the job in the school system, I was terrified. What are the rules here?" (p. 82). This brings up for me a million questions I want to ask all of my professors. For example, there are moments in class when I wonder how my professors felt on their first day of their first job as a social worker. I want to know how others balance this work when it touches close to their personal lives. The thing I enjoyed most about this manuscript was Tinucci's courage to tell the story of her inner thoughts while in practice. I reflected on my personal development when reading how Tinucci brought her triumphs to guide her through her new teaching career. In her own words, "As I wrote this personal narrative, it became evident how and why stories matter and why story is an essential element of my pedagogy" (Tinucci, 2018, p. 88). Reading other social workers' experiences helps me sort through my own.

Second Chances – **Dirk H. de Jong**

Any room can be turned into a classroom; it just takes a passionate teacher and willing students. This is the message Dirk H. de Jong (2018) presents in his manuscript, "Second Chances," about teaching in a prison. Describing the setting, de Jong (2018) reflects:

> The room in which I will teach is hot. There is no air conditioning. Two big fans, spinning at top speed, whir a noisy welcome. Unlike my well-equipped college classroom, there is no computer console or pull-down screen to show my tidy PowerPoint slides. The available whiteboard appears to have seen better days. The inmates file in. Mostly, they are men of color. (p. 90)

Throughout this narrative, there are moments like these where the author reflects back on the feelings in the room. Several times, he describes the intimate interactions between classmates, and this captures the emotional energy emitted during the class. Short but sweet, I think "Second Chances" is an excellent example of narrative of personal social work practice.

[Ink vs. Bytes: The Delicate Balance I Tried to Maintain in a Library](#) – **Fatima Taha**

Being a librarian, what all does that entail? Taha (2018) explains there are many roles encompassed in the title *librarian* in her narrative "Ink vs. Bytes: The Delicate Balance I Tried to Maintain in a Library." As a social worker, I can relate. Taha further explains that her position at the library is to connect the worlds of paper and technological resources. Many times there are patrons walking into the library, feeling overwhelmed about a task they need help achieving. Taha explains she has an almost sixth sense and is able to tune into their unspoken needs and emotions. I reflected on my own interactions with clients at work and realized I, too, naturally tune into the words unspoken. Taha (2018) describes an interaction with a patron:

> Early on Monday morning as snow fell quietly out of the large glass windows lining the non-fiction area of the library in which I worked, a gentleman walked confidently up the stairs and onto the second floor. He was immaculately dressed in a suit and fit the stereotypical image of a powerful businessman. Of course, to me, his attire did not matter: I mention it here only to make a point. As he turned toward our bank of computers, he faltered ever so slightly, his hand reaching up to touch his temple. Sensing his momentary discomfort, I calmly but quickly walked over to see if I could assist this new patron… (p. 37)

I loved the imagery used here. I could imagine myself standing in my favorite library, watching the snowfall outside. I began to reflect on times when speaking with someone, even family or friends, and watching the discomfort told through their body language. This passage reminded me how we are more in tune with others than we realize when we also "listen" to them with our eyes. I hope you choose to continue reading the rest of the manuscript, for it is filled with many more eloquently told, tender moments between Taha and the library patrons.

[The Shared Experience](#) – **Kathy Zappitello**

In the manuscript "The Shared Experience," Zappitello (2018) introduces the reader to the uplifting compilation of a small library, the staff, and its motivated director trying to make a difference in their community. As a social worker, I know there are innumerable resources each community has to offer, and the public library is one of my favorites. Zappitello recalls trying to identify both individual and community needs while creating ways to meet those with the resources a library on a limited budget has. Not only was money tight for the library, but also for the local food pantry. Resourcefully, the library staff developed a policy to collect non-perishable foods in exchange for personal over-due library fines. This creative solution was an asset for the community and a saving grace for a mother in need on a Friday night. My favorite narrative moment of this situation is Zappitello's (2018) response to her co-worker, "After the family was out the door, my co-worker turned to me and said, 'I'm so glad you were still here to make that decision.' And I replied, 'What decision? Doing the right thing is always the solution'" (p. 54). It reminded me of the moments when we must make a decision, and, sometimes, there is no one around to consult. What does one do? The answers may not always be as clear as this situation, but I need to hear of the uplifting stories for my own motivation to stay ignited.

In another situation, Zappitello tells of a more complex dilemma. During a free community activity for children to engage in a latest-and-greatest crafting trend, a co-worker complained of the adults using the limited materials for themselves. I too agreed with her co-worker's point of view. This was until I read Zappitello's (2018) inner dialogue about the situation:

> It was in that exact moment that I knew that everything we were doing [placing importance on social mores rather than empathy] was wrong. My stomach dropped and the room morphed from light and festive to dark and gloomy. It was like something out of a movie. My staff member continued to complain and blather on about "those people" who had ruined her event, but to me, she became almost a blurry blob moving in slow-mo while my mind raced to formulate a plan. (p. 56)

Reading her physical and emotional response brought me right into the moment. It became clear where my views of situations fall short. The humble unveiling of the author's thoughts proved to be a great learning tool for me.

The Business of Libraries – Abby O'Neill

Raised in a family of social workers with a career as a librarian, O'Neill (2018) writes about how she sees these two worlds working together in the narrative, "The Business of Libraries." As a social worker, I know two of the best community resources are churches and libraries, so naturally this correlation made complete sense. Unfortunately, O'Neill's fellow librarians did not always recognize the connection of their library being a valuable resource. One of my favorite excerpts is when O'Neill (2018) describes a specific interaction where she offered a new perspective to help problem solve:

> The instructor and the class seemed to laugh and dismiss my suggestions, "We're not social workers here, and if you think we should be, you're in the wrong business." I'm used to that sort of negative response; yet, I know that even after the origin of the planted seed is long forgotten, the naysaying will fade and some or all of the idea will sprout. (p. 58)

The reality is that at some point in every person's life our ideas will be dismissed. It was helpful to read O'Neill's professional perspective on interacting with others when that happens.

Reflections on the Election of Donald Trump: Uninspired and Inspired Responses from a Social Work Faculty – Jeffrey Dale Thompson

Right from the beginning, Jeffrey Dale Thompson (2018) starts with excellent narration of his recount of the presidential election in 2016 and the events leading up to it:

> A small Methodist Church in a "Red state" hosted the voting in my precinct. An official led me to my machine, explained the controls, and backed away only slightly. He remained uncomfortably close. Was he attempting to ensure I voted the party line? (p. 20)

This is a great way to set the scene, even without giving too much detail. I felt as if I was

standing at the voting machine. I could feel the apprehensive feeling, as if I too were being watched. Giving just enough details to invite the reader into the moment was a fantastic way to draw me in. This is a theme of Thompson's writing as he continues to recount what happened that gloomy November.

Disaster after Disaster: Unexpected Thousand-Year Floods and Presidential Elections – Priscilla D. Allen and Jennifer L. Scott

Between the natural disasters, floods and hurricanes, and the great political divide post the 2016 presidential election, Louisiana took a hard hit. Priscilla Allen and Jennifer Scott (2018) highlight the fact that many times these events are plastered over the news for a week or two, only to be forgotten about while the individuals affected are left to pick up the pieces. One of my favorite lines is the opening of dialogue from Dr. Richelle Allen, a psychotherapist, "On the morning of November 8th, it was a challenge to be a therapist and listen for meaning while my own internal echo shouted: 'Not my president!'" (Allen & Scott, 2018, p. 55). This took me back to that morning when I heard the results of the election, remembering feeling both numb and sick with dread and despair, dragging myself to work. I too mentally disowned the man now elected to run the country. I found solace in reading the echo of my own thoughts regarding the last election and seeing how each practitioner worked through this.

Our Solidarity was the Solution—Looking back on 2017: Rising and Resisting for Two Decades in NYC – Benjamin Heim Shepard

Shepard's (2018) manuscript is an action-packed, firsthand account of his experience as a social activist. He is getting out there to be heard. I almost do not want to tell too much for fear I will spoil the surprise, but I gleefully enjoyed reading his account of attending Donald Trump's inauguration. Shepard (2018) describes the moments leading up to his play-by-play narration of the event:

> Tickets were easy to come by. Few wanted to actually attend. By 6:45 am we'd made our way past security. We'd have to stand there for five hours before the magic moment when we'd seek to disrupt the inauguration, without getting found out first. I kept blowing the cover. (p. 79)

I felt like I was in the front row of this encounter. I feel as though I have great insight into Shepard's thoughts even before he begins the dialogue. I chose this manuscript both for the verbatim rendition of the moments at the event and the fact that I have not read much about activism.

Between Then and Now: My Coming, Being, and Staying in Urban/Rural Canada – Bharati Sethi

Sethi (2017) describes the experiences and struggles of immigrating to Canada and fighting for her citizenship for years. From day one to present day, Sethi walks the reader through how being a visible minority impacts interactions and everyday activities. I think the best example is to start

with the beginning of Sethi's (2017) manuscript:

> I hugged my oversized "made in Nepal" coat tighter as I made my way to a local restaurant in a mid-sized urban-rural region of Southwest Ontario. My feet were so cold that I could barely feel them through the "made in Nepal" shoes, seeped in icy wet slush. My body still remembers the warmth of my first winter jacket and winter shoes bought from a local thrift store. I slept in them for the first night of purchase, sweating in my heated bachelor apartment. As I made my way to the restaurant, the shopkeeper looked at my young thin brown body with distrust. I clung tightly to dollar bills; my shoes torn and dirty and my oversized jacket covering my petite frame. Oh! Those harsh and lonely seven years as a foreign worker. My precarious immigration status marginalized me repeatedly. I was trapped. (p. 42)

This manuscript had a profound impact on me as I came to the realization, once again, how little I know. It made my heart sink to read again someone sharing their experience, doing the emotional labor for other white, natural-born citizens to get a small glimpse of understanding. I am both awed and honored by the willingness Sethi had to reach into her past, retelling traumatic experiences for others to read. Please, take the time to read this manuscript. It certainly has opened my mind to the ignored pressures and unrealistic obstacles that immigrants face.

Supervisor and Intern Reflections on a Year of Research: Why It Worked – Erica Goldblatt Hyatt and Brandon D. Good

Brandon D. Good, a student feeling claustrophobic at a small college in the small town he grew up in, was new to Erica Goldblatt Hyatt's class. This new student also came with a warning from other teachers as a challenging student who would continue asking professors questions for a satisfactory rationale. Dismissing her colleagues, Hyatt chose to see what was behind these fervent questions and discovered a student hungry for more. Good came to her office expressing a want for more than what the college's psychology program had to offer. Hyatt offered him the opportunity to work as an intern on a research project. During the preliminary meetings, Good and Hyatt verbally discussed expectations and apprehensions. Here is one example of narrative from Good and Hyatt's (2017) exchange:

> "Will we be meeting a lot to talk about my progress and what I'm finding?" he asked. His eyebrows furrowed into a familiar scrunch. The subtext of this expression, to me, read as follows: I might need extra help. Usually so confident in his academic abilities, Brandon appeared nervous. I wanted to challenge him but not push him too far. (p. 68)

This manuscript reminded me of interactions I have had, in both my personal and professional life, with people who both intimidated and challenged me. It reminded me how keeping an open mind allowed to me hear what others were really saying. Each time I have put aside my prejudgments, fears, and insecurities, I have created opportunities for others to show me who they really are. Many times, I look back over my life and see times I would have robbed myself of an experience I hold near to my heart. This requires me to be willing to let go of my expectations and allow life to unfold. This is often the case when I have been wary and guarded

of someone, and by letting them in I have begun to see another side of them I would have otherwise missed.

As a student I related with Good's frustration, which we all experience during academic growth. For me, as a closet perfectionist, learning new things is uncomfortable. I want to do everything right the first time. Through my academic career, I have learned not knowing is more admirable than the pretentious facade I can hide behind of "having it all together." I won't always have the answers to a situation or have the perfect thing to say, but if I can show my clients I am willing to admit when I am wrong and learn from those mistakes, I can model the behavior others have shown me. What a great reminder that adequate supervision and staying the course can bring about amazing results.

Death of a Student: Dealing with Competing Interests – Jodi Constantine Brown

Sometimes in life, we have one vision for the future, and life takes us on a different route. This was the case for Jodi Constantine Brown, who started her career as a social worker conducting program evaluations and found herself in an academic administrative role. While in her administrative role, Brown met Amanda, a student preparing a project for her Capstone class. Brown (2017) reminisces about their first meeting:

> My first glimpse of her occurred as she walked through my office door in September 2013. A riotous mass of untamed brown curls floated above her petite frame, her brown eyes sparkled, and she had a quick smile. She was so tiny she seemed to float when she walked, and she looked so young that it was difficult at first to imagine her as the mother of two young children. (p. 39)

I am drawn to the writing, which requires me to use my imagination. After spending many hours as a graduate student reading dry textbooks, my interest is piqued when the author notes enough details that I feel as if I am there.

Brown (2017) tells of the developing student-teacher relationship as they met to discuss Amanda's research. As they continued to meet, Brown began to notice the anxiety in Amanda's comments and suspected some of this was due to changing cohorts. Leaving the safety net of her peers in the program, Amanda now would continue her MSW journey with a new unknown set of classmates, and this time online. Amanda was also a person who was working through life challenges outside of school. The growing workload and family commitments began to weigh on her. Brown (2017) recalls moments when Amanda confided in her:

> In between talking about her schoolwork and her research project, Amanda would tell me about her young children and talk about the difficulty of balancing school and family. Her entire face lit up when she talked about her children, and it was clear that the love she had for them was that of a doting mom, but she was pulled in many different directions. (p. 40)

As I mentioned before, in life, we never know what is going to happen next. Brown then tells of the moment she learned of Amanda's death by suicide:

I had an empty pit in my stomach, and the disbelief I felt as I sat in her office listening to Matt froze me. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't think clearly, and I found myself in a momentary place of denial, wishing it would all go away while at the same time hoping that someone had their information wrong and Amanda would breeze through the door in the next few hours. (p. 42)

As I read her words, I was transported back to that dark day in December of 2015 when I learned of a close friend's suicide. As I read Brown's (2017) words, I could relate to the bodily sensations she experienced in those first moments of knowing. I remembered how some days I would wistfully steal a look at my phone to see if she had called for our daily check-in, even though I knew in the bottom of my heart she was gone. I remember playing the unrelenting, treacherous game of what-if: what-if I had called her that evening, what-if I had told her how important she was that day, what-if I had better recognized the signs, what-if...then things would have been different.

As we must with challenging times in life, Brown (2017) tells how she trudged on through her grief. There were times when she encountered conflicting feelings of professional responsibility and personal grief. Following my friend's death, my outlook on life changed. My new perspective impacted my everyday interactions. My grief challenged me to examine how I interacted with people, and how I communicated in my interpersonal relationships began to change. For example: I began to listen to friends more while I talked less, I told people I appreciated them even if I thought they already knew, I started checking in with people outside my immediate social network when I noticed changes, and I became more compassionate for the little things weighing down my friends. Just as Brown explains, after some time I began to see how this event could positively influence change in my work. To summarize my reflection of Brown's powerful and vulnerable narrative, I leave you with something I once heard: We may grieve alone, but we can heal together.

That Which Cannot be Remedied Must be Endured – Michael Babcock

Michael Babcock (2017) writes about his travels to Juárez, Mexico, where he worked as a medical social worker in an outreach clinic. The clinic was housed in a fire station, where each year hundreds of families who did not have access to affordable, specialty healthcare came in search of help for their children. Babcock writes about his experience in the role of medical social worker. Many times, this meant he was assigned the job of informing the families their child could not be treated. Here is captured one heartbreaking moment when Babcock (2017) had to deliver the news:

The parents looked at me with questioning, anxious eyes, hoping the pronouncement meant good news. Surely these doctors could do something for their daughter. Surely the trip had not been made in vain. Surely there was a cure for the mysterious monster that ravaged her spastic body. Sadly, certainly, there was not. (p. 16)

This manuscript piqued my interest for a couple of reasons. First, it continues to amaze me how many avenues one can explore as a social worker. This profession continues to show me how

limitless the possibilities really are. Second, I know I want to have only good news for my clients. As a social worker, I want to find the solution no one has found for my clients, but the reality is sometimes in life there is just bad news. I was reminded how in these moments sometimes our job is to hold space for someone and ride out the emotions with them. This short and fantastic manuscript is a wonderful example of narrative writing.

[Coming of Age as an LGBTQ Social Work Educator: Reflections on a Personal and Professional Journey](#) – Trevor G. Gates

This manuscript reminds me of the saying "Wherever you go, there you are." Trevor G. Gates (2017) writes a narrative examining how his personal and professional identities intersect in the classroom. Inviting the reader into a reflection, he recalls the experiences of growing up in a conservative family. Struggling with negative religious opinions on homosexuality, daily taunts and bullying from peers, and coming to terms with his own sexual identity in a homophobic community, Gates dreamed of escaping this suffocating environment for a more inclusive one. Gates (2017) reveals his attraction to the social work profession: "In some ways, responding to homophobia was what interested me in social work education and advocacy. It was both a personal and professional journey" (p. 8). We all have our life experiences that lead us to a helping profession, and many times this can be a motivating force to keep the passion for our work alive when we feel like we have no energy left to give. My entry to social work, and my ever burning passionate flame, is my recovery. Getting sober changed everything in my life, and I found purpose and fulfillment in social work that resonated with my new way of life. This is the internal motivator that keeps me going, feeding the fire of passion in my work. This has been, for me, a personal and professional journey. I also appreciated the rest of Gate's manuscript, as it is full of magnificent, rich narrative from his experiences teaching in higher education.

[Cold: A Meditation on Loss](#) – Sarah Morton

Sarah Morton's (2015) reflection is a deep and chilling account of a client she worked with. Her client, Rosie, was trapped in a life of substance abuse and intimate partner violence. She worked hard to overcome the struggle of leaving the life she knew, only to find herself struggling in a new unknown way of life that seemed foreign to her. Rosie, pregnant with her second child, wanted nothing more than to keep this baby and get her son back. Describing a house visit, Morton (2015) writes with such rich description, I felt as if I was in the room with her:

> You know, Rosie says, I am going to keep this one whatever they say. I don't care what you call it, what the hell happened. See, she says, her arm wrapped over her belly, I can feel him quickening. Rosie holds her mug of tea in her other hand. The tea is cold now, little pools of dark scum on the top, clinging to the edges of the cup. But god, she says, that house is cold, so fucking cold, she tells me. (p. 7)

This unsettling manuscript is deeply captivating. After reading this, I was left speechless.

Eros, Thanatos, and Ares: Counseling Soldiers about Love and Death in a Combat or Hostile Fire Environment – Cathleen A. Lewandowski

Cathleen Lewandowski (2014) tells of an experience I will never know. She recounts being deployed to serve as the Social Work Officer at a camp's combat stress unit. Most times only seeing a soldier once, it was imperative that Lewandowski always remembered the main goal of the session: to help emotionally support the soldiers while in deployment, depending on their needs presented in that very moment. Many times, Lewandowski (2014) expressed the thoughts we have with clients, which are never said aloud, such as:

> When presented with these situations, I wanted to say, "I am here in Iraq, same as you, and have no clue about what your wife/girlfriend is feeling or thinking about your relationship." But I put that aside, and decided that my main objective, in keeping with preserving the fighting force, was to provide whatever assurance I could that things would work out, that he should listen and be supportive as much as he was able from half-way across the world. (p. 39)

Another example of this introspective self-dialogue is:

> I suggested that her confession was an indication she still wanted to be with him. I questioned her timing, but kept these thoughts to myself. I offered that he could tell her that he still wanted to be with her; that they could work it out. (p. 39)

There are many more examples of personal narrative of situations with the soldier, which I deeply appreciated. Being able to "peer" into another social worker's inner dialogue was an indispensable teaching moment which was both helpful and intriguing. One creative and captivating way Lewandowski (2014) decided to relay client interactions without breaking any confidentiality was to group common session topics in relatable, popular songs. I thought this was a fantastic way to exemplify the use of popular music and culture as a coping strategy used by both the soldiers and Lewandowski herself. Education through something we all love, music! The rest of Lewandowski's manuscript evokes raw emotion from the reader through many personal stories of her experience on deployment.

Conclusion

I have so boldly asked for you, the authors, to be vulnerable with us. Write to *Reflections* about the times when your innermost self was screaming to be heard. Write about where you found the crossroads between personal and professional. I have asked you to remove the professional mask so that others can see the personal you. This is why here I have done the same.

As I sit at my desk, gazing out over the busy street, feeling the slight chill of winter from the window close by, I reflect on my journey here at *Reflections*. I am amazed. I have come so far in my professional growth, and I realize I have accomplished this by sitting through the profuse and bitter feelings of discomfort when learning something new. A discomfort so strong it makes me ache and fidget; the frustration at not being good at something despite knowing I have never

done it before. I have learned patience with others, but patience with myself is a virtue I struggle to master.

On my first day at *Reflections* I was presented with the task of understanding the difference between narrative and expository writing. I felt the sinking feeling of panic set in as I thought, "Writing is not my strong suit, as my English courses were the subjects I have most dreaded in my academic career." As a student, I have struggled with disruptive, doubtful inner dialogue swirling around in my mind through each and every paper. Yet, on the outside, I pasted on a smile and set to the task. It seemed the more I read about the difference between narrative and expository text, the less I understood. I thought, "You are overthinking this—just set to the task you love most, reading."

As I read, it became clear the manuscripts I enjoyed the most were filled with vivid imagery, deep reflection, personal emotion, and rich dialogue (either with the self or between author and client). I found comfort and comradery in my connection with the authors as they unveiled their innermost thoughts, and I began to see that I am not so unique in my professional struggles. Questions like "How will I work through my 'first day at a new job' nerves?" and "What if I am left speechless when a client presents a situation I do not know how to handle?" or "Am I the only person who feels so many moments of self-doubt and unreadiness?" and "How do others handle life on life's terms when at work?" swirled in my head. I continued to read, and these myriad insecurities were quelled. I began to see how I am not alone as a helping professional, always questioning the quality of my work. We are all just ordinary people trying to help one another while muddling our own way through life.

I then began the second and personally most daunting task: the writing. I have a friend who says, "There is unexplainable magic that happens when you set pen to paper," and so I did just that. I took a deep breath and began to write, unfiltered, about what I had read. I expressed—possibly only a perceived notion—that I am not often asked to write my opinions in school. I am usually required to write research papers or practice case notes.

So I prompted myself to express my apprehension without explicitly saying "I fear what I have to say is wrong." I wanted to see if I could write my way through the fear and frustration. This task required me to be vulnerable with the reader. I was terrified and yet with the support of others, and some personal introspection, I have tried to accomplish this. Now, I have come to realize that maybe my greatest strengths are the ones I have been most afraid to develop, and sometimes all I need is a nudge from others to help me walk through the fear. Here is my truth; this is who I am behind my own professional mask. I hope one of these manuscripts resonates with you and inspires you to share as well.

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Doing the Right Thing: A Narrative Interview with Irving Miller

Joshua Miller

Abstract: Irving Miller was a social worker and subsequently a professor at the Columbia School for Social Work from the 1940s through the 1980s. He was an expert on organizational behavior and part of a cohort of group workers at Columbia University who were influential in the development of this modality. The interview with him is a reflection on a career in social work during an important phase of its development and offers important historical context as well as sharing a story about a life and career.

Keywords: group work, case work, disability, blindness, Judaism

Introduction

My father, Irving Miller (1918–2001), was a professor at Columbia University School of Social Work for most of his career. Many times when presenting at conferences, I have been stopped by former students or colleagues and told how he was viewed: "brilliant, wise, funny, sage." He was raised in poverty by his mother, who had been widowed at an early age and who suffered from Retinitis Pigmentosa (a severe, progressive hereditary eye disease), which both he and his sister inherited. (Had he lived in the present, there would have been many more technological supports for the visually impaired to support his career as well as more developed protections through the ADA.) Despite his visual handicap, he rose in the profession and played a role, along with other colleagues at Columbia, in the evolution of group work as a major modality of practice. According to his colleagues, his powerful and enduring influence was as an expert in organizational behavior, promoting high ethical professional standards and behavior and always asserting the primacy of clients in social work practice. Wherever he was holding court, at home and at work, his insights were always laced with humor, joke-telling, and an endearing and engaging style.

The following are edited excerpts of two interviews that I conducted with him in the early 1990s.

I interviewed Irving and edited the transcripts along with Paul Abels (who was an early editor and contributor to *Reflections*), and after his death, edited out my part of the discussion so that his answers flowed in a more engaging narrative. I have added contextual information in brackets when needed. Along with illustrating some of Miller's insights about social work education and practice, they describe his impoverished childhood, growing up in Brooklyn in the 1920s and '30s, working with gangs at a Settlement House, the impact of his visual disability on his career, the McCarthy era and social work, and the emergence of Jewish social workers in the profession.

Interview

[My father] died in 1924 when I was six. Under [New York Governor] Alfred E. Smith, we had a ADC [Aid to Dependent Children] program. My mother got a child grant, something like thirty

dollars a month for each child. They used to send investigators to see if they could get my mother to work. So my mother had a fixed income and then she had three of her siblings help her with flat sums of $25. We were poor, but she always had good food on the table—we were well fed. I wore hand-me-downs; so did my brother and sister, from the children of similar-aged affluent cousins.

We were living mostly in Brownsville [Brooklyn]. We had electricity and a coal stove and later steam heat. It was the slums, but it was a homogenous neighborhood [meaning, all Jewish]. And it was a stable neighborhood. That was the interesting thing about Brownsville where I lived. Everybody was poor. The neighborhood was loaded with Jewish widows whose men had died in the flu epidemic post-World War I. There were a lot of widows. I lived in a block where everyone knew each other. The neighbors looked after us. If you didn't behave, and your mother had to work or something, they turned you in, would tell your mother on you. So it was very tightly knit. We had a lot of friends—there was a closeness, a sense of people. People knew each other. You would leave your kids with a neighbor. My mother loved to play poker—penny poker. Like, she went to a neighbor's house and she took me along. I slept and then she would carry me upstairs [to our apartment]. My mother was well off in a sense and she could feed us and pay the rent, but we couldn't have any luxuries. I never went to camp in my life as a kid. My mother was too proud to send me to a social agency camp. We would play in the streets, like marbles or with fire hydrants and did various things like stealing potatoes. We used to climb up a hill and look through the opposite streets to see if we could catch a lady undressing. When I was twelve, I started to work.

[These experiences helped me with my career.] Those who know me say that I have physical courage; I am not afraid of much. I take my chances. I knew all kinds of things that were going on. I had a different perspective on life and when I went to social work school I met a lot of people, mostly very lovely young women, who had no adversity in their lives.

I went to work while I was in high school. I was a delivery boy delivering packages from the age twelve to age eighteen. I was seventeen and a half when I graduated from high school and then I started to work seriously [in the fur market]. My uncle was in the shipping department of a store. It was discouraging work, pushing barrels. I wanted to get out of it. I did have trade union experience. But I also wanted to go to college. I went to school at night because I aspired to have a degree, but nobody could afford to send me to college. I had to bring money into the house. I worked for eight or nine or ten years to get a college degree, going at nights [to City College]. As I was within sight of a degree, I was speaking to one of the psychology teachers, Gardner Murphy, and he said, "You know, it is hard to make a living in psychology—when you graduate, I think you could get a fellowship at the University of Georgia for a master's and doctorate degree." But I couldn't make a living at being a psychologist. He said, "You know, you would be a good social worker, working with people." I had just gotten married, I had a young wife, and I could not go to Georgia and live on $800 a year. I wanted to be a lawyer, but that would have been a full-time thing and I could not afford it. I think that careers are chance factors. They are not determined. You know that wonderful song, "When I am not near the girl I love, I love the girl I'm near?"

A fellow student, Herbie Rosen, advised me: "If you want to go to social work school, they won't take you if you don't have experience—you have to be in the field."

"So how do you get field experience?" I wondered. I didn't know anybody.

"Well you go down, and you go to a social work agency," said Herbie.

So, I heard of Greenwich House, and I went [there] and asked for a job. A woman named Mary Simkovitch said that they didn't have any work for me. She suggested to me that I try Madison House. So I walked from Greenwich House, on Barrow St. in Greenwich Village, all the way to Madison Street on the lower east side. It was mostly an Italian area at this time—Market and Madison Streets. So I came in and I said, "I would like to apply for a job here; I am interested in working."

I think it was about 1941 or '42. There was a shortage of men [due to World War II] and I was 4F [due to my visual handicap]. I met a man by the name of Norman Lurie who later became the head of the National Association of Social Workers and the head of welfare for the State of Pennsylvania. He was working then as the director—the "head worker"—of Madison House. They had just lost a [worker,] and he asked me about my experience. He became very intrigued because I had trade union experience when I worked in the fur market. When working in the fur market I had actually set up a credit union. I was an activist in the union and he knew some of the people that were the head of the union. It was not a very left-wing union. He was a very interesting guy—in the best sense of the word, a *tummler*. He was all over the place. That's a Yiddish word, *tummler*—a maker of things happening—and he said, "I'm going to take a chance and give you a job." So I got a job at $1,320 a year, very low salary, as the Director of Social Activities.

I used to work in the game room. There were very few men there at that time. Madison House employed me four nights a week. I learned a lot of things and attitudes and how to handle discipline problems with kids. I was very patient and accepting and naturally non-judgmental with some of these tough kids and I worked with a gang. I was patient and I was [also] tough. They did terrible things. They ripped toilet bowls out of their moorings—and this was a very nice place. They were tough and angry. They refused to leave the agency; they were defiant, all these young people, except with me and the psychiatrist. At first they called me "Douchebag" and all that kind of stuff. They called me all kinds of names and they tested me, but when they got to know me and like me, they [greeted me with] "Hey, Teach." I got to know these kids and I went with them to the pool halls. I was good at it then.

I took them out on trips. I wanted to venture out with these kids. They lived two and three blocks east and west—Madison Street, Water Street, Grand Street—those were streets east and west, and the fourth or fifth street up [North] was Delancy Street and then Houston goes after that. It occurred to me that they had never gone further than Delancy Street—it was dangerous for them because of other gangs. I said to them, "Let's take a trip, you like to play pool and I could take you to a pool hall." There was a pool hall on 14th Street above the Irving Place Theater. They tested me and said to me, "Would you bring your wife?" They were always jiving, you know,

kidding around, because I was married. (And they were 15-16 , Butch Connelly, Frank O'Neill, Tony Magaletta, Gabriel Pascucci [names changed to protect confidentiality] all these people—these kids, they ended up badly.) So [my wife, Helen,] came along and I took them up to 14th and I noticed that they were terribly ill at ease—in the bowling alley and billiard place—very ill at ease, tense as could be because they were about twelve blocks north of their territory. I realized that these were boys; these were young men—14, 15, and 16—who had more sexual experience than I, and they drank, and they did all these terrible things, but they suddenly became very frightened. And they said: "Hey Irv, let's get out of here, let's get out of here. I don't like it here. Let's go down back to Madison Street and we can have 'sheep's cheeks,' this is not for us. I don't like it up here." And we went back and then we did have something and went home. I lived on the Lower East Side then. But that was a very interesting experience for me—that these kids, with all their bravado—they were limited to two or three square blocks. They were terrified!

I told that to Bob Vinter [Group work professor at Columbia University]. He said, "I had the same experience." He told of an experience where he had done some excellent work trying to get kids summer jobs. Now this was at 103rd Street and Park Avenue—his agency. He said, "I would get them jobs, I have connections—good WASP [White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant]—you know with the East Side—rich people who sit on boards." And he got summer jobs for them and they never showed up to work. They would not take the jobs anywhere below 96th Street—seven blocks. I had the same problem. They [were] just scared shitless to go further.

I formed a club, "The Hustlers," and I had a very interesting classic experience. They wouldn't trust each other, so I was their treasurer. No professionally trained worker [would] think of confusing his role, to be their treasurer. But I was their treasurer, because they did not trust each other. So I held their money for them.

I was scared half of the time that I worked with them. My wife, Helen, observed it once. They refused to leave the settlement house at closing time and the women [who worked there] were scared. So I go out with this [gang member] Butch Connelly and he carries on and he marches around with a chair over his head. So I was leaning against the building, not seeing too well then, and I finally said, "hup, two, three" and I marched him back in and gave him a whole [military] routine. He marched all around Madison Street, holding a chair over his head, up and back with the goddamn chair, and finally he got exhausted and I marched him into the door and he laughed at me [and left]. [My] visual acuity was right there, my field [of vision] was not. The principle symptom that I had to cope with was night blindness; that is why I was scared on the streets. I had relatively good vision—I was not legally blind then. [But I was worried about walking at night due to my] retinitis pigmentosa.

They named themselves The Hustlers, so my supervisor, who was then my age—she was a young social worker, just graduated, and she said, "How wonderful, Irving, that their names are Hustlers."

So I said, "Helen, you don't understand that they are putting me on."

[She replied,] "What do you mean, they are putting you on?"

"*Hustlers* doesn't mean busy bees," I said. But they were very nice people and I really did like them and I have very kind feelings towards them.

There were very few Jews around [in social work]. When I was a student, there were a half a dozen Jewish kids. That was the New York crowd, and the whole New York School of Social Work [now Columbia] was the Protestant establishment—CSS, Congressional Women, Gordon Hamilton, Verna Lowery, and Clara Kaiser. These were these elegant women. It was the WASP establishment and there was one Jewish teacher, Phillip Kline, who was married to a very affluent WASP. One or two Jewish teachers and they were very, very acceptable Jews. They were not Jewish types. There were a few Jew boys, but we stood out. I was one of four or five lucky people who got into that School in 1941. Although I am clearly and unmistakably Jewish, I never was fazed by my superiors. They never would make me defensive.

I was not afraid of them and I was very direct with them. I got along well in school. I took the group work program and I really didn't find any of it very stimulating. I didn't have a high opinion of what they taught in group work—and I don't feel like mentioning names, but I was very underwhelmed by the level of teaching. It was sort of morally arrogant. They thought very highly of themselves. They thought that they had the answers all the time. I heard the most lavish nonsense from the teachers; I just didn't believe that shit. However, [in fairness to] Phillip Kline, he really believed that social workers are self-liquidating professionals—if you straighten people out, then they won't be in poverty. They taught things that I didn't believe were so, that if you straighten people out all the rest will follow. So it was a reductionist thing in a way. There were a few very good teachers and I used to admire the way they analyzed the cases, but in group work it was weak. It was all conceptual stuff. They didn't deal with the matter of skill. What will you do? Grace Coyle [Case Western University]—she was an intellectual, so she was good. There were straight Freudians, who taught personality, growth, and development. They had the real things, psychiatrists. They had a whole theory, a whole set of ideas.

Gordon Hamilton was the casework teacher. There was a little subtle rivalry between the psychiatrists and the caseworkers. [The psychiatrists taught the human behavior type of material, case work teachers taught practice.] I learned about welfare—I was a welfare buff. I took all the courses they gave on public welfare.

My first placement was in casework on the lower east side, a few blocks away from Madison House. They were beginning to try to develop placements in the Department of Welfare. It was a very interesting experience and I learned an awful lot from the workers there. I went to visit homes to check up on my clients. I wrote social diagnoses for these people. I had to write them all the time, because the object was to give the social diagnosis. I had a wonderful client that I used to like to see. She was a lovely woman, married to a Jewish gangster who was a Jewish nogoodnik, a hustler who used to forge ration stamps. He was in prison. She schlepped sacks of surplus foods and worked very, very hard. I said to my supervisor, "I think that we ought to arrange a special need; she ought to have a visit to her husband in Pennsylvania." I asked, "Can't we get three or four bucks together—you know, the price of a new hat—so Lillian could have a

new hat?" I wanted to send her with a new Easter bonnet to see her husband. She said [I would] have to go to the case supervisor, [and I would] have to write it up. They made an allowance for her to go see her husband.

Years later I learned from Mobilization for Youth that the rules are not bad; you have to know how to use them. It was a brilliant stroke [conceived of by] Dick Cloward and his ilk—wonderful ilk. They discovered that the Department [of Welfare] was violating its own rules, so they learned the rule book, and it was a very powerful weapon.

I think at that time I thought [that social work] is a worthwhile thing to do. One of my teachers said that you are doing God's work in practical ways and to be a social worker was to do good. Later I learned that it is important to be a good-doer as well to do good. Social workers were nice people. They tried, Lord knows they tried. They cared. But I also thought that there was a lot of foolishness. I still think there is a lot of foolishness—nonsense.

I graduated from school and my first job was in a group work agency, a Jewish agency in Brownsville and East New York. The program went well and I trained students there and worked there for five years. After five years, the students praised my work, and the word got back and I got a job as an assistant professor at Columbia University for $5,500. When they offered me the job I was thunderstruck. I grabbed it right away. Bill Schwartz [Group work professor, Columbia University] made a weird remark to me. He said, "You know, half of the social workers, young social workers who graduated from Columbia felt it was a fluke and felt that they should have gotten [the job]—so, about a hundred psychoanalysts know about your appointment." I think certain things about me helped me—like my personality and my attitude. I was funny. I told stories.

I felt that I came to Columbia University School of Social Work at a time when there was really a quota for Jews. No question about it. I came in spite of being Jewish. I was the second or third Jew on that faculty, I believe, or the fourth. I was always clear—I identified myself clearly and unequivocally as Jewish. I didn't conceal my Jewishness. M, my friend, said, "You are the only one who seems to be comfortable with your Jewishness." I celebrated the Jewish holidays and wouldn't come to school on these days.

I always was a strong believer on being able to do the work. So I would always say to [students] go where your practice will be. Get to know practice and where you can get good supervision. And I encouraged them to speak about their artistic abilities and their ability to write. I learned at school that a lot of it is just pretense, a lot of phoniness, it really is. It is in the market place of education, like any other thing. Considerations are always more important, such as money—bringing in money for the school. Faculty who have pretenses of objectivity I have always felt are really corrupt, and moral superiority is the greatest barrier and obstacle to change. They have turf and their own comfort to be concerned about. You can get faculty very excited if you want them to give up a perk. I find that as a teacher, I had to be loyal to what my job was, [not the institution]—that is a matter of personal ethics. It is a matter of personal ethics to me not to give students a shafting. My own feeling was you have an utter loyalty to do the job that you are supposed to perform; you have to be a good teacher. You try to give students a fair shake all

of the time.

When I first got there, I taught group work and I liked it. I really liked being a teacher and I did like the ambiance. There were funny things I had to deal with. The School of Social Work was at Carnegie Mansion. It was a lovely place. Offices were bedrooms, guest rooms, and the all-teakwood room was for seminars. The image was that the casework teachers had to have privacy—it was the most ridiculous thing[, so they had the better offices]. A good part of your load was [as] a field advisor; you taught two courses and had fifteen students in the field. Everybody had to carry students—all practice teachers. Most of the core social work faculty did not have doctorates; that was a later development. Many of them worked in the field.

Nobody taught me how to be a professor, but I had mentors. One, Virginia Bellsmith, was in the casework faculty in the psychiatric social work sequence. She was a firecracker, a tough-talking gal. She took an interest in me. She taught me how to survive in the system. She taught me that you have got to be student-oriented, not agency-oriented—the focus is the student. She said you have got to give the poor son of a bitch a break sometimes. So she kept me out of trouble. She was the director of fieldwork and helped me through another difficulty. I was carrying a group of students and a social work union was being organized at a Y—the largest Y in New Jersey—the Jewish Y. I had six or eight students there and it was a very good plum of a placement. So I called the students in and I said, "None of you are going into that agency; it is not an educationally good situation for you." I offended the agency a great deal and I pulled out all the students and I arranged some work for them to do. Neither the left nor the right supported me. I found the situation to be very painful. I was called, by some of the Jewish faculty, "The Westchester Marxist." The students were political and they wanted to picket and I said that this is not a field assignment—picketing. So I reassigned them to do other things and I told Virginia Bellsmith about it and she said, "You had better write that up and I will protect you—send me a note on what you did, but I think it is very good." The Associate Dean called me in to say it was very good handling, and it became the policy of the school. That was a very proud moment and I gained a lot of strokes on that.

There were not a lot of Marxists on the faculty. We knew who they were. During the McCarthy era, one of the people at the school was called down to testify. There was a lot of scary business which was hard to survive and a few of us refused to do certain things like sign a loyalty oath. New York State, the over-regulator of university, wanted everybody to sign a loyalty oath, and I didn't want to sign. There were no repercussions because the dean then, Kenneth Johnson, supported us. He was a very courageous man, a lawyer and a judge. When the Rosenbergs were killed, he volunteered to be their [children's] guardian, their legal guardian. All the Jews counselled him not to, that is the irony of it—the liberals—the so-called liberals. Three of us stood up against him [when he tried to have the school used as an air raid shelter during the Cold War], refusing to participate. He came to a faculty meeting and he said, "I heard that a few of you people don't want a shelter—have moral objections to it." And he said, "Alright, so we won't have it," and we didn't. He was a man that always surprised you—like Nixon going to China.

I kept teaching and then I took a leave and I went for a doctorate in social work in the late '50s.

The distinctions between casework and group work were eventually eliminated and everybody taught practice. I was a practice teacher. Everybody else [who were group workers], they did not want us to combine because there were eighteen casework teachers and [only] five group workers. "They will outnumber us," they said, and I said, "Yes, but they are not going to outsmart us."

I pushed for it and Bill Schwartz agreed with me and he said, "I don't think we are ready and I think we ought to wait a year or two, but I will go along with you—because in theory you are right, we ought to join up." He had a generic approach; he never liked, theoretically, the boundaries [between group work and casework], because it was *social work*. Social work was group social work with individuals. When I first started teaching, casework was very much the dominant modality and group work was small and marginalized. Later on, there became tension because group work grew.

When I came into the New York School of Social Work in 1951, it was in the midst of a struggle between the functional and diagnostic schools. The functional school of [the University of Pennsylvania] had become very influential in two or three of the agencies in New York, the Jewish Family Service, The Jewish Child Care Association, and a third agency. What Gordon Hamilton and the other caseworkers did absolutely floored me; they removed all students from [these agencies] because they didn't like what they taught—they were "contaminating the students, they had all these wrong ideas." And I had just come to the school and they got opposition from the one person who opposed them directly at these meetings I attended and it was Phillip Kline, who was social policy. Also, Edward C. Lindeman, the social philosopher, raised the question of academic diversity. [After the initial cut from the agencies] they worked out a compromise—an accommodation to each other—and they started to take students again.

This was really very interesting, terribly interesting to me and it went to the heart of all the thinking that I had to do. When I am talking about the diagnostic [school], they put the worker as the maker, shaker, breaker, and doer, and the functional [school] seemed client-centered, a different psychological approach. Carl Rogers was a [client-centered] psychologist and people used to make fun of him at Columbia. Everybody was Freudian, which bothered me. [The diagnostic school] made an enthronement of assessment—they saw it as a process and a product. That is different than what Alex Gitterman and Carol Germain wrote, where assessment is an ongoing process, an interactive process, from moment to moment.

Casework teachers were perceived by students (and me) as never teaching practice in casework. This is, I think, a big problem. The students protested that all they studied was diagnosis; treatment and practice you were supposed to learn in the field. The [casework faculty, such as Florence Hollis] really thought that if you teach diagnosis (it was called "appraisal") that practice will flow from it. It was almost mystical. Once you have an assessment, the rest follows. The group workers would say diagnosis is not really true—that you diagnose and assess constantly as you go along—it is a fluid, ongoing process.

[The caseworkers] accused us of being "functionalists." Harold Myer, a casework professor, was my friend—an ambivalent friend. We were tied to each other because we went through the

doctoral program together. He said, "You know casework because you are a good friend of Lucille Austin, but you will see, Irving, that there is a fifth column in here of functionalism." Bill Schwartz admired some of the work [of the functionalists] because it was a client-centered therapy—the relationship with clients and the process. He really believed in that, and I did too. Those were lively times and [the Casework faculty] were always on the defensive. Their senior members [Gordan Hamilton, Florence Hollis] always took us on and we always had debates and I thought we won. Bill Schwartz and others were formidable and forceful. So those were very exciting times. One of the things that I think comes through is the group work legacy to teach practice—[and ask,] "How do you do these things?" That became the strength for group work and the group work grew in prestige.

There was mutual influence. Group work had to learn something about the individual counselling model. There were two major directions in group work [represented by Bob Vinter and Bill Schwartz]. They both respected each other but from different positions. It was not as if there was a battle going on. Bob Vinter woke up one day in 1960 and he said, "The whole group work enterprise is not real because they don't pay attention to the details of what you do." [Vinter saw] the use of the group as an instrument for treating individuals—so he did pay attention to details of how you worked and it was really psychologically oriented, psychoanalytically oriented. And Bill Schwartz was a different kind of a person—interactional. He was an interactivist.

There was real activity going on [in the early '60s] and all kinds of interesting things; caseworkers became interested in introducing family work. But the caseworkers still really believed [if you were psychodynamic] that if you understand what you get from insight you move to action. But it works the other way—you can give all the insight and people can die. But from action [you gain insight]—you gain insight from doing what you have to do. "Let's do it, let's work on it." That, to me, is a powerful idea. [The caseworkers'] reliance was on the intellect and not the use of the scholarship. Their idea of scholarship was not to study the process, but it was to study scholarship. My friend Alex Gitterman used [this quote] three times in a paper, and it comes from [the philosopher] George Santayana—"The saddest thing to contemplate is a science or a person that is interested in itself and not in its subject." You have to also [learn] separate skills. How do you help clients to deal with their environment unless you know something about how to do it?

I think that I rubbed some people the wrong way—the traditional casework crowd thought I was brash sometimes. But the women on the faculty (of Columbia School for Social Work) thought that on the bread and butter issues of women and men, that I was very much concerned with giving women equal consideration. They said so to me, that I was less of a "pig" than any other man on the faculty, which was a left-handed compliment of sorts. I seemed to get along well with women. The women felt that I was very positive to them and respectful—not patronizing. I brought along the whole committee when I felt that a woman was hired at a lower rank than she should have been and I raised it immediately at her first probationary evaluation.

If I had to do it all over again, I would have stayed with casework, because I was a good caseworker and because there is a much larger constituency than group work. I had important

outside activities which enriched my teaching, like my work as director of Vacation Camp for the Blind. Casework has a constituency that is clear cut and you can't be a consultant to group work, unless you are Alex Gitterman. And casework has a more developed field of research.

I do want to say that along the way, I simultaneously carried on a whole career in work with the blind. I developed a camp for blind [sic] which turned out to be a marvelous thing. People praised it whoever saw it; it was really social work. Ira Glasser, the head of the American Civil Liberties Union [worked there as a dishwasher] and wrote a book—it was *The Problems of Doing Good*—and he gave me a copy of it. He wrote the book with two other people, including Willard Gaylin. At a meeting where he spoke, he saw me in the audience and he said, "I want you to know that I learned more social work from Professor Miller than any and since." All kinds of outstanding people [worked at the camp] and later became well known in the field. Sherman Barr worked there. He was the heart of that camp. He was such a brilliant, creative person. We had all kinds of good people there and we were different than all other camps. We showed up the other camps for the blind.

The Guild for the Blind: they were very casework [oriented], were a highly professionalized agency, and ipsy-pipsy—very precious and they caseworked clients to death—their model was the kind of thing I talked about, diagnosis, assessment, self-actualizing. My philosophy was that self-actualizing is not everything—that it is work, working with them, working with the problem, working with the task [that matters].

The Guild called me up once. They said, "Four of our clients are at your camp; I would like to have a report on it."

I said, "What do you mean, you would like to have a report?"

"Well, we want to know how they do for the record. Were they good campers?"

I said, "Did you tell them you were going to ask?"

They said that they did not know. "Why do they have to know that we are checking up on them?"

I said, "If you ask me I will do a professional courtesy, but I have to tell them. I'm sorry and I will not permit it unless they can be told that they are being inquired after." I said we don't do such things.

[My sense of professional standards and ethics] had nothing to do with being a social worker. My mother would have killed me if I did otherwise. It's not social work, it is [what is] honorable. My mother would not [tolerate] a liar, ever. People always said [to me], "You take all kinds of shit from people, but you can't stand the abuse of power." I always have had a sensitivity to being honorable about these things. My bosses used to say to me, "You have only one problem: you are too generous to people who are poor and incompetent." However, I would fire a person in an instant [for being disrespectful] to a client. [A group worker] was leading a

discussion and he criticized a client for being a Trotskyist or a Right Winger, in a group discussion, a very brilliant young worker. He attacked him, and I said, "You had better go and apologize and if you ever do that again, you will be fired forthwith—you have got to see that you have the power—you're the social worker, let them talk about their politics and let them develop them, but don't proselytize."

Somebody else said to me, "You have got to do the right thing." I will tell you a very central kind of experience I had. One of the most beautiful ladies that I knew, Dalia Scott, was a full-time professor. We used to have to write reports on students [whom we were advising, who appeared before the Academic and Fieldwork Performance Standing Committee]. The advisor had to collect data about the student's classroom work and we had to write our own report to the committee.

Dalia said to me one time: "I'm having a very hard time, Irving . . . I did share with the student what I said about him, not what other people said about him, and what I was going to say about him in the report," and [she told me the Associate Dean, Sidney Berengarten] said, "that's a privileged communication to the committee."

I said [that was bullshit]. "I tell students what I say about them to the committee and what I am going to say—the position I am going to take with the committee when I bring them to the committee as a field advisor."

So, I took it up at the next meeting of the committee on students. I said to [the committee]:

> I want you to know that Dalia told me about your position that the information is privileged. What you say about the student is not privileged! That is why administrations want secrecy—they invoke confidentiality—but it is to protect secrecy. You have it all wrong, Sidney. I have been violating that rule for years and you don't even know it, because it never occurred to me to keep it secret. Secrecy has to be used to protect confidentiality, but you cannot use confidentiality to protect secrecy—that is what administrators want—control.

And Sidney changed the policy. [The same kind of thing happened] when Mobilization for Youth used to go to the Department of Welfare and ask them to obey their rules, they would say, "I would like to look at the record."

[The response was], "You can't; it's privileged."

It was very clear that they wanted to protect the organization by keeping it secret. I would say I was nurtured by a distrust of organizations—a distrust that comes from my experiences [as a worker] that you can't trust the bosses [that I believe] to this day.

I learned that confrontation is always public—it is never private. The caseworkers always did it, pick you off [in private]. When I complained to [the Dean, Mitch Ginsberg, in public] the caseworkers said, "You were right, but why didn't you tell him privately and not in front of the three caseworkers on the committee?"

I said, "No, it is your property, you have to know it too."

I was very fond of Sidney Berengarten, conservative as he was. Sidney was a lovely fuddy-duddy. He really had a great deal of fondness even if people gave him a hard time. Years later I said to him, "You know, Sidney, I have an affection for you and you know everything I ever said about you was in public, I have never denounced you, all of my complaints of you were on the record where it belongs." (I had learned this from the group workers, it had been reinforced by people like Bill Schwartz—when you are playing things out on a public stage, you are in your formal role.)

And he said to me, "I have learned something from you—when you criticize me publicly I always believed that with you, only ten minutes later you felt very warm with me, after it was all over, but other people do it underhandedly."

When I [retired], I didn't have a high opinion of my teaching—some years it was very good, some years it was middling. I always had a very select group of [students] that always felt very strongly and positive because of my intellectual insights, but I always wasn't effective [because] I was kind of rambling, not always focused. What I was most proud of was [the respect that my colleagues afforded me].

I had trouble publishing. I did respectable things and whatever I wrote I got good feedback. People want to publish because they want to get advancement. I always felt embarrassed by what I wrote; I thought it was not very good the minute I finished it. Because I didn't write I tried to excel in (school) politics. I developed course materials and stuff like that. I really would have preferred to love to publish and get my status from that. I regret it because people later in my career, like Bernie Schiffman, would say "What you do write is so good, why don't you get a book out?" I found it very hard—the discipline of sitting down and writing, and had anxiety—that's a writer's block. Ann Hartman and others said that I tried to put too many ideas in one article[, and that] they could have filled five or six articles.

[Irving discusses his blindness and how it was pure coincidence that he directed a camp for the blind in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He left the position after suffering a heart attack at age 42.]

[When I was the director of the camp for the blind] I even drove a car around the camp for a while. But I almost killed somebody [that] I hadn't noticed. I was driving [my brother in law's car] and [apparently] there was a kid there by the road. I saw a mother running toward the car and wondered why and [my brother in law] said, "Didn't you see the child by the side of the road?" And I hadn't. I never again drove. My visual handicap put a blight on my career. It cut down my mobility. I couldn't read very well. I had trouble in the last five years when I was visiting students as an advisor. I would always wonder, "Please speak up because I can't see you." It blighted my life. I don't like excuses[, but] if I were fully sighted I would have done more scholarship. I would have had many more options. I did make a gambit for an interview to become a dean of a New England school of social work and they wanted me very, very much. But [when] I was interviewed I didn't present well, because I didn't see very well. And there

were a couple of people who didn't want me, because I was also strong, and I didn't get the job.

I was interviewed by the [University] President and I said, "What is it, my handicap?"

And she said, "I am ashamed to say yes."

I think if I was fully sighted, my life would have been very different. I would have taken other options. I would have driven a car, you know. It was a blight on my life[, but] I made good compensations. There are jokes about me bumping into people and I won an award two years in a row for making the best riposte [upon collision].

I have a good feeling about my career. I feel that I was useful as a teacher. I think that most people regarded and respected me. I was elected very frequently when I ran for the committee on academic appointments. It was a sign of trust as well as political connections; people wanted me there rather than other people. I was lucky to be the kid who worked in the fur market (and became an academic). I fell into it and I always feel forever humble about that.

Interviewer's Note: I am grateful for critical feedback offered by Alex and Naomi Gitterman, Abby Miller, and anonymous reviewers. Irving Miller kept a professional log for most of his academic career, which I have edited. They expand on many of the themes covered in this interview. If anyone would like for me to email them a copy, please contact me at jlmiller@smith.edu.

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A Field Liaison's Reflection on Dual Roles and Boundaries

Brie Radis

Abstract: This narrative focuses on a new field liaison exploring dual roles and boundaries. The experience is explored applying a relational framework. I explore my journey through my relationship with my father and how this impacted my current view of social work as well as how it was challenged when I lost my father.

Keywords: field liaison, boundaries, relational social work, dual roles

Prologue

"It is you," said my student with surprise in her voice. I looked up with tears running down my exhausted face. I was holding the hands of my father, who was on life support in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). My first-year social work student, who had noted my surname on her field placement admission's roster, had come down to our floor to confirm if the patient was one of my relations, as I was her faculty field liaison.

Introduction

After spending several years working as both a field instructor and clinical supervisor, I became a field liaison. I was excited to take on this role, which enabled me to support students to bridge the theoretical concepts they were learning in the classroom with their experiences in their field placements. As a field liaison, I would provide support not only to students, but also to field instructors and their agencies, assisting them in connecting to the field office and supporting them with gate-keeping aspects of the role, including socializing new social workers (Tully, 2015). I acted as both a consultant for the field instructor and as an evaluator for the students; therefore, the duties and tasks of my role were diverse. At times, I was alternately a mediator, instructor, and mentor to students. I quickly learned that part of my role included teaching others about the scope and responsibilities of our partnership (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2016). Despite these varied roles and obligations and their corresponding challenges, I closely followed the *National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics* in my application of dual relationships and had strict boundaries with the students (Sugimoto, Hank, Bowman, & Pomerantz, 2015).

Similar to the professional boundaries with both clients and staff, which I adopted in the clinical social work field over the course of fifteen years, I limited disclosure of personal information to a professional minimum (Knox, 2015). I made sure to always keep the conversations with my staff focused on their work performance or clients' well-being. I continued these practices with my students: for example, I kept business office hours and made appointments with students instead of being readily available. I always met with students at the social work school or at their field sites. When I scheduled virtual meetings, I made sure to have a neutral background. I asked students to refrain from texting me and to focus on professionalism and learning goals in our interactions (O'Leary, Miller, Olive, & Kelly, 2017). While I strived to be relational, warm,

open, and compassionate in our interactions, I deflected curious personal inquiries about my life—such as whether I had a partner or children and other related questions—in the manner of a seasoned practitioner. I was often present in their practice classroom and visited them at their field sites, regularly discussing the importance of creating professional boundaries. I also wanted my students to observe me model professional boundaries in these diverse environments in order to prepare them for their macro and micro roles within community settings. We engaged in individualized meetings, email exchanges, Zoom and Skype check-ins, and telephone calls so that I could be updated on their progress throughout their field experiences; our relationship stayed within the bounds of that between social work field liaison and social work student.

Keeping the personal and the professional separate was not always an easy path, as I was dealing with my own personal challenges. I struggled to compartmentalize and separate from my field liaison role these duties: completing my doctorate work, parenting young children, and navigating the challenges of caretaking for a father who was terminally ill. Many of my students were also experiencing their own challenges: several of the students' mental health struggles or past traumas resurfaced as they entered their field placements (Gilbert & Stickley, 2012). Certain students were facing chronic health issues, eating disorders, moving to a new city, relationship crises, and financial struggles; in addition, certain students were confronting structural issues of discrimination in their agencies. Through class discussions, process-recordings, and one-on-one interactions, I learned about their journeys to social work and the biases and challenges they faced within the field. Through supervision they integrated their social work field experiences and past post-traumatic growth experiences and their intersectional identities into their work. Often a student's disclosure was a vital part of our supervision process; this disclosure helped me to better support the students, providing tailored support (Knox, 2015).

Early on in the fall, I found that I had to shift to a relational social work framework as a field liaison to support my social work students during their field experiences. Relational social work in this context would highlight "mutuality and interaction in the relationship between the self and other" (Goldstein, Miehls, & Ringel, 2009, p. xii). Additional relational social work concepts that I utilized with my students would recognize the resilience and strengths of the students and their paths of growth, acknowledge intersectionality and how this impacts human development and the relationship between the field liaison and student, and finally emphasize empathic attunement between the student and field liaison (Goldstein et al., 2009). Utilizing a relational framework with the supervisee, I would negotiate our liaison relationship through shared interactions and experiences (Goldstein, et al., 2009). Instead of lecturing to the supervisee about boundaries, I would email a student who had texted me a gentle reminder, or when a student was experiencing personal issues that arose at the field site, I would offer resources for support. I would focus on the relationship between the student and myself and the student and their field site and closely monitor this parallel process. If appropriate, I would share my own social work practice experiences and integrate these examples into our work together.

During our individual meetings, one student, "Mae," discussed the impact that her adoption has had on her own social construction of race and identity in the social work practice. She had been raised by white Italian parents in a predominately Caucasian upper middle-class neighborhood in a rural area of Ohio. Since attending our large urban social work school, Mae had been

discovering more about her culture and her ancestry and was for the first time engaging a diverse range of individuals and was able to forge new relationships that expanded on her own idea of identity. She had been taught to be color-blind (to believe that everyone is the same and that racism does not exist) by her parents, but now saw that this belief system had hurt her and was now impacting her clients. Mae began to proudly identify as a student of color and often brought up the racial inequalities that her clients were experiencing during our supervisions.

Like many of my other first-year social work students, Mae had transitioned from college directly into social work school with experiences in community service or clubs leading her to the social work profession. While she had worked for several years in various roles in the service industry, the field placement as a hospital social worker served as her first professional role in the field. She wanted to thrive in this new role. However, she was very quiet and unsure of herself and often waited for direction before engaging with clients. During Mae's first few months in the field, she experienced several challenges, including advocating for supervision or support from her busy field instructor, who expected to take maternity leave near the end of her first semester. Since she did not receive significant guidance, she reached out to me more frequently to pose questions and to seek support. I met with her and her field instructor to support her with requesting additional responsibility and she was successful during this interaction by bravely requesting more opportunities such as running a group. I saw Mae grow from being timid to being more confident in her first-year intern role while performing intakes and discharges as well as offering social support to the patients and their families.

My student Mae was the acting social worker on the floor when my father was admitted into the Intensive Care Unit on the cancer floor in the middle of her second semester. When she came to his room to see me that day, my father was newly unresponsive and as his health power of attorney, it was my role to make the decision to take him off life support. When she saw us, she instantly entered the room and engaged with me, my sister, and my mother, who were distraught. His rapid decline had been sudden, and we were all stunned and grief-stricken. Interacting with my student at this time filled me with anguish, as I was cognizant of the awkwardness, tension, and overlap between the private and professional realms; simultaneously I also embraced the utility of the moment and made requests for various supports which she readily took note of (we requested that a chaplain visit us, etc.). I instinctively repressed my feelings to be able to carry out a civil conversation about banal subjects like the cafeteria food, parking, and the weather. Mae kept a friendly disposition during our interaction, but I could also sense the tension between her urgency to be helpful and my own preference for the conversation to end. She came back to our room at a later time to check on us and by then, our stay at the hospital had nearly ended, because my father died later that night.

When I returned to teach our practice class, our relationship was changed and impacted by this challenging interaction. I had been seen as the person who needed help in a moment of extreme vulnerability due to grief and loss. She had been acting in the role of social worker and helper. Mae tried to subsequently check in with me on several occasions to discuss my loss, and I found that I could not hold back tears due to the rawness of losing my father. She would wait for me after class or come up and talk to me during a break. She brought me a sympathy card and once even made the offer to talk if I ever needed to. She would say, "How are you feeling today?" and

I would respond "Fine, how are you?" almost as if in an automatic response. She would try to meet my eye during class and give me a sad smile or nod. I was experiencing the shock and numbness of grief and struggled to keep my composure during the class, so I came to want to avoid these interactions. I finally opened up with my fellow practice professor about this dynamic, and she would at times act as a buffer. It was an ethical dilemma for me because I did not want to hurt Mae's feelings and this situation was not her fault at all. I could sense she wanted my approval. However, I also needed to protect myself because my own professional boundaries had been crossed and I was unsure how to best proceed. Ultimately, I kindly thanked Mae for her concern, but clearly asked her to not engage with me on this matter because it was too difficult, and I wanted to spend the class time focusing on the material and on her and her peers.

In the midst of a family crisis and in shock at the hospital, in retrospect, I regret that I did not request that another social worker fill her role. The boundaries and ethics of our field liaison and student relationship shifted; as a full-time social work professor and faculty field liaison, I must now grapple with the challenges inherent to the field liaison/professor and student relationship. I had endeavored to successfully transition back to our original roles as field liaison and student; we achieved this transition on the surface level, but there was a great deal which remained unspoken and unaddressed regarding our previous interaction. She had been present during one of the most vulnerable and difficult moments in my life.

Growing Up

Starting when I was four years old, I would frequently accompany my father on home visits to the homes of his clients. We lived on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in a rural area with extensive corn and soybean fields and farming near both Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass's birthplaces. Despite the historical significance of the Underground Railroad, there was a drastic economic divide between the residents who were Black and the White upper class—with an almost nonexistent middle class—who lived in this region. In the early 1980s, several of the families whom we visited had children with physical, developmental, and mental health challenges. These families often did not have running water or access to indoor plumbing for a bathroom. When we would visit these families, we would bring vegetables from our bountiful garden, cookies, or needed supplies from the local health department where my father was employed as a mental health case management supervisor. We would visit in living rooms, backyards, porches, and at kitchen tables and talk about both the joys and challenges these families were experiencing. Through these site visits, I first learned about relational social work in practice by watching my father deeply listen to and share with these clients. I can still remember the big smile on his face when he greeted the often-wary caregivers and the looks of relief and tenderness that were on the faces of those on the receiving end of the exchanges. My dad would explain that the most vital part of the visit was connecting with and forming genuine relationships with the individuals. He was modeling relational empathy for me and teaching me to do the same. In my house growing up, the terms "client" and "friend" were interchangeable, and clients often called me on the landline to check in and talk to my dad and would frequently chat with me or my younger sister. Clients were present for holidays or to help with a yard project, for which they were compensated. There was a multiplicity of roles inherent within his

everyday relationships with his clients.

As a licensed professional counselor in a rural environment who was inspired by pastoral counseling, my father followed a vocational calling to serve others. He believed that boundaries needed to be broken down to prevent a divide within the relationship. When I ultimately attended social work school and began to practice, my own professional practice diverged from my father's style. I sought a private life within a large city as compared to a rural community. I embraced the *NASW Code of Ethics* (2017), and I learned about dual roles and clearly defined boundaries, which were typically easier to uphold in an urban environment due to social norms which prioritize the delineation between the professional and personal realms. While I had witnessed and experienced less established boundaries growing up, I transitioned to the other end of the boundary spectrum and created strict boundaries. As a new social worker, I did not have personal pictures on my desk or disclose being queer or married, I never approached a client in a public setting, and I consistently redirected Facebook invitations and personal inquiries from clients and supervisees.

Conclusion

In spite of these values, in the aforementioned situation with my student Mae, I had involuntarily disclosed information about my family and about my grief. I was vulnerable and exposed not only as a field liaison, but also as a family member dealing with loss. At the end of the semester, Mae approached me to thank me for encouraging her to run a group on the cancer unit and for the support I provided to her during her field placement. Mae took a deep breath and said to me: "Thank you also for letting me help you and your family that day." As I nodded a response, I noted that when practicing relational social work with students, I can still maintain clear boundaries while also allowing vulnerability to be present in our interactions. Subsequently, I have endeavored to embody the relational approach in my relationships and interactions with students. Through exploring the grief surrounding losing my father, I continue to strive to be intentional about my being self-reflective and vulnerable and use this as a tool and not a barrier in my role as a field liaison and social work professor. This experience also reminded me that boundaries and relationships are constantly in flux and that change is always to be expected. Further research on dual roles with field liaisons and students and when the social worker needs help should be explored through qualitative research.

On a smaller scale, I have since integrated my relational approach into my teaching and field liaison philosophy, which I review during the first class with my students each semester so they are familiar with the approach and what it means in our work together. Relational social work techniques are powerful teaching tools that help to create a dynamic learning environment where we focus on the here and now and the experiences of the students and cultural context of field and the social work classroom. I also stress that I welcome feedback, and that I am also still learning, and that it is challenging work to be reflective while we engage with others. If I make a mistake in class or have a learning experience from my own work, I model apologizing and share my feelings about the experience as openly as I can. I also share that the syllabus is a guide, but that it is subject to change as needed to meet the needs of the students and their areas of expertise and how my social work training and experience can be shared to create a rich

learning environment for everyone. I share with my students the importance of context for how they experience the world. I also highlight examples of social work ethical situations in the grey where circumstances are not always clear and that as social workers, we have to figure out the best possible answer that stays true to social justice principles, social work values, and integrity.

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My Dissertation:
A Journey Towards Self-Awareness and Beyond

Leyla Feize

Abstract: This narrative portrays my personal struggles towards meeting my "self." It is a story of resistance, fear, openness, acceptance, experiencing personal and professional growth, and witnessing the unexpected results of this journey.

Self-awareness is not a new concept and has close ties to spirituality and religiosity. Almost all systematic religions and spiritual traditions encourage individuals to increase their knowledge and awareness of "self." However, in this article, I aim to focus only on the psychology perspective. The concept of self in this article refers to human consciousness. Self-awareness is a professional skill that includes observing and reflecting on personal feelings, thoughts, and biases (Hamilton, 1951). According to self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972), the self can operate as a subject or an object. When one's "self" pays attention to external stimuli, the "self" plays the role of subjective self; when the direction of attention is towards inward and internal stimuli, the "self" plays the role of objective self (De Silva, 2004; Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). Subjective self is known as public self-consciousness and objective self as private self-consciousness (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Minsun, Min Ju, & Sang Hee, 2008; Scheier & Carver, 1985) or true self (Schlegel, Hirsch, & Smith, 2013). Duval and Wicklund (1972) indicated that objective and subjective selves are "mutually exclusive." However, Silvia and Duval (2001) elaborated May's (1967) views on self-awareness and the human capacity of experiencing both objective and subjective selves simultaneously. Research on self-awareness is generally outdated (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010) and contemporary researchers have changed their focus from self-awareness to mindfulness. Though there are numerous definitions for mindfulness, the observation of one's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors is a commonality in all. The concept of mindfulness is taken from Buddhist tradition and has recently been integrated into cognitive behavioral therapy (Tirch, Silberstein, & Kolts, 2016). Harrington and Loffredo (2010) and Richards, et al. (2010) introduced mindfulness as a prerequisite and a path to self-awareness.

This is the story of my personal journey of self-awareness: the exploration of inward data while I was working on my dissertation collecting outward data. It is also an appreciation of doubt as the first step to discovery and commencement as a way to overcome fear and inadequacy. I divided this personal journey into three stages. In the first stage, I explore my dissertation subject, which triggered my inner self to practice mindfulness. The second stage is an elaboration on my struggles to practice mindfulness. The third stage is about the process of reaching self-awareness as a result of a continuous and habitual practice of mindfulness.

Permission to Explore Self

As a middle-aged woman, I finished my PhD courses in the field of social work, passed the qualifying exam, and was ready to start writing my dissertation. I aimed to explore, discover, and develop insights to better connect with and understand people from different cultures. I was deeply aware that understanding others is the most difficult and significant step towards any interventions or treatments, so I decided to focus on cultural competency and explore cultural competency in relation to self-awareness. At first, it started like any other dissertation; I searched for articles and started to write the literature review. One day as I was immersed in writing, my eyes came upon the word "self-awareness." For the first time, I asked myself: "What is my relationship with this topic?" My immediate response was: "It is just a dissertation topic. Do not overcomplicate it." Suddenly, I became resistant. I did not want to think about self-awareness. My inner opposition was akin to a three-year-old child's tantrum. I pondered why I reacted that way for a while, decided to let it go, and continued to write the literature review. However, from then on, I was not my usual self; I felt disconnected from my "self." I might have had a feeling of fear, fear of questioning the "self," fear of confrontation with the "self," and most likely, a fear of the unknown consequences of the confrontation. I could not escape these fears. It is said that if you see the light, you cannot keep living in darkness. Deep inside, I knew I had to be open and explore my inner self.

I, as a Middle Eastern woman, grew up in the tussle of revolution and war. It was 1980; politically, all government institutions had changed. It was an end to thousands of years of monarchy and a beginning of an unknown republic government. Before people had a chance to become oriented with the new situation, a few months after the revolution, a long-term, destructive war began. The economy became unstable, the inflation rate rose, people struggled, and the society's nationalist values were replaced with religious values. People were divided in many groups with different ideologies, but the main division was between religious and non-religious groups. As a pre-teen, I was confused with this sudden division and the chaotic situation. I was in the process of adjusting to the reality of post-revolution. Later as a teenager, I faced the bitter reality of male dominancy in society and started to explore my social and historical identity, re-visited and re-lived the long history of national and international oppression, and learned that male dominancy in society had been a byproduct of (this) historical oppression. I started to reject male supremacy and whatever norms enforced oppression by speaking up and defending women's equality and rights whenever I had a chance. Perhaps my identity formed based on protecting my "self" and focusing on environmental forces more than inner forces.

When I immigrated to the US many years later, I noticed first the huge cultural differences. Gradually, as a woman, I started to see more cultural similarities in terms of oppression and realized that I had to fight against oppression all over again, this time against implicit male dominancy and both explicit and implicit parts of the mainstream culture: discrimination, prejudice, and racism. I was like an exhausted soldier returning from a desperate battle, who did not have time to take off her boots and put her bare feet on the ground before heading into another fight. As a lifelong survivor and fighter against social injustice, I did not have time to look inward. My attention was preoccupied with my harsh environment and finding creative

ways to develop resiliency as a means to survive. Although, in my early adulthood, as a professional practitioner, I learned to reflect on my relationships with my clients, my use of reflection was compartmentalized; it did not embrace my personal life.

While I was working on my dissertation and taking notes on self-awareness, I concentrated on the two dimensions of self-awareness and the process itself, in which the "objective self" evaluates the "subjective self." I read about self-awareness over and over again and the concepts continued to catch my attention. Probably, subconsciously, I knew I was not deeply in touch with my "self," and part of me pretended that as a professional, undoubtedly, I knew the functions of the subjective and objective selves. I continued to write; self-observation leads to self-reflection and increases self-awareness (Axelrod, 2012). I was eager to better understand or perhaps experience the concepts of self-observation/mindfulness, self-reflection, and self-awareness firsthand. But what was the root of my resistance and fear? Why was confronting my own "self" so scary?

While I was dealing with my dilemma, I still had my busy and ordinary life as a PhD candidate and a part time therapist. I designed the research method for my dissertation and selected my participants. I received University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, arranged an interview room, and acquired a phone and a recorder. I was ready to start but found I could not. I put everything aside for a while and tried to determine how I could regain my inner peace. I finally concluded that I could not move forward with my dissertation unless I was willing to explore my "self." At that point, I had to cooperate with the "self" for the sake of the research.

Struggling with Self-Observation and Evaluation

I accepted the challenge to, at least, try to observe my "self" as an object and practice mindfulness as a path to self-awareness (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Richards et al., 2010). After I made the decision to practice mindfulness, I was no longer at war with my "self." But I was not at peace either. I have never forgotten my first day of self-observation. It was an early morning on a sunny day in May. I was excited and anxious at the same time; I was not sure how to practice and did not know what to expect. I started my daily life with morning exercise, making breakfast, preparing the children for school, and leaving the house. However, in all those moments, my inner self was watching and monitoring whatever I felt, thought, and did—as if a camera with a strong zoom lens was filming all the details—not only my behaviors, but my feelings and thoughts. I was able to see that the chilly morning weather was pleasant. Interacting with my children was also pleasant. But hurrying up to get ready was frustrating. That morning, I was aware that a cluster of thoughts passed through my mind. Some of them were directly related to preparing to leave the house and some were about my near and far past and the rest were my plans and dreams. When I was thinking, "Today I am going to meet the dissertation chair and discuss my progress," I felt more energized and used more positive and lively words in the kitchen table conversation. This observation was awakening but also draining. I felt so uncomfortable that I could not continue the observation after some minutes. The observation did not seem to be a normal effort. I was exhausted. I felt that I used too much energy during those minutes.

The ability of seeing the "self" objectively was frightening, more so than looking at my potentially unpleasant behaviors. I felt helpless and surprised that my true self had been a stranger to me for so long and wondered if all these years, I had lived without realizing this capacity, without seeing this inner light. It was an "aha" moment, but in a different way. My previous experiences of "aha" moments were in relation to the external world, like when I solved a difficult problem or understood someone thoroughly.

The second day, I observed my "self" for a few more minutes than before. At the end of the first week, I was able to observe the "self" for hours, and at the end of the month, I did not count the hours of observation; I just tried to practice mindfulness every day. At the end of the third month, observing the "self" became second nature. I became used to the presence of the "objective self." It was with me all the time and not just for some minutes or hours. I liked and enjoyed having it and its presence required little or no effort. It was not a guest but the host. I felt that I was conscious almost all the time. I experienced having a clear and organized mind. I was still surprised but satisfied at developing this ability.

Living in the present moment was a new experience; I felt that I was moving into a deeper level of consciousness, and it scared me. During these times, whenever I started to evaluate my "self" after observing a behavior, I became overwhelmed and stopped the observation. For example, when the "objective self" observed engaging in a behavior that was inconsistent with my value system, the realization was painful. I was in the clinic's monthly meeting and witnessed that the clinical director minimized and even, somehow, devalued a therapist's appropriate and ethical way of approaching an angry client. I, in the role of "subjective self," just looked at the director in surprise but did not support the therapist who was treated unfairly by the supervisor. Observing this behavior was accompanied by immediate analyzation and criticism by the "objective self." At this point, the "subjective self" preferred not to be observed by showing distress and anxiety. The "objective self" intervened prematurely when the "subjective self" was not accustomed to and ready for its presence. In that level of my self-development, the objective and subjective selves had been acquaintances, but not friends. I learned from the experience that before the habituation of self-observation, reflection and self-evaluation can cause confusion and put an end to the process of self-observation. Therefore, the first step of self-awareness is self-observation and mindfulness.

Gradually, the process became easier because I grew accustomed to myself as an observer in the same way that one becomes accustomed to having someone in one's physical presence. Also, I was just a simple observer; observing was not as threatening as analyzing a behavior. The observation occurred simultaneously with the action that was being observed without judgment, analysis, or worry. Slowly, I became used to fully perceiving the present moment experience and became accustomed to observing my "self" objectively. At this point, I became ready to utilize objective self, to self-reflect and self-analyze. Self-analyzing was no longer threatening. It was bearable and tolerable when the "objective self" imposed criticism and compassionate when the "objective self" incorporated praise on me. Self-reflection, or evaluating my feelings and thoughts, was a gradual process as well. The acceptance of present experiences was a gateway to analyzing my feelings and thoughts. It helped with letting my inner guard down. Protecting the "self" became unnecessary and irrelevant.

Attaining Fulfilment and Inner Peace

Becoming aware of the role of subjective and objective self requires a conscious willingness to do so. Self-reflection cannot occur without awareness of these two different roles of the self, but as long as one becomes habitual in using this capability of the "self," I learned that self-reflection is inevitable.

In my case, especially at the beginning, self-reflection was not easy. It was a lot easier to be ignorant and to just live, act, and assume "I always act based on my personal values, I certainly have full control of my thoughts and feelings, and I completely understand my feelings." But instead I reflected on my behaviors by asking myself whether each behavior was consistent with my values. What are the evidences? What do I think about the behavior? How do I feel about that? Am I satisfied? Irritated? Frightened? What internal factors triggered and led to my behavior? What external factors were involved? Is there any way I can improve this behavior? How did others perceive my behavior? And so on. Sometimes, I started to analyze the feelings first, other times the thoughts or behaviors; but I knew, somehow, I should eventually address all three angles of the triangle of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. For instance, I did not attend a required meeting in the clinic I worked at. This behavior was consistent with my personal values but inconsistent with my professional values. On a personal level, I did not want to waste my precious time. On a professional level, I had a responsibility to exchange and share knowledge and insights with other colleagues. I felt nervous and vulnerable to some degree and I thought the meeting would have been a waste of time and boring. But, I did not want to be recognized as an irresponsible colleague, either. The internal trigger was my tiredness with the daily work, and the external was my frustration with having an authoritative and inflexible supervisor. I could have improved this behavior by attending a future meeting and redirecting it into a meaningful, beneficial, and flexible discussion. Whenever I felt emotionally overwhelmed in paying attention to my feelings, thoughts, and behaviors fully and analyzing them, I stopped the process. However, I felt compelled to return to those thoughts/feelings again.

It was astonishing to me how I was able to see my "self" from both roles of the subjective and objective self. When I activated the objective self by self-observation and accepted the objective "self" as a mirror of my value system, I felt free and enlightened. It did not mean that I stopped having behaviors inconsistent with my personal values completely. It means my "subjective self" was more aware of value-based behaviors, and my "objective self" played its role of evaluation more often and was not a stranger. They were comfortable with one another, which made self-reflection smoother.

Each self-reflection drove me towards an organized, peaceful, and enlightened state of mind and as a consequence, all fears washed away and were replaced with acceptance and openness. It appears that self-reflection increased my self-awareness and self-awareness in turn increased my self-reflection (Furman, Coyne, & Negi, 2008). Without noticing at the time, I was experiencing the cycle of self-reflection and self-awareness. I felt that I was getting closer to my true self. Living with self-awareness does not mean that I can change all my undesirable feelings, thoughts, and behaviors easily. It means that I am aware of my limited knowledge but infinite capacity. It means that I do not try to pretend to be knowledgeable and wise when I am not. It

means moving towards becoming a real person. It is a spiritual journey in terms of increasing self-consciousness.

I was a wanderer in my own self-awareness journey when I started to interview the participants in my dissertation study. I was eager to listen to them and understand their experiences and inner worlds. When I interviewed my participants, 35 university professors across the United States, I embraced their experiences of self-reflection and understood them intuitively because they resonated with my own journey towards self-awareness. During the process of the interviews, the interviewees became emotionally engaged. Some of them cried and one participant said: "I am telling you a story that I have never told anybody before." They lived their experiences, but it was hard for them to describe and explain their journeys to self-awareness. Each of these 35 participants had followed a specific path, but all were satisfied with the result of the process. They indicated that practicing self-awareness gradually became part of their way of life. Although the interview was designed to be 30–45 minutes long, some described their experiences so vividly and expansively that I just could not stop them at the end of the allotted time. I felt that I experienced those moments of understanding and enlightenment with them.

Interactions with my participants and listening to their stories has also enriched my knowledge and has driven me to do more self-reflection. During the two years of the dissertation process, I learned to proceed from self-observation to self-reflection and later self-awareness. When I was ready to defend my dissertation, I was able to "move freely from subject-self to object-self" (Feize, 2015). I was aware of my conscious self as an "I" and was able to observe my "self" as an objective or "me" easily.

Integrating the Three Stages

I learned from my dissertation literature review that the stimulus to practice mindfulness could be external or internal: coming from outward events and circumstances or from one's mental states (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). The process of obtaining self-awareness includes the acknowledgement of self-observation, the engagement of the "self" in the roles of subjective or objective and self-reflection. When one is exposed to an internal or external stimulation, s/he observes the stimuli and related feeling and behaviors. This is a process of observing the "self" objectively. After this stage, one becomes ready to evaluate his/her own behaviors and raise awareness of the "self."

It seems that all individuals are exposed to circumstances that can prompt or stimulate the process of gaining self-awareness (Garcia & Soest, 2000; Lyke, 2009). Various factors determine the readiness and willingness of individuals to engage in the process that will result in raised self-awareness. Often the circumstances or stimuli that prompt a journey into self-awareness involve encounters with perspectives that are inconsistent with our current view of the "self" or the world. Frequent or intense encounters with this type of "otherness" may increase the likelihood that an individual will begin to observe and reflect seriously on the self. However, readiness to engage in the process that leads to self-awareness varies and is not easily predictable. In my case, I was ready to connect to my true self and the dissertation topic was an opportunity to direct me to the right track.

Practical Implications

Currently as a social work educator, I encourage and guide my students to move towards self-awareness through assignments and class activities. I begin by exploring students' understanding of the concept. In lower level courses, I encourage and emphasize critical thinking strategies as a gateway to explore the "self." Students learn to analyze the outer world in order to get ready to analyze their inner world. In upper level courses, the goal of the assignments is to stimulate students' self-awareness. I make it clear to students that without connecting to their own inner worlds, they will not be able to connect to their clients' inner worlds. The final step is inviting students to observe their "self."

For example, at the beginning of the semester, I ask graduate students to choose one of their behaviors that they do not like and wish to change (target behavior). They are asked to observe the frequency and intensity of the target behavior and any attempts they make to change it. The students make charts to demonstrate their efforts during the semester. At the end of the semester, they are graded on the process, not the result. I am not interested in exploring their methods of changing their behaviors. My role is to stimulate self-observation; it is up to the students to decide whether or not to change the target behavior.

It is difficult for some students to understand what is meant by self-awareness, while others are eager to learn about it. However, students who are resistant at first are better equipped and more suitable candidates for exploring "self" than those who are indifferent. It is possible that the resistance is an indicator of fear but also of a latent interest in exploring and overcoming their fears. They most likely have some degree of self-consciousness and fear of the unknown and on the unconscious level would like to explore and overcome their fears.

In my practice as a mental health therapist, I try to stimulate my clients' self-awareness by asking them to observe particular behaviors. Resistance to exploring the "self" is common in this stage, and I employ my own resistance experiences to better understand my clients' disinclinations. If they decide to put the resistance aside and engage in the process of self-observation and mindfulness, they are likely to be able to move toward changing their lives.

For example, with clients who are in denial about their objectionable behaviors, I raise their awareness so they see the discrepancy between their assertions and actions. I simply show them that what they say is different from what they do. Clients might say, "I care about my health." I might then ask these clients to make a chart of each time they eat healthy food or exercise each week.

These clients might be resistant to this exercise, and I accept this and help them explore the roots of their resistance. Those who succeed in dealing with the resistance are more likely to increase their self-awareness and advance in the process of recovery.

Summary

In this narrative, I reflected on my own dissertation and the way it affected my life and as a

result changed not only my own life, but also my students' and clients' lives. It is my journey of intertwining personal and professional worlds. This journey had a starting point but will continue as a life-long process, with no particular destination in sight.

I do not assert that self-awareness is a panacea and will solve every individual's problems. However, self-awareness is perhaps a catalyst and facilitates the process of change. It is empowering that everyone has the capacity and potential to go through the process of self-awareness, overcome associated fears, and manage and change their life.

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Social Work Education and Hurricane Florence

Peter V. Nguyen

Abstract: The article explores the educational experience at the University of North Carolina Wilmington School of Social Work before and after Hurricane Florence in September 2018. The article covers topics of teaching with a condensed curriculum and how to best work with social work students to ensure success. The article also ties in the concept of emergent volunteering as a part of the social work field internship. Finally, the article proposes ways of utilizing the unique expertise in social work to prepare for future disasters.

Keywords: social work education, condensed curriculum, student success, emergent volunteering

Media coverage on tropical storm Florence began early September 2018. It was the peak of hurricane season and other storms were forming. Three years ago, my family and I moved for the first time to a coastal city. We quickly adopted the attitude of the locals, who dismissed hurricanes and at the same time made preparations should any make landfall. As days passed, Florence grew quickly from a tropical storm to a Category 1, then Category 2 hurricane, while heading toward the US mainland—the realization (and fear) that Florence would make landfall near Wilmington, North Carolina, became the lead weather story.

In North Carolina, each county and city decides whether to evacuate in the event of an approaching storm. Counties around Wilmington were under mandatory evacuation orders, but in Wilmington evacuation was voluntary. This forced me and my wife to make a decision. We had to consider the impact of living through the storm, not to mention the potential risk it imposed, which could be a traumatic experience—especially for our five-year-old daughter. Our neighbors, an older couple, were sheltering in place; had it just been a choice for me and my wife, we might have done the same, but our daughter's safety and well-being was paramount. It was nearly impossible to find lodging within a 200-mile range of the city. Fortunately, we found an Airbnb in Atlanta and left, leaving behind students, colleagues, neighbors, and friends.

This narrative is my personal experience as a faculty member in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. I focus on topics of ensuring student emotional readiness to successfully complete a condensed curriculum after a disaster while maintaining academic integrity. Further, I examine the learning and volunteering opportunities that arose from a crisis. Finally, for the future, I propose responses and recommendations by drawing on the experience and expertise of the University of North Carolina Wilmington College of Health and Human Services, where the School of Social Work, School of Nursing, and School of Allied Health reside.

As the week of September 10, 2018, approached, Hurricane Florence was upgraded to Cat 4 with Wilmington, NC, its likely landfall. The phrase *direct hit* was prominent in conversations. The University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) is situated between Wrightsville Beach and the Cape Fear River, approximately four miles in each direction. It is a picturesque campus with Georgian architecture and beautiful landscaping forested with mature pines. With a

population of over 17,000 students and more than 2,000 faculty and staff, closing campus and evacuating students was the safest choice. On September 10, 2018, the university administration issued a voluntary evacuation, followed by a mandatory evacuation order the next day. Hurricane Florence made landfall in Wilmington on September 14 as a Category 1 hurricane but lingered over the area until September 16th. In total, Florence deposited 8 trillion gallons of water, rain up to 35 inches in some parts of North Carolina. Over a million people lost electricity, 50 people died, and the initial damage was estimated to be $22 billion. Florence caused widespread damage to the city of Wilmington and surrounding counties. As Florence slowly crawled northeast, it left behind thousands of damaged homes and businesses and thousands of downed trees. A local school district in the next county closed for 27 school days due to mold damage in school buildings; 9% of the student population became homeless and 70 employees of the school district were displaced. An estimated total of 2,500 roads in the state were closed, many severely damaged or washed away. Some of these roads were major thoroughfares connecting Wilmington to surrounding cities. People were unable to return to their homes and supplies were not delivered for days. Wilmington became an island. At the time of this writing three months later, there are still areas in Wilmington where debris is gathered at the side of the road and has yet to be picked up. From the sky, one can see many houses with blue tarps due to roof damage.

The UNCW campus suffered extensive damage and closed for a month. Over 225 trees had fallen, several academic buildings with expensive scientific equipment had been badly damaged, and several dormitories had suffered severe water damage. The shutdown resulted in 600 minutes of lost instructional time for a three-credit hour course, creating a challenge to deliver 75% of the instructional semester in about 50% of calendar time remaining. The university administration worked feverishly to move students back into dorms, ensured buildings and classrooms were safe for classes to resume, and brainstormed ways to make up classes while maintaining curricular integrity. Websites were created to provide daily updates, financial and emotional support, and volunteer opportunities. As the university resumed classes one month later there were still off-campus students who were homeless as apartments were not safe to inhabit and on-campus students still unable to return to their dorms due to water damage. Though the university added additional hotel rooms in the area to accommodate these students, there were not enough, and many had to sleep in the gymnasium on cots when they returned to class.

As we resumed classes, another hurricane, Michael, landed in Florida as a Category 4 storm. Though landfall was far away, there was fear of Michael bringing additional rain to the Carolinas. Anticipating more flooding due to the already saturated grounds, the UNCW administrators made the decision to close for one day. This created more challenges for the campus maintenance crew, who were still cleaning the campus and getting facilities to be habitable. This also affected faculty and students who were already working to deliver the curriculum in a shortened semester. Fortunately, Hurricane Michael passed farther to the east than predicted, sparing Wilmington from more rain, more problems.

Shortened Semester, Flexibility, Emotional Readiness

A large university is a city unto itself, composed of interdependent entities and populated by thousands. Academic units work in tandem with auxiliary units (Registrar, IT, Financial Aid, Facilities, Dining, Human Resources, etc.) to support the needs of faculty and students. A major disruption cascades throughout the entire system, affecting each and every unit and requiring careful planning to bring every unit back in a coordinated and controlled fashion. In sum, Hurricane Florence was a major disruption to the academic calendar, educational process, and administrative functions at UNCW.

Rollo and Zdziarski (2007) define a crisis as "an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution" (p. 27-28). Though Florence was not a sudden crisis (like a tornado or earthquake), its impact was unpredictable. The Provost's Office worked with the North Carolina Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to reduce the number of instructional hours while maintaining the integrity of the curriculum. To make up for such a large and unprecedented loss of time, UNCW Academic Affairs developed a diverse and flexible plan. This plan proposed adjustments to the academic calendar like having classes when breaks were scheduled, changing the daily class schedule by extending instruction time, and giving students the opportunity to make up time through outside-of-class and/or online assignments. In some cases, faculty and students decided to hold make-up courses if necessary. Overall, the university was able to keep its timeline for Fall graduation.

In the School of Social Work, in addition to the loss of instruction time in class, many of its students also lost time at field internships; multiple area agencies where social work students intern suffered great damage and closed for a time. Additionally, some field instructors suffered personal loss and were unable to return to work immediately, leaving students without supervision. The school's field coordinator was able to assign task supervisors for a few students who did not have their field instructor. The school director worked with the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) regarding instruction time and field internship hours. As a result, social work students had the option of working extra hours at their internships upon their return and were allowed to count field hours through volunteering with various recovery efforts. This volunteering option allowed the students to participate in disaster relief efforts and be exposed to different populations and issues. It was touching to hear from multiple students that they appreciated the counting of volunteer hours, but would have helped with the recovery process regardless. Additionally, students also had the option of completing field hours the following semester if necessary. The weekly field seminar class where students come together to process field internship became a crucial space to assess students' emotional states as they moved forward. It allowed us to discuss the many clinical and macro lessons about the aftermath from the perspective of students, clients, agencies, and community. For example, we discussed case management concepts as most students volunteered at local agencies to connect hurricane victims with community resources. Several were excited to recite their triage experience with an interdisciplinary team. Many were amazed at the opportunities to translate the social work interviewing and assessment skills that they had learned in social work practice classes to real

life situations. The students also witnessed the emotional toll of those affected by Hurricane Florence. Despite the pervasive melancholy, many expressed feeling rewarded by helping others and, at the same time, easing some of their own "post-hurricane trauma." In particular, I loved hearing so many indicate that the volunteering experience affirmed why they chose social work as a career. Overall, the field seminar was a perfect place where students received support from one another and discussed the hardships faced by some of the clients at their internship or volunteer venue while serving as a teaching venue for social work crisis intervention.

In addition to structural changes in curricula such as instructional time and revision of the university calendar, it was essential for instructors to be sensitive to the emotions of returning students. Hurricane Florence had direct and indirect effects on everyone. Many students were affected directly by being displaced from loss or damage of home, apartment, or dorm. Meanwhile, others were concerned by knowing a classmate or family member who suffered damages. In addition, many students suffered financial hardship from being unable to work when businesses remained closed. The witnessing of the devastation, direct and indirect impact, financial hardships, and the condensed semester culminated in emotional distress for days and weeks after Florence. I realized the emotional toll, if left unacknowledged, would greatly hinder student focus as the semester progressed. It was therefore extremely important for instructors to be sensitive to the emotional state of students and to assess their readiness upon return. In the first class after reopening, in my social work diversity class, I intentionally used class time with the students to survey and get a sense of where they were emotionally. I found many were eager to return to school as a way to regain a sense of normalcy. When asked what they needed from me as we resumed classes, many expressed it was important for their instructors to be flexible with classes and assignments given the shortened semester. It is worth noting that while students indicated a need for flexibility and understanding from instructors, it was important for students that the integrity of the curriculum be maintained. Due to the shortened time, I spent more time meeting with students outside of class to guide them through the assignments and arranged for our Writing Center to have one consistent tutor to work with my particular class. This hands-on approach from me and consistent writing advising played a great role in comforting students as well as optimizing their learning. Further, I collaborated with students to modify some class assignments and topics to relate to Hurricane Florence. For example, some assignment topics included exploring the effect of Florence on vulnerable populations such as older adults or impoverished groups. I also collaborated with students on the revised due dates of assignments. This collaborative effort of revising class assignments and due dates, processing students' emotions, and assessing their readiness was based on an effort to heal and have a successful semester. It was a genuine effort to empower students to have input and assert control over their lives as they struggled for normalcy. In short, I utilized the principles of Universal Design, which focus on eliminating and adapting learning barriers by being flexible and considering the needs of the students and current circumstances (Rose, Harbour, Johnston, Daley, & Abarbanell, 2006).

Hurricane Florence's devastation provided many teachable moments for social work students. I integrated social justice topics that relate to natural disasters into lectures and class discussions. Students were asked to reflect on parallels between their lives and the lives of their clients, especially oppressed populations or clients from their internships. For example, I asked students

to compare the uprooting of their lives at last-minute notice and how that may be similar to the everyday life of those living in poverty and always in danger of eviction. I asked them to reflect on the lives of undocumented immigrants living in daily fear of deportation, especially in the current political climate. Other examples included economics or aging where students were asked to contemplate the resources required to evacuate or the plight of the older adult population that depends on others. Finally, topics of mental health such as trauma, stigma, and access to treatment were discussed. Throughout the discussion of these topics, the social work students were able to use their own situation and reflect to empathize with the lives of those who suffered losses from Hurricane Florence. These were lessons and feelings that could not have been generated from assignments or lectures, but rather from real life experiences.

Emergent Volunteering

Crises create adversities, but also present opportunities, especially for those of us in helping professions such as social work. Hurricane Florence had all-around social, physical, economic, and emotional effects on Wilmington, its surrounding counties, and UNCW. As a result, there were many people who needed help as soon as the rain subsided, for weeks thereafter, and will need support for months to come. There were ample volunteer opportunities for UNCW students organized by the University Office of Community Engagement and academic colleges. UNCW students joined organizations such as FEMA, churches, and local government and non-profit agencies to participate in search and rescue efforts, distribute relief supplies, aid rescue workers, work with displaced families and children, and help with animal shelters. For example, some students volunteered with Catholic Charities to advocate on behalf of people who lost their homes by gathering the required paperwork to apply for FEMA rental assistance. Others volunteered at shelters where homeless people and people who lost their homes were housed.

Because the School of Social Work received permission from CSWE to count volunteer hours as part of internships, there were many opportunities for the social work students to participate in real life crises with first responders and affected clients. In many ways, Wilmington became a live simulation lab for social work students. Twigg and Mosel (2017) wrote that after a catastrophic event such as a hurricane or earthquake, the immediate response from the community is spontaneous and self-organized. Those involved in the recovery efforts are coined *emergent* groups or spontaneous volunteers such as family members, friends, and neighbors forming a *therapeutic community*. Many UNCW students who stayed participated in recovery efforts immediately after Florence left and were joined by students who returned to campus later. My social work students indicated the combination of the flexibility and understanding by the instructors and the opportunity to help the community was the optimal formula to moving forward after Florence. Furthermore, the students also stated they grew closer to each other and bonded even deeper as they helped each other and the community. This sentiment concurs with Twigg and Mosel (2017). They stated:

> There can be positive emotional and psychological benefits to individuals from being involved in response activities. Involvement often has a transformative effect on volunteers, stimulating self-esteem, interconnection, healing and empowerment; supporting individual recovery from trauma; and helping volunteers to build new relationships in their communities.

It may also lead to greater involvement in community and voluntary work, and a stronger sense of community solidarity, as well as to changes in individual life choices such as seeking work in more caring and community-oriented professions. (p. 450)

Hurricane Florence presented an unexpected dimension of learning and helping for students that could never be offered in a typical academic internship. Through volunteering, social work students had an opportunity to discover existing concerns beyond their primary area of internship interests. Along the way, they also found it to be healing as the process of helping others was therapeutic for them.

Aftermath

There will be other hurricanes. As this is being written, devastating wildfires ravage California. The School of Social Work is in a unique position to collaborate with the other units in the College of Health and Human Services, the School of Nursing and the School of Allied Health, to prepare for disasters. Due to the unique expertise of each school, it would be worthwhile to create a class focusing on the responses and coordination of the three units to natural disasters. Further, because the College of Health and Human Services has an extensive network within the community because three of its units have internships as part of the curriculum, it is equally important to include community partners and utilize these resources as part of the response. In particular, the School of Social Work has already planned a training with Red Cross to train the faculty.

The mental health impact from a natural disaster can be detrimental and long-lasting. The School of Social Work can partner with the university counseling center and field agencies to help university employees and people in the community recover long after a disaster. In addition to providing counseling, the School of Social Work can use its community organizing principles and take the lead to mobilize students on campus and community members to tackle social inequalities that came to light during and after Hurricane Florence. In short, the School of Social Work and university should take advantage of opportunities to work with and serve the community in the midst of a tragedy.

Coda

Through difficult times people find common bonds and unite to help each other. I had a front-row view of the resilience of students and the community. It was a chance to see a united community at a time the division of politics seems to dominate the daily news. There was no red or blue, only "We—Wilmington Strong." Though not surprised, I was amazed to have witnessed the giving and helping spirit of social work students who helped one another and reached out to the community. I admired their insistence on maintaining the integrity of the curriculum by doing extra assignments and attending additional classes. It was their *can-do* attitude and optimism that reminded me of the reason for entering academia and for giving hope to the social work profession and the lives our students will touch.

Acknowledgements

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This I Believe:
Examining the Construction of Truth, Belief, and Reason

Sarah Emily Faubert

Abstract: There are several advantages to epistemological and personal exploration in social work research, education, and practice. This reflection is especially important in qualitative social work research where social inquiry may be shaped by assumptions about the process of knowing and, therefore, has the potential to impact the interpretation of events. Students may struggle to resonate with the complex and abstract concepts associated with epistemology, and there is a paucity of literature regarding the experiences of developing insight into this topic and its personal and professional implications. Drawing on personal experiences, I reflect on the experience and importance of epistemological exploration, a lifetime project for those in the helping professions.

Keywords: epistemology, epistemological exploration, personal beliefs, critical reflection, self-reflection, social work, constructivism

Introduction

There has long been debate regarding the relevance of epistemology in professional programs including social work (Aymer & Okitikpi, 2000). Many agree that social work students should be provided with opportunities to develop their understanding of epistemology and the implications of personal beliefs and values, and most social work curricula at graduate levels include an examination of epistemological underpinnings (Marra & Palmer, 2008); however, students may struggle to resonate with complex and novel concepts concerning epistemology, and contemporary literature is largely void of the implications of these considerations from a personal perspective. In an attempt to advance this area of inquiry, this paper discusses the development of an understanding of the importance of personal and epistemological reflection in social work practice and outlines implications for consumers/clients, students, and practitioners. The first section describes the underpinnings of epistemology and postmodern theories. The latter half of the paper uses a first-person narrative to outline the relevance of this in practice.

Epistemological Underpinnings

Epistemology, which concerns the study of knowledge and the sources of knowledge, is relevant to many helping professions as it reflects how the beliefs individuals hold regarding the certainty of knowledge, the process of knowing, and the justification of knowledge claims may have an impact on actions and behaviors (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Marra & Palmer, 2008). Specifically, epistemology is relevant to social work practice as skilled practitioners, who will be required to use critical thinking skills to inform conscious decision-making practices, should be able to understand how their own knowledge sources and beliefs may hold bias (Anderson-Meger, 2014; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2009). One way to achieve this understanding is through epistemological exploration, which allows students to explore where their own beliefs and

knowledge reside and, thus, develop a competency to critically evaluate information and resolve and coordinate theory and evidence (Hofer, 2004; Kuhn, 1991). Unfortunately, the importance of epistemological exploration and relevant implications are often overlooked and underappreciated by students who may struggle to resonate with concepts and material(s). This may disadvantage students who lack the opportunity to gain both personal and professional insight as well as consumers/clients who may benefit from a practitioner who has critically evaluated their own sources of knowledge and the implications of the beliefs they hold.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism is relevant to epistemology, ontology, and the nature of perception, cognition, learning, and behaviors as it is based on the premise that individuals attach unique meanings to life experiences (Carpenter & Brownlee, 2017; Granvold, 2008). As such, realities are formulated individually or are co-constructed interpersonally (Granvold, 2008).

Philosophically, constructivism concerns the nature of reality and being and the nature and acquisition of human knowledge (Baerveldt, 2013; Carpenter & Brownlee, 2017). The constructionist view of epistemology acknowledges that knowledge occurs at both conscious and unconscious levels (Granvold, 2008). Thus, it becomes important to examine the unconscious processes whereby knowledge is constructed in order to avoid potential biases that may be the result of personal experience and constructed beliefs.

Constructivism is a relatively new conceptual framework for social work practice (Carpenter & Brownlee, 2017). The constructivist perspective suggests that knowledge is developed as interpretations of experience and emerges in historical contexts depending on human activity (Turner, 2017). Therefore, the knowledge and understanding that social workers (among others) possess is a result of the experiences they have encountered (Carpenter & Brownlee, 2017). Individuals, then, act accordingly based on the knowledge they have gained through these experiences.

Constructivism not only provides insight into the development of knowledge, but also provides an understanding of human behavior based on causality. Since the personal experiences we have had lead to our beliefs and are not necessarily an accurate representation of the truth and reality of others, the potential for bias must be acknowledged and accounted for.

Personal Experience with Epistemology and Postmodern Perspectives

The underpinnings of epistemology did not resonate with me until my first year of doctoral studies in social work when I was tasked with successfully grasping the key concepts and theories surrounding this topic. I had no prior experience with epistemology, and while I had considered some aspects of how my own personal beliefs and philosophies had the potential to bias my practice, I had never considered the foundational components of my beliefs, where my knowledge came from, or why this mattered.

Like many students, I found the subject of epistemology complex and confusing and I struggled

to see its direct relevance to practice. I struggled to resonate with abstract terms and, when I turned to the literature, it was difficult to find open and transparent discourse (for example, through personal narratives) from those navigating similar unfamiliar territory. Exploring aspects of constructivism, familiar territory for many social science researchers, helped to make sense of the importance of exploring these issues and the implications that this has on practitioners both personally and professionally. Constructivism helped me to comprehend how I came to understand what I believe to be true, how my reality and beliefs are subject to change, and how these beliefs and realities vary from one person to the next. While I had skilled professors who helped me better understand this topic, I realized there was a great paucity of literature as it concerns the real-life, raw evidence and experiences of how these factors influence practice and why it matters. I had hoped to find more information and insight from fellow students and practitioners who offered tangible examples of why this information was relevant in practice. The following section outlines how I was able to resonate with this topic through the integration of my own knowledge, sources of knowledge, and experiences in practice.

"This I Believe": Personal Evidence of the Importance of Epistemological Exploration

This paper has discussed the constructivist view of human knowing using literature relevant to social work and epistemology. However, what is lacking in current literature is personal and reflective evidence of the importance for epistemological exploration and the value of consciousness of one's personal epistemology. The following section will illustrate the importance of epistemological exploration using three personal examples (vignettes).

I Believe in Kindness

Research indicates that students' beliefs and understanding often relate to their study domain (Hofer, 2004). Thus, it is not surprising that my desire to become a member of the helping profession is deeply rooted in my upbringing and in the interactions I have shared with others. Like most youth, growing up I was exposed to various forms of bullying. Having witnessed numerous acts of aggression and injustice toward my peers, I grew to feel I had an obligation to advocate for those who were subject to unkindness. I remember experiencing strong feelings of sadness and a desire to make things better. These feelings instilled in me a desire to help others and, over time, I sought teachings and role models who valued acceptance, kindness, and non-judgment.

By university, I had decided to pursue a degree in social work where I hoped to ally with like-minded professionals who shared the beliefs I brought with me to the program. After completing a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree, I accepted a job working with survivors of psychiatric deinstitutionalization. Had it not been for my personal experiences (and constructed reality) growing up, I may not have decided to pursue a career fighting social injustices. Before long, my reality was changed by experiences once again. After working as a front-line social worker, I began to see even more flaws in current systems and policies. This new reality—combined with my previously fostered drive to prevent injustice—led to a belief that pursuing a Doctoral degree and becoming a social science researcher would allow to me to

address the problems I'd identified.

My experiences witnessing acts of unkindness toward others encouraged me to pursue education that I felt would lead to change. My reality was shaped throughout my life and has led me to believe certain things and act in certain ways based on my personal experiences. Had working as a front-line social worker revealed that all systems were running smoothly and effectively, my reality would not have necessitated further action on my part. However, seeing these issues and having these experiences led me to make decisions that have greatly impacted the way I think, the way I perceive things, the knowledge I seek, and the way I interact with the world around me.

Knowing why and how I know what I know has allowed me to become critically aware that my reality is not the ultimate truth. Furthermore, I acknowledge that my reality may be privileged and is not an accurate portrayal of the way things truly are. Thus, relying on personal experience alone is not enough and if I am to be truly effective in my pursuit of kindness, I need to know why I believe in kindness in the first place.

I Believe "This Too Shall Pass"

Resilience has always been an interest of mine. I am constantly reminded and inspired by the way countries, people, and communities bounce back after tragedy. My belief that things get better stems from my own personal experience that no matter how bad things are, they will improve.

This notion became clearer to me in my twenties when I lost a dear friend. I did not think things would ever get better. It was an unimaginable loss that, at the time, I could not imagine ever recovering from. I recall people telling me that things would improve, but despite their well-wishes, I did not feel better. I experienced feelings of grief that I had never felt before and pain beyond measure. It took years, but over time, my wounds healed and I was able to move on in ways I never thought possible. Knowing that I was able to overcome such a tragedy strengthened and empowered me, giving me a new appreciation of my time with others. I believe having this experience not only instilled in me a desire to help others during their time of suffering, but led me to believe that even though it may not seem so at the time, things do get better.

The belief that things do improve may seem harmless and its epistemological basis trivial, but it is important to examine the implications of this seemingly simple belief. Just because I was able to surmount this tragedy does not mean that others will have the same experience. For some, the pain and suffering may never truly pass; for others, the pain may even worsen. Thus, my reality is not shared by everyone. By not examining the origins and implications of this belief, I might have become an impatient and discouraging social work practitioner who could not understand why people were not adhering to my belief that "this too shall pass." Not only would this be insensitive, it would be ethically irresponsible. Thus, knowing why I hold that belief and where this knowledge came from allows me to act sensibly and consciously when working with others who have experienced a similar loss.

I Believe Knowledge is Power

I was raised in a single-parent home. My mother, a highly educated and successful woman, raised my brother and me amid busy work schedules and appointments all on her own. While other children of single mothers struggled financially, my brother and I never went without. I began to attribute our privileged circumstances not only to my mother's dedication to her career and to her family, but also to the knowledge and education she pursued that allowed her to obtain a job that provided for us. My mother instilled in me a desire to accumulate as much education as possible; I believe that without this influence, I would not be where I am today.

While I was fortunate enough to have this experience growing up, I am well aware that this is not the reality for most single-parent families. Thus, my reality could be described as privileged and is notably a construction based on personal experiences. Examining the epistemological underpinnings of my belief in knowledge is both important and humbling. Without examining why I hold this belief, I risk making decisions that are based on my reality and personal experience alone. This would not only be erroneous but incongruent with social work values and ethics.

I am aware that education is a privilege that not everyone has, and I remind myself of this daily. The fact that I am able to attend university and learn from brilliant minds that have both knowledge and practice wisdom to share is a privilege that I do not take lightly. I see education as a provider of the skills I need to critically reflect on information that is presented to me and also as a means to facilitate changes that will help others.

Future Implications

From a constructivist perspective, it is evident that the experiences outlined above greatly impact my current beliefs and practices both personally and professionally. With these beliefs impacting decision-making processes, it is clear that social workers have an ethical obligation to examine their personal beliefs in order to provide evidence-based practices and avoid potential biases and assumptions. Epistemological exploration has many implications for social workers, and I believe it is crucial that epistemology is a subject explored by students who may be tasked with making decisions that will affect others who will most certainly have experiences that differ from their own. Knowing that realities are constructed and that people develop knowledge based on their personal experiences has important practice implications. For example, students who are aware of their personal epistemology will be able to better understand that concepts and ideas that seem real and justifiable to them may not apply to a wider population (Aymer & Okitikpi, 2000). This leads to compassion, understanding, and acknowledgement that multiple realities exist and that realties are often fluid. Additionally, as students explore their epistemological basis, they learn about themselves on personal and professional levels. Thus, epistemology offers insights into personal beliefs and values and fosters intellectual and personal growth in students (Hofer, 2004).

This paper attempted to accentuate the value of consciousness of personal epistemology in social work. As evidenced throughout this paper, future research should aim to promote the personal

and critical reflection of social work students. As this paper has done, works should encourage students to explore their personal epistemologies and relate them to their professional experience. Although recent research has provided valuable insights into the importance of epistemology, little literature exists that demonstrates the intersection of personal beliefs and their direct relationship to practice.

Conclusion

Epistemology may be thought of as an issue better suited for philosophers than social workers; however, with the many implications for practice, it is important that students are encouraged to examine the epistemologies that guide their practice actions (Dean & Fenby, 1989). While current research has identified the benefit of epistemological discussion in pedagogy, little has been done to demonstrate the intersection of personal experiences and their impact on belief and practice. Personal and epistemological exploration not only allows social workers to avoid potential biases related to their personal epistemologies, but also facilitates an understanding of client narratives and the construction of knowledge (Siegel, 1989). Social work students may need help developing their theoretical orientation, a lifelong project, and exploring these issues and connecting beliefs and truths to experiences may facilitate this understanding and lead to better outcomes for consumers/clients and practitioners.

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The Shift to Fee-for-Service:
Neoliberalism and Behavioral Health Services

Zakia Clay

Abstract: The rise of neoliberalism has influenced both policy and practice. With an emphasis on the economic market, performance, and efficiency, practitioners must re-examine their role and ethical responsibility to the individual receiving services. The aim of this reflection is to examine the role of fee-for-service in behavioral health and the unintended consequences that occur on the frontlines as practitioners negotiate the need to meet regulatory standards that are, at times, in conflict with providing person-centered care. The author concludes by emphasizing the need for more research on policy implementation and highlights the importance of cultivating a supportive environment while simultaneously advocating for policies that both empower service recipients and allow for service flexibility.

Keywords: neoliberalism, person-centered care, fee-for-service, behavioral health, policy

Introduction

In 2011, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services approved a State Plan Amendment allowing New Jersey to provide Medicaid reimbursable mental health Community Support Services. Community Support Services (CSS) consist of rehabilitative services that support an individual in restoring skills necessary to achieve recovery goals and integrate into the community (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2011). While state plans vary, each agreement allows a state to receive a federal match for each valid service provided (Smith et al., 2000). In this case, maximizing Medicaid dollars can help offset behavioral health costs. New Jersey's state mental health authority identified supportive housing as the program element that would implement CSS as a fee-for-service (FFS) model.

New Jersey's supportive housing providers historically operated on cost-based contracts. However, this funding structure did not necessarily ensure nor monitor high quality service delivery or agency spending. In many ways, I believe, the cost-based contract system was set up for failure. It was inevitable that the burden of supporting behavioral health programs exclusively with cost-based contracts would become unsustainable. At any time, state legislatures could make fiscal decisions that significantly reduce or eliminate the funding allocated for behavioral health contracts. Additionally, states do not have enough fiscal resources to indefinitely support the rising needs of behavioral healthcare.

Transitioning to FFS, in many ways, also means a shift to neoliberal governance. Neoliberalism endorses efficiency, performance, and free market (Harvey, 2007). In New Jersey, although agencies will be independently billing Medicaid for the services they deliver, the state would still maintain regulatory authority over CSS programs. This new arrangement ultimately reveals a hierarchal power between the state and agencies responsible for delivering this rehabilitative service. Further, neoliberalism forces agencies to become more entrepreneurial since they will

rely heavily on FFS reimbursement (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005). For many agencies, shifting to a business model may conflict with their mission to provide person-centered care. For example, implementing a market model can give health insurers and administrators more fiscal power and influence over the types of services delivered (Verhaeghe, 2014). As such, agencies may structure services based on what insurers will pay for rather than what an individual may want to work towards.

New Jersey's mental health authority funded the Rutgers University Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions to provide training and technical assistance to supportive housing agencies transitioning to FFS. As a faculty member on the training and consultation team, I was uniquely positioned to explore the impact of FFS on supportive housing. I also worked in supportive housing for several years, which gave me a good understanding of the previous program policies and practices. As part of my current role, I conduct on-site visits with agencies and speak with staff and the individuals receiving their services. I will share some excerpts from these visits in hopes that policy makers and behavioral health programs can gain insight into the experiences of those directly affected by the change to FFS. Additionally, the aim of this reflection is to examine the role of FFS in behavioral health and the unintended consequences that occur on the frontline as practitioners negotiate the need to meet regulatory standards that are, at times, in conflict with providing person-centered care. I have also been able to explore the neoliberal influences of adopting this model. I will share the stories of front-line practitioners in supportive housing programs and a service recipient to specifically illustrate these unintended consequences and neoliberal influences.

The Transition to Fee-for-Service

New Jersey's transition to FFS means that payment is based on services that fit billable standards. In this case, reimbursement is based on the interventions outlined on an individual's approved rehabilitation plan. Under New Jersey's rehabilitative FFS model, these interventions must address skill deficits and promote independence. The services also need to be documented in a progress note. Prior to Medicaid FFS, agencies provided services that were less formal and not always outlined on an individual's plan. In my experience, a practitioner could spend several months engaging an individual by taking trips to a coffee shop or spend countless hours assisting someone with skills they have already mastered. However, under the new billing infrastructure, Medicaid will not reimburse for providing such services.

The new standardized practice requirements for the rehabilitative FFS model, CSS, also focus on practitioner credentials. Only registered nurses, practitioners with a clinical license, or psychiatrists can complete the formal assessment that drives the reimbursable plan. This is a stark contrast from years past. When I worked in supportive housing, agencies employed individuals with a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, agencies hired peer providers with a mental health diagnosis. Under cost-based contracts, peers and staff with a high school diploma or bachelor's degree could complete assessments. Aside from new staffing requirements, CSS also mandates that an outside entity authorize individualized rehabilitation plans. Previously these plans were reviewed and approved by supervisors within an agency. The transition to FFS forces agencies to adopt a new practice approach that places greater oversight

on the services practitioners deliver. Practitioners with higher credentials generate higher reimbursement rates for an agency, which, in this case, will influence staff recruitment. From a fiscal standpoint, it would be nearly impossible for an agency to remain profitable if they continued to employ primarily high school level staff or peers due to their lower reimbursement rate.

In the case of Medicaid FFS, agencies are forced to increasingly regulate and monitor practitioners to ensure that their work proves profitable to cover overhead costs. This places much more accountability on the individual practitioner. I believe that a neoliberal approach calls for practitioners to be more rigid in the way they work with individuals and more focused on maintaining higher caseloads. As a result of such systemic changes, practitioners become demoralized and alienated (Wallace & Pease, 2011). In speaking with practitioners, in many ways, they lose their professional identity due to enmeshment in a business model that undoubtedly guides their practice. Rather than focusing on providing quality services, practitioners may be expected to structure their work on the services that will generate the most reimbursement.

I could not help but consider that, on a broader scale, neoliberalism significantly affects individuals receiving services. In my opinion, their relationship with practitioners takes a different form. The reconstruction of the therapeutic relationship can result in pathologizing service recipients for financial gain (Wallace & Pease, 2011). I began to consider the possibility of individuals who were independent in many areas of their life getting frequent visits from a practitioner to meet monthly quotas. I wondered if practitioners would focus on a person's deficits rather than strengths so they would be able to maintain the volume needed to remain financially stable. Treating individuals like nothing more than dollar signs goes against the values of the helping profession. On the other hand, I was curious about the benefits of adopting an FFS cost structure. I was excited at the opportunity to visit agencies and hear directly from those contending with the changes.

"Pat": Transportation

I met with a frontline practitioner who began to talk about her work with service recipients and the various goals they work on together to achieve. One task that took up most of her time was driving. She reported that the individuals in the program needed help getting to and from different places in the community. I listened intently as she described one such visit.

   Pat: *"I sit in the car while he's in the grocery store since he doesn't need my help."*

I asked her why she bothers to go if she simply sits in the car and he can shop independently. I also inquired about the possibility of teaching the person how to use public transportation. She explained,

   Pat: *"He would have no other way to get there. There is no public transportation in his area, he can't afford to buy a car, and none of the people he knows has a car. I know they really don't want us to be driving people around, and truthfully I didn't go to school to be a taxi driver, but*

what's the alternative, leaving people without a way to get food?"

I could sense Pat's frustration and could understand her dilemma. During my time in supportive housing, providing transportation was a normal occurrence. I often felt like the "taxi driver" Pat described. However, I never questioned it because I thought it was part of my job.

Cartwright and Hardie (2012) highlight that implementing a policy may indeed produce the positive contributions it was aimed to achieve, but it also produces what Lipsky (2010) calls "unintended consequences" that may not have been initially considered. Pat acknowledged that "they don't want us to be driving people around," likely because transportation is not a billable service under the CSS FFS model. Yet, it has been my experience that practitioners use transportation time with individuals in the program to discuss goals or to build rapport and trust that it will ultimately benefit that individual's well-being. Pat also mentioned that there were no public transportation options available, which made it difficult to teach the person she was working with alternative ways of getting to the store on his own. While discouraging practitioners from transporting individuals may support an agency's fiscal agenda, it, perhaps, unintentionally ignores the needs of individuals receiving services. Pat later stated that she felt that the decision to continue taking the person she was working with to the grocery store week after week was the right thing to do, even if it was not a billable service. She went on to share that she believed that what she was doing was in the best interest of the individual she was working with, which speaks to delivering person-centered care. Though the CSS guidelines specify the need to provide services that foster independence, Pat exercised "discretionary measures" (Lipsky, 2010). She deviated from the agency's new neoliberal guidelines to meet the needs of the person she was working with.

I think most in the helping profession would agree that service recipients have unique needs and practitioners will always be faced with different scenarios that require in-the-moment decisions. Further, I would assert that flexibility is needed to cope with an ever-changing environment, but if practitioners continue to make exceptions to the rules, then what are the "unintended consequences" (Lipsky, 2010) for practice? Often, when system reforms alter organizational demands, frontline practitioners make adjustments that are functional for their agency, but dysfunctional for the individuals they serve (Brodkin, 2011). While well-intentioned, I believe that Pat's decision to routinely accompany an individual to the grocery store could have negative implications.

In my opinion, continuing to take an individual grocery shopping without a plan to teach the skills necessary to get there independently fosters dependent behaviors. An individual will continue to be reliant on the agency to meet his or her transportation needs and perhaps never realize the importance of acquiring such skills. In this case, Pat may be able to work with the service recipient to build relationships with people in the community that can assist him with getting to the grocery store. I wondered if Pat explored vocational goals with the individual so he could one day save money to purchase a car to drive to and from the store on his own. I believe without exploration a person receiving services may not see the alternative possibilities. They may never feel empowered to be more independent and may remain content with others doing for them. Pat's role as an everyday gatekeeper determines whether the individuals she serves

gain access to the services to meet their needs (Spitzmueller, 2016). In this case, I think the person Pat is working with has the right to services that would allow him to reach his optimal potential. Further, Pat could be denying him access by imposing her own rules that are not reflective of the agency's standards. Nevertheless, if Pat's decision to provide transportation to the grocery store addresses the service recipient's needs, then how does this decision fit into the neoliberal approach that her agency is adopting? While this example demonstrates one of the many dilemmas that have emerged from introducing neoliberalism into behavioral health practice, I knew there was much more discourse that existed.

"Anthony": No More "Check-Ins"

I found myself eager to speak with individuals receiving services. Speaking with practitioners is helpful, but people on the receiving end of services give a different perspective. I met with Anthony who has been receiving services for five years. He explained that he was grateful for all the help he has received from the supportive housing staff.

   Anthony: "These people really saved my life. I was at my lowest point and they helped pull me out. They would come visit me every day, just to talk."

When asked if he noticed any changes in the services he was receiving he shared,

   Anthony: "Now they say they can't really do that (come by to talk) anymore. My worker said with the new rules, they're not allowed to do a lot of the things they used to because they'll lose a lot of money. They can only come to do things that are on my treatment plan."

I could sense the disappointment in his voice and began to feel a sense of guilt. I thought of my role in the FFS transition. I was tasked with training the supportive housing workforce about rehabilitative services, but inherent in that was also teaching staff to focus more on what was billable and what was not.

The change to FFS will hold practitioners accountable for the services they deliver. Spitzmueller (2016) suggests that FFS arrangements direct a practitioner's energy away from the stated needs of service recipients and toward what agencies are paid to produce. As I reflected back to the feelings I had when meeting with Anthony, I now see that my guilt was rooted in the apparent loss in humanity. To me, what Anthony described was a blatant focus on reimbursement. In some cases, I think there is value in "just talking." However, in looking more deeply, I recognize that practitioners should be just as focused on what agencies are paid to produce. Most agencies would lose funding if they did not abide by regulatory guidelines. While Anthony was disappointed in the need to shift focus, it was a necessary measure for the agency to ensure sustainability in the changing environment. If there was no focus on revenue, agencies would go out of business and practitioners would lose their jobs. The new CSS FSS model requires practitioners to actively work with individuals on their identified goals if they want to be paid. These standards encourage proactive behaviors. If there were no rules, then a practitioner could presumably continue to visit service recipients day after day, week after week, year after year to "just talk." A review of agency records showed that frontline practitioners, in large part, were

not addressing goals that were outlined on plans during visits. "Check-in" and "follow-up" were common words used in many of the progress notes. However, these were the types of visits that Anthony explained were necessary for his recovery.

For Anthony, having someone to talk to helped him through a difficult time. He believes that there will be no allowances for the things the agency "used to do" because the agency will lose money. One could argue that, in this case, the organizational practices of managerialism undermine the ability of a practitioner to address and support an individual's need (Wallace & Pease, 2011). As I mentioned, even though Anthony viewed his time with practitioners as an opportunity to simply talk, it was clear that it played a meaningful role in his life. The new neoliberal approach provides practitioners with a limited menu of care options that may not always include what a service recipient needs and can be perceived as a "devaluation of caring work" (Healy & Meagher, 2004). I wondered, if the agencies' focus shifts to fiscal compliance, where do service recipients fit?

In my opinion, a compliant agency with compliant workers does not necessarily mean that the care that is being provided is of high quality. Thus, in this case, providing quality services comes with balancing the delivery of person-centered care in a neoliberal environment. However, I think this is difficult. I have spoken to practitioners working in FFS arrangements that report feeling pressured to sustain service volume to reap financial gains for their agency. Such demands, even if unintentional, change the therapeutic relationship. I believe practitioners may begin to see service recipients as dollar signs, and individuals will see practitioners as obedient soldiers out on an agency mission to make money.

In many ways, a neoliberal environment encourages practitioners to push service recipients out of their comfort zone. Simply helping an individual maintain his or her stability or level of functioning may not aid in moving someone along the continuum of care. In this regard, if practitioners are not empowering individuals to be self-sufficient, then they are contributing to a larger systemic issue. I have found that the old way of doing business, reliance on cost-based contracts, did not always hold agencies accountable for poor outcomes. In some neoliberal systems, services can be reduced or cut off to manage costs (Wallace & Pease, 2011). If this were to occur, the impact on service recipients would be significant. As such, agencies need to monitor programmatic outcomes while continuing to provide a supportive environment for service recipients that don't feel fiscally driven.

"Michelle": The Role of Supervision

Michelle, a frontline practitioner, brought her lunch into the conference room and explained that she never has time to eat on a regular day, so our meeting was a welcomed relief from her non-stop schedule. I asked her how she felt about the transition to FFS and was surprised by her response.

   Michelle: "Look, my supervisor says that we are required to do things one way, but then our director comes and says the opposite. I can't make myself crazy trying to figure it out. It's on them—that's why they get paid the big bucks."

Michelle had been with the agency for two years. I found her honesty both amusing and refreshing. Most staff seemed to be walking on eggshells and unsettled by the uncertainty, but Michelle seemed committed to being stress-free during the transition to FFS. I asked her how she viewed her role and she said,

Michelle: "I just do what I'm told and hopefully help a few clients along the way."

It was clear that Michelle did not see herself as someone who had power. Initially she seemed unaffected by the changes; she wasn't going to make herself "crazy trying to figure it out." On the other hand, I believe it was important for Michelle to help the individuals she works with in some way. Michelle did not believe that it was her responsibility to find out about CSS, but rather her supervisor's job to know. Lipsky (2010) states that the focus on more accountability means that frontline practitioners are less controllable. Yet in this case, Michelle is allowing this new form of accountability, which has neoliberal implications, to control how she approaches her work. Michelle's admission that she simply does what she's told implies that she does not always take the time to ask questions about why she is expected to do things a certain way. She also mentioned receiving mixed messages, but later admitted that she does not make the effort to get clarification from her supervisor.

I asked Michelle about the type of supervision she received.

Michelle: "I don't really get supervision unless there's something wrong with my paperwork. There's no time."

Supervision in a neoliberal environment focuses on making sure practitioners hit targets. This method of supervision focuses mainly on assuring that administrative tasks are completed rather than helping practitioners develop skills. For Michelle, her supervisor only meets with her when there is "something wrong" with her paperwork. I knew from other onsite visits and trainings that Michelle was not alone. The transition to FFS, in my opinion, deprioritizes supervision. In the CSS FFS model, supervision time is not reimbursable. Therefore, there is limited time, if any, to support a practitioner with professional development goals and the enhancement of skill competencies.

Hasson (2010) explains that fidelity can be optimized by using facilitation strategies that include manuals, training, and feedback. In this case, Michelle is receiving feedback, but it is fraught with inconsistencies and focuses on problems. As such, I think it is important for mental health authorities to provide opportunities for agencies to learn about the changes and explore ways for agencies to manage tasks they are not paid for, such as supervision. I have found that if supervisors and administrators do not feel supported by the state, then it will be difficult for them to adopt a new approach and guide their frontline staff successfully. Conversely, practitioners should be able to rely on their supervisors to have the correct answers; otherwise, a supervisor's credibility will be diminished. In this case, supervisors hold a position that comes with the responsibility of evaluating implementation and using a communication mechanism that will inform the mental health authority about the new FFS model and its effectiveness on the frontlines.

Some supervisors use disciplinary action as a means to deter unsatisfactory job performance. However, Lipsky (2010) points out that "agencies are constrained from controlling workers too much, particularly in challenging their performance...for fear of generating opposition to management policies and diminishing accountability even further" (p. 163). In this case, I think it is important for Michelle's supervisor to assess whether she is effectively providing CSS and offer further in-vivo training as needed. The absence of such evaluative measures leaves frontline practitioners with the power to enforce rules and practice in ways that may compromise the integrity of CSS. I believe if supervisors allow fear of opposition to dictate their relationship with frontline practitioners, then they are inherently becoming a part of the problem. Without consistent supervision, it will be difficult to implement the FFS model, CSS, as intended. I have seen supervisors, for the most part, rely heavily on frontline practitioners' self-report to evaluate the work being done with service recipients. I do not believe that a practitioner's self-report alone is an adequate monitoring strategy. Although supervision is not reimbursable in the CSS cost structure, I believe it's a task that still needs to be done. Providing supervision, in my opinion, is part of best practices. To me, if frontline staff feel supported and receive consistent supervision then it's likely to have a positive impact on their work. The new neoliberal approach of FFS requires practitioners and supervisors to work closely to ensure a balance between the values of neoliberalism and practice.

Discussion and Implications

In many ways, the cost-based contract system for funding supportive housing services in New Jersey was not empowering or sustainable. There were no consequences for agencies that did not deliver services that led to positive outcomes. I believe the emergence of neoliberalism in behavioral health through new policies like FFS could create many positive changes for agencies. Wallace and Pease (2011) argue that, despite being exposed to neoliberal discourse, practitioners have the ability to resist. Instead of feeling constrained by fiscal demands, practitioners can make their work with individuals more meaningful. I saw firsthand how the old system facilitated dependency on multiple levels: agencies dependent on contracts for funding and service recipients dependent on service providers for help. Shifting to CSS could mean more efforts to empower stakeholders. If practitioners focus their practice on teaching individuals the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful members of the community, then they could have an improved quality of life.

Policies are created to serve as a framework that structure the way practitioners provide services; however, one can argue that some policies are ineffective, either by design or implementation. Practitioners often feel the need to exercise discretion when regulatory requirements are in conflict with the needs of service recipients (Lipsky, 2010). Gaps in policy implementation will exist in perpetuity as long as policymakers make decisions that do not take into consideration the nuances of service delivery. I have seen how policies can diminish the individual experience. For example, policies do not always take into account the individual needs of a person or the efforts that a practitioner may need to take to support someone in their recovery. Instead, policies address broader issues. Additionally, when new policies affect practice, service recipients can be left feeling abandoned.

Under this FFS model, practitioners are urged to focus on delivering the services outlined on an individual's rehabilitation plan. The services or interventions that are delineated on the plan are what the agency will get reimbursed to provide. While, in many cases, practitioners are free to provide support that falls outside of an individual's rehabilitation plan, financial ramifications discourage this type of flexibility. I think agencies that take a rigid stance and begin limiting the services they provide risk alienating the individuals who receive their services. Vasquez, Bingham, and Barnett (2008) explain that the American Mental Health Association firmly discourages abandonment of service recipients. Furthermore, abandonment is considered a form of inappropriate termination.

In this case, service recipients should be made aware of the limitations of an agency given the transition to FFS and work with other stakeholders to find solutions. In doing so, I believe, individuals stay abreast of changes and their needs remain a priority for practitioners. It is not uncommon for service recipients to be unaware of changes that influence their care. Policy makers, mental health authorities, agencies, and practitioners should work to disseminate information to these individuals more readily. Lipsky (2010) describes a system where efforts are made to help "guide a [service recipient] through bureaucracy, and to obtain answers they are otherwise unable to get" (p. 195). Such guidance would not only make the system more manageable for individuals but foster a more transparent therapeutic relationship and empower individuals to make life changes.

If there was more dialogue about what was happening on the frontlines, there may be fewer gaps during implementation. Policy makers and mental health authorities may not be aware of the challenges that exist on the frontlines that would make it, in most cases, nearly impossible to maintain the integrity of new models of service delivery. Creating forums that are accessible to frontline practitioners and the individuals they serve would allow policymakers and mental health authorities to gain the perspectives needed for successful implementation. Additionally, when there are significant changes in approaches to care that impact many community stakeholders, states should consider adopting a process that would support agencies and service recipients during the change. In New Jersey, the state mental health authority has invested in a state-wide training and technical assistance initiative for the agencies affected by the change to FFS. This strategic plan allows an entire workforce to be educated about the FFS changes while teaching practitioners the critical skills necessary to still provide quality rehabilitative services. This type of training initiative can serve as a helpful guide for those creating policy and the frontline staff who have to adhere to the requirements.

Conflict will always exist for practitioners as they manage the needs of their agency versus the needs of the individuals they serve. However, creating a supportive environment where practitioners can turn for support is critical. "Street-level" (Lipsky, 2010) work can leave practitioners feeling overwhelmed and isolated. As such, policy makers and state mental health authorities should consider incorporating supervision into FFS models. Consistent supervision and encouraging peer support could work to cultivate a supportive environment where frontline staff can openly discuss their challenges and receive feedback as they continue to negotiate needs in a neoliberal system that does not always consider the practitioner.

As I look back on writing this reflection, I must acknowledge my initial apprehension. Due to my role in the training and consultation team funded by the state mental health authority, I wondered if my critique of the new FFS model would be met with resistance. I also questioned if I could offer a balanced view of the change. Thus, throughout this process, I was mindful to examine the role of FFS from all angles. I also committed to being transparent about my experiences and offered excerpts from the visits I conducted. For me, this process highlighted the need for more scholarship on policy implementation. Gaining a better understanding of these policies, how they are implemented, and their effect is critical. There is often much more of an emphasis on researching direct practice rather than on the structures and policies in which direct practice operates. By conducting more research on policy implementation, we can identify strategies that could contribute to successful transitions. Ultimately this will create a healthier environment for agency staff and the individuals receiving their services.

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Pause for Something REAL

Casey O'Meara

Abstract: Learning, authentic and relevant, is life. A pause for reflection allows life's lived experiences to become moments for learning. The break between the end of a school year and the beginning of the next, summer vacation, is when parents, students, and educators "pause" learning. But these moments during the summer are far from a pause—they instead provide the basis for learning linked to life as something REAL (Relevant, Experiential, Authentic Learning).

The final day of school for another year and it's off to summer vacation! Students and their parents prepare for different routines and new experiences as "learning" winds down. The transition from formal learning inside of schools to environments outside takes shape from June through August. There are often reading lists and reminders to practice arithmetic and world language skills, but these are moved aside for the outside.

In contrast to flashcards, reading challenges, and summer writing assignments, parents look for their children to have experiences in nature, the visual and performing arts, athletics, and sleep-away camps. There is value placed on these experiences as they come at a financial cost. Parents select to pay, at times with input from their children, for these semi-structured opportunities to learn. How is it that these experiences, deemed so important that they are paid for beyond the cost of a school year, are priorities during summer vacation?

Yes, summer jobs exist, but with less and less frequency. Today's economy requires a skilled workforce, restricting young people's chance to earn extra cash during the summer. Summer vacation now consists of service trips, journeys abroad, and other enrichment experiences. These are opportunities for self-discovery; to consider experiences as processes for deep learning is encouraged during the summer.

The pause between the spring of a school year and the following fall sets a premium on moments of play, self-discovery through exploration, and new experiences that the school year attempts to emulate. Seemingly disconnected moments of summer "fun" provide learning experiences. Curiosity, self-discovery, and play exist in the water, sand, and woods during the summer. As I spent time with family and friends this summer, it was in our moments in the sand at the beach that I learned as a student.

As a career educator of only 17 years, I refer to the century-old pedagogy of experiential learning to guide teaching and learning. Our lives are made of many experiences. Humans, with innate curiosity, look to engage in learning through events occurring naturally, made intentional through lived experiences. As a 23-year-old immersed in curriculum and instruction for the first time, I was introduced to Experiential Learning Theory. I became enamored theoretically with

John Dewey and then practically with David Kolb. Experiential Learning Theory became my mode to create for students as I found my vocation designing learning.

Educators consider inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, place-based learning, flexible pathways, and personalized learning in the setting of a school. Educators must pause to recognize the principles of this age-old learning framework, to understand the theory supporting this pedagogy, to build the capacity to leverage points of departure for naturally occurring learning inside and outside of school. With an understanding of Experiential Learning Theory, teachers as guides can create "summer-like" experiences as moments to spark the curiosity to a lifetime of learning.

The creation of a purposeful experience provides an opportunity to apply learning theory to one's life. The responsibility for those working with students, both in teaching and coaching roles, is to support students' lived experiences as the story arc for the process of their learning. As learning emerges through nonlinear means, it is necessary that constructivist and cognitive theory are understood by participants engaged in learning.

Experiential Learning Theory, with a focus on how learning presents in context and its importance in varied environments, allows "play" to be "educational" (Kolb, 1984). Experiential Learning Theory is the theoretical basis for understanding learning—and thinking about one's thinking—through self-discovery.

In a district in Southwestern Vermont, High School Prep is a free experience for any incoming secondary student for one week or two in July. Teachers and students engage in REAL education during a first exposure to high school with the intent to connect with adults, other students, and personal interests.

Kolb (1984) understands acts of engagement in and outside of school through the predictable and unpredictable. A learner's interest in dogs exposes them to their use in law enforcement during High School Prep. As the school year begins, dogs are provided for physical and emotional healing in school. This leads to research opportunities on canine service training for the learner. These experiences provide "play" and self-discovery during a "summer program," and later moments to complete needs assessments for local animal shelters in a school-wide effort to collect identified items for shelters. In school, healthy dog treats are made during a school-wide community service day to be distributed to a local humane society. To demonstrate understanding of media literacy, public speaking, English, and science requirements, a Public Service Announcement and other materials are prepared for the community about the importance of animal ID tags, microchipping, spaying, and neutering to possibly be aired on the local access channel.

Why is it a priority that students explore their interests and the "natural world" during the summer? Why is nonlinear learning the accepted—and preferred—method for learning during this season? Why do parents put a premium on curiosity sparked through naturally occurring moments from the end of a school year until the start of another?

I often wonder, how is it that "school" from September through June is not following "the natural order of things"? Equity, access, and opportunity are an aim for most educators. However, experiential learning opportunities are often paid for by those with resources during the summer and not readily facilitated as a form of equitable education in our schools. How can "paid-for experiences" become the preferred means to engage in learning, seeking equity, during the school year?

Experiential learning takes place on-site and in classrooms as something new is explored, not a replication of something already underway. I have facilitated students' efforts to research and build worm composting systems, develop plans to raise mercury collection awareness, educate the public about illegal trash burning and dumping, propose viable food security systems for counties; helped facilitate the redesign of a garbage truck to separate organic waste from non-organic waste during collection; and established and tested a cost (financial and physical) analysis for firewood processing in my community. Feasible solutions to community challenges can be developed through experiential pedagogy. Relevant, Experiential, Authentic Learning (REAL) can provide models as solutions to identified needs and conclusions from "tests" shared for feedback from community partners.

Facilitating experiential learning takes a great deal of planning. Educators may need to meet with members of the community to arrange visits for students inside and outside of school, explain how the content of a course connects with experiences to motivate and engage students in interactive activities, and arrange for travel to and from learning sites. As well, there is necessary reflection on "why" married with learning objectives "what and how" to be paired with action "what if?" For some, the methodology will prove too challenging, and others will reap the satisfaction of facilitating equitable education.

Through Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), students and teachers can leverage experiential opportunities with a focus on the contexts and environments in which students learn, how learning comes to exist, and the impact that learning has on those environments in which they occur. Life experiences, "summer programs" and otherwise, become moments for learning and a model of experiential pedagogy. As education looks to engage in inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, place-based learning, flexible pathways, and individualized and personalized learning, educators must find moments where learning occurs naturally and purposefully blend these experiences in with those naturally occurring outside of school.

REAL (Relevant, Experiential Authentic Learning) education will require a pause for reflection.

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A Reflection on the Nature of Teaching and Learning in the Context of Study Abroad

Mark D. Olson

Abstract: As educators are increasingly called upon to integrate international content into curricula to reflect the world's growing interconnectedness, study abroad programs have become an integral part of higher education across disciplines. Education abroad provides an invaluable method of offering experiential learning to enhance students' awareness and understanding of multicultural issues. However, the degree of intercultural learning obtained has been questioned, particularly within today's corporatized model of higher education and its emphasis on student recruitment and retention. Critics have likened today's study abroad students to privileged tourists, having limited opportunities for engagement and understanding of diverse people and cultures. This paper uses an autoethnographic approach to explore a six-week summer semester in Japan. I, the author, examine the nature of teaching and learning within the context of study abroad.

Keywords: travel, Japan, study abroad, autoethnography, cultural humility, cultural competency

The call to highlight global interconnections in social work curricula reflects the importance of intercultural engagement in an increasingly transnational world (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). This importance is reflected in ethical standards that call on the profession to "work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (National Association of Social Workers, 2000, p. 61), and "promote respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions amongst different ethnic groups and societies" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012, para. 15). Cultural competence has been identified as an essential social work skill, crucial for alleviating conflict across cultures (Rotabi, Gamble, & Gammonley, 2007, para. 2). Toward this goal, international study abroad programs are increasingly employed as a means to enhance intercultural engagement and understanding.

Throughout its history, education abroad has been carried out in various models, each providing a different emphasis and experience of intercultural learning. Central to these models and their varying emphases is the degree to which students experience opportunities for engagement that facilitate a deeper level of intercultural understanding. For many students, long-term international stays are often unfeasible. The rising costs of a university education and the time constraints of students have resulted in a remarkable growth in short-term programs (Walters, Charles, & Bingham, 2017). Defined as programs lasting "less than a standard academic semester or quarter" (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009, p. 366), short-term stays now account for the majority of all study abroad programs (Institute International Education [IIE], 2015).

Additionally, the issue of financial incentives for higher education institutions providing study abroad has raised critical questions regarding trends in international education. In an increasingly competitive environment, universities vie with each other to recruit students, and study abroad opportunities may offer enrollment incentives. Consequently, are these programs

viewed as educational opportunities or as a chance for students to encounter a novel international experience? Some have likened today's study abroad students to the privileged travelers of previous generations. Touring foreign locales from the standpoint of a vacationer, the American study abroad participant has been described as a "colonial student" (Ogden, 2007–2008), having limited engagement with and understanding of local people and their culture.

Foronda and Belknap (2012) pointed out that much of the literature on education abroad presents the experience as positive and transformative; disappointing or problematic experiences receive limited attention and educators may be less inclined to report such experiences. My own encounter with study abroad was filled with unexpected challenges. Attempting to teach in a very different environment from the traditional classroom, I was pushed to examine my assumptions about teaching and learning. This paper employs an autoethnographic approach as a means to explore the experience of study abroad from a more reflective, less approbatory perspective. The use of autoethnography entails the sort of reflection that educators often ask of students and, likewise, must be willing to engage in as well.

Placing Study Abroad into Context

Commenting on the relatively recent growth in international study, Bodycott (2012) highlighted the variety of educational options available to students and trends toward student mobility as an increasingly common part of higher education (Cui, 2013; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). In American institutions, study abroad has encompassed various models, including student exchange, direct enrollment in foreign universities, and the increasingly common "Island Model" (University of Illinois at Chicago, Study Abroad Office, 2014-2017). In contrast to the traditional junior year abroad associated with the origins of international education, Island Model programs tend to be short-term and function relatively independent of the host institution. Home campus faculties teach their students and often reside together, apart from the host institution and its community (Hanouille & Leuner, 2001; Kehl & Morris, 2008). Thus, students and faculty exist in "a self-contained context" (Norris & Dwyer, 2005, p. 121), which may limit opportunities for intercultural learning.

Dwyer (2004) found that interactions with other cultures increased students' awareness of their own cultural values and biases and were significantly more likely to increase knowledge and understanding of diverse populations and communities. However, the length of time students spent abroad appeared to have an important influence on intercultural learning; not surprisingly, students who spent a full year abroad exhibited greater knowledge and understanding of the host culture. Following the Island Model, our six-week semester seemed to limit the level of cultural immersion students were able to experience. As students were taking courses delivered from their own faculty, they had less opportunity for interaction with students and teachers from the host school. Consequently, this self-contained approach may have inadvertently fostered detachment from the local culture, impeding the primary objectives of international education.

Dwyer's (2004) longitudinal study provides what may be the most comprehensive review on international education. Employing a large representative sample obtained through the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), her research found that a full year of study

abroad provides measurable benefits in terms of academic achievement, career options, and maintaining foreign language skills over time. While short-term stays also produced benefits, Dwyer concluded, "clearly the greatest gains across all outcome categories are made by full-year students" (p. 161). Unfortunately, as noted, long-term study abroad is unrealistic for many students today. Moreover, while intercultural engagement may be the primary goal of study abroad for educators, this may not necessarily be a priority for students. Thus, identifying the values and objectives that motivate various participants and stakeholders is critical.

Factors Influencing Decisions to Study Abroad

Perkins and Neumayer (2014) reported that the average income of the host country's citizens had greater influence over decision making than the academic reputation of the host institution for students outside the US. Students from Africa and China often pursue study abroad as a means to obtain a measure of financial security for their future (Bodycott, 2012; Maringe & Carter, 2007). In contrast, Norwegian and American students reportedly viewed international education as opportunities for travel, pleasure, or career advancement (Payan, Svensson, Høgevold, & Sedbrook, 2015). Despite increased racial diversity among US study abroad participants in recent years, students continue to be predominantly white and are more likely to come from affluent backgrounds (Horn, Jerome, & White, 2008; Institute of International Education, 2016; Stallman, Woodruff, Kasravi, & Comp, 2010). This economic disparity played out within our group of students. One student, who appeared to have fewer financial resources, seemed less integrated into the group. Unfortunately, the student's inability to take part in some tourist activities due to financial constraints occasioned criticism from other students. Students' interest in sight-seeing opportunities, while understandable, also seemed to exemplify the challenge to maintain a focus on educational priorities.

Ogden (2007–2008) posited that the model of education abroad parallels the history of Western colonialism, with students analogous to the "colonial traveler" seeking international travel, while maintaining the privilege and comfort of their own culture. He argued that "students (and their parents) are increasingly demanding familiar amenities and modern conveniences while abroad and seemingly with total disregard to host cultural norms or feasibility" (Ogden, 2007–2008, p. 37). Consequently, critics have charged that the experience of study abroad may be more akin to tourism rather than an opportunity for intercultural exchange and learning (Cheng, 2013; Shannon-Baker & Talbot, 2016). Moreover, acquiescing to student expectations of accommodation may reinforce perceptions of American exceptionalism, rather than facilitate students' awareness of their own privilege.

Advertising for study abroad programs seems to promote student expectations of privilege. Zemach-Bershin (2008) examined promotional materials targeting US students for international education. The dominant images repeatedly portrayed white students as the center of attention, with locals on the periphery, seeming to serve the function of an audience. Likewise, Zemach-Bershin argued that the language of this advertising often emphasizes active and adventurous American students, contrasted with passive, uncharted cultures and people waiting to be discovered (e.g. "Let's wake up the world" and "The World Awaits"). This unfortunately parallels Western culture's history of arrogance and ignorance of cultures beyond its own

borders.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that our students' behaviors were also influenced by the cultural norms of hospitality demonstrated by our hosts. The Japanese concept of *omotenashi*, referring to Japanese hospitality and an emphasis on caring for guests (Yi, 2016), was in evidence throughout our stay. Students and faculty were often treated as visiting dignitaries, attending receptions arranged by our hosts and receiving gifts at various agency visits. At times, the level of attentiveness could feel awkward and overwhelming. I remember feeling some embarrassment as we exited a reception held on the evening of our first day in Japan; students and faculty of the host school lined both sides of the hall and applauded as we walked out. Certainly, it would be difficult to fault students for having a sense of privilege after receiving this kind of attention.

Japan is generally considered a "Westernized" culture, with a highly developed economy. Thus, issues of poverty and oppression may be less evident than in other international settings. Conversely, other study abroad experiences may expose students to the realities of poverty and oppression that can be particularly distressing. Namakkal (2013) noted the experience of a University of Chicago student who wrote of her shock at the sexual harassment she encountered shopping for saris in the market bazaars of India. Similarly, reflections on the experience of education abroad revealed students' surprise at the hostility they encountered due to their identity as Euro-Americans (Brown University, Office of International Programs, n.d.).

Although the Island Model of study abroad may protect students from the sort of experience described above, it also limits opportunities to grapple with issues of privilege and structural oppression (Foronda & Belknap, 2012). This illustrates what may be a fundamental dilemma of education abroad; in order for students to experience the immersion that leads to intercultural learning and a critical examination of power and privilege, they must be able to experience a degree of autonomy and risk that self-contained programs do not provide.

The Dilemmas of Profit and Privatization in Study Abroad

Describing market-based trends in the contemporary university, Gilbert (2013) argued that neoliberal economic philosophies in the US have influenced the development of the "corporate university" in which the focus on academics competes with an emphasis on revenue. The issue of financial incentives for institutions providing study abroad has raised questions regarding trends in international education. The increased demand for higher education and growth in student mobility have led to the development of study abroad as a global industry, with higher education identified as a major export among some countries (Bodycott, 2012; OECD, 2014).

As noted, opportunities for international study may be seen as a valuable recruitment strategy for higher education institutions. For example, some of the literature on planning study abroad trips have noted the value of working with university public relations staff to promote the program and recruit potential students (Gammonley, Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007). The question remains as to how educators can develop and structure the study abroad experience to facilitate an educational experience rather than a tourist experience.

The current trend in higher education toward a student-as-customer model (Searcy, 2017) may further complicate the balance between meeting students' learning needs and their expectations of international education. Students may generally approach education from a "customer-service" orientation, expecting university faculty and staff to provide resources to minimize discomfort or inconvenience. This can be particularly problematic within the context of study abroad. For example, some students reported having a "meltdown" because they didn't have access to wi-fi in their dorm. This was especially disconcerting because our host school had clearly gone out of their way to accommodate the American students. This increasing perception of higher education students as "customers" (Ogden, 2007–2008) may reinforce the emphasis on tourism over learning and critical thinking as the focus of the study abroad experience.

As noted, this paper uses autoethnography to explore a study abroad experience in which five BSW students accompanied me and a faculty colleague on a six-week summer semester to our university's sister school in Japan. The critical reflection of autoethnography also allows for an examination of study abroad as it relates to cultural considerations of privilege and the nature of teaching and learning within the context of international education.

Methodology

Autoethnography has been defined as a post-modern approach intended to "analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, para. 1). The value of self-reflection as an educational tool was pioneered by John Dewey (1910/1991). However, its merit as a strategy for anti-oppressive practice is especially relevant to social work education (Mattsson, 2014). Fook and Askeland (2007) provided a particularly applicable model, emphasizing reflection on cultural factors as an examination of taken-for-granted assumptions regarding "normal" behaviors and ideas, as well as what constitutes knowledge. The authors acknowledged that the process of "unearthing deeper assumptions" may precipitate anxiety, but ultimately has the power to transform social work education and practice (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p. 521).

Within the process of autoethnography, the experience of authors as they interact and connect with the culture is the phenomenon being explored. Thus, critical self-reflection is essential. Perhaps more importantly, helping students navigate the distress of social disconnect and culture shock in a foreign environment requires that educators be willing to acknowledge their own struggle and distress in this regard (Furman, Coyne, & Junko Negi, 2008).

Students and faculty went through a 15-week pre-program orientation at our home school prior to the trip to Japan. During that time, we met weekly with an instructor from the Office of International Programs for lessons in reading, writing, and speaking Japanese. The summer semester ran for six weeks, during the months of May and June. Our daily schedule included classes in which students and faculty met four days a week for courses on cultural diversity and comparisons of social services and policies in US and Japan. Classes were loosely structured with an emphasis on interactive discussion. Additionally, the host school coordinated weekly visits to various organizations and agencies, as well as opportunities for American and Japanese

students to interact in classes and social functions.

The process of data collection involved reviewing entries from journals kept of my experiences during the semester and e-mail communications with friends and family members describing the study abroad experience, as well as my own reflections on our experience in Japan.

Emergent Themes

Manifestations of Privilege?

In a "call to action" to combat racism, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) defined the concept of "privilege" as a "collection of benefits…[including] access to resources and social rewards and the power to shape the norms and values of society" (NASW, 2007, p. 10) that may or may not be consciously recognized by the recipient. Manifestations of privilege, such as impatience with host cultural customs and living conditions may be viewed as American arrogance by local people and may create barriers to intercultural communication and learning (Rotabi et al., 2007). Over the course of our time in Japan, I occasionally observed what seemed to be students' lack of concern for Japanese cultural norms.

Journal Entry: It's certainly interesting to walk through Tokyo with the group. [My colleague] tried to warn them about revealing too much skin in Japan because that would be considered inappropriate. Some of them didn't listen, and we get quite a few stares from men and women as we walk down the street.

Prior to our trip, my colleague (who had been to Japan on previous occasions) cautioned students regarding cultural considerations of appropriate dress. Clothing that was typical in the warmer climate of our home campus, such as lower necklines and exposed shoulders, were considered inappropriate in Japanese culture. However, some students seemed to forget or discount this, and their style of dress appeared to be a source of disapproval from some in the local community. This neglect of local standards seemed to exemplify a sense of privilege; however, my acute embarrassment at what I interpreted as disapproving looks at our students may have been a reflection of my own self-consciousness in an unfamiliar cultural environment. I often felt reduced to a dependent state as I tried to manipulate chopsticks or communicate in a different language and was forced to rely on the patient guidance of our interpreters. Possibly, the disorientation I felt in attempting to navigate an unfamiliar culture while also maintaining a sense of control as instructor colored my perceptions of students' demonstrations of privilege.

Our reaction to lacking familiar comforts and conveniences may also be interpreted as a reflection of privilege. Students at times appeared to be at a loss being removed from technology, and some students were alarmed at finding they did not have internet access in their dorm rooms. Expectations and cultural stereotypes regarding Japanese proficiency with technology seemed to further students' frustration with the lack of available internet access; as one student exclaimed, "We're in Japan! How can we not have internet?" Additionally, although the host school had gone out of their way to be accommodating, there was still the language barrier; thus, we did not have the option of getting questions answered quickly nor needs met

immediately.

Journal Entry: In Japan, people make requests in what seems to be a very indirect, almost apologetic manner. The students feel free to say "no" to things that [my colleague] tries to let them understand we can't really decline.

Language barriers appeared to be exacerbated by cultural differences in communication style. Our Japanese hosts seemed to make requests indirectly, and consequently, the American students felt free to decline engagements or events the hosts had gone to great lengths to coordinate. While it may seem reasonable to consider students' reaction as an example of American arrogance, it is equally plausible that differing cultural communication styles can lead to perceptions of cultural insensitivity. The direct, often blunt communication style viewed as admirable in American culture presented a clear contrast to our hosts' style of communication, where requests seemed to be presented as suggestions that could be accepted or declined. Thus, when we admonished students who created a minor crisis by breaking their dorm curfew, the students were visibly upset and confused. They had not interpreted what they perceived as the dorm parents' suggestion to be in at a specific time as a "curfew." This illustrates how cultural differences in communication affect intercultural understanding and could have served as a learning opportunity. Although we had gone through 15 weeks of Japanese language sessions prior to the trip, our focus was primarily on "content," with limited attention paid to the underlying context and the process of communication in another culture.

The study abroad experience allowed me to examine my own notions of teaching and learning, exploring my biases vis-a-vis the relationship between teacher and student, and what constitutes learning. Reflecting on the experience pushed me to examine the culture of higher education and my own identity as a teacher and social worker.

Defining the Nature of Teaching and Learning in Study Abroad

Journal Entry: Still uncertain as to how to really conduct a class here. . . . Yesterday one of the students complained about their assignment for a paper comparing US and Japan policies, etc. . . . I found myself getting more nervous and feeling like I should do something completely different (e.g., be more formal; start with a PowerPoint each day, etc.).

As noted, my colleague and I met with the students in loosely structured classes focusing on issues of cultural diversity. We attempted to use this time to facilitate reflection and open discussion; however, the loosely structured format appeared to be confusing and frustrating for students. Some expressed dissatisfaction with this lack of structure, noting the absence of traditional methods, such as formal lecture and technology to illustrate the material. Activities and assignments were intended to foster independent learning. Thus, students were expected to gain knowledge and understanding of the host culture through class discussions, field visits to various agencies, literature searches via the campus computer lab, and communication with the Japanese students living with them in the dormitories. However, presenting students with this non-traditional learning format seemed to precipitate significant anxiety. My initial reaction to students' apprehension was a sense of guilt that I had not sufficiently prepared the course to

replicate a more traditional class structure. Eventually I recognized that students' anxiety was an expectable and understandable reaction.

Journal Entry: It occurred to me that what we are asking [the students] to do is radically different from anything they have to do in the traditional classroom. Generally, students have a course syllabus and/or outline that detail [sic] *every reading and activity over the course of a semester. . . . If the information is fed back using the same language, concepts, etc., provided from the text and instructor, the students earn an "A."*

Expecting students to produce traditional course outcomes in the absence of the traditional course structures may have been a major source of students' anxiety. Attempts to replicate the conventional teaching and learning within the context of education abroad may undermine the experiential learning opportunities that are the primary advantages of the study abroad experience.

In addition, it seems possible that by recreating a formal "classroom" environment, we were recreating the differential positions of power between students and faculty and impeding group cohesion. Consequently, attempts to facilitate open discussion related to our feelings and reactions to a different culture and our struggles in it often felt unproductive. At the same time, I was dealing with some of the same struggles in understanding cultural variances and coping with language and monetary differences while trying to maintain the sense of control I felt in the classroom. This disparity raised questions for me regarding the definitions of teaching and learning beyond the traditional university environment.

Lessons Learned

The Value of the Pre-Program Orientation

Foronda and Belknap (2012) identified guidelines for educators to facilitate intercultural learning and prepare students for education as opposed to tourism in the study abroad experience. Critical to this is the pre-program orientation process that prepares students not only to anticipate cultural differences, but also to anticipate students' emotional reactions to such differences. This was particularly critical given the comparatively insular nature of our home school's community. For example, while visiting Buddhist temples one student indicated her discomfort with the icons due to her Christian beliefs. The student's reaction indicated that we as faculty had not fully considered and discussed beforehand what it might be like to have students' views and beliefs challenged by exposure to different spiritual beliefs. Clearly, a more thorough orientation, in keeping with social work values, could have supplemented practical learning with an exploration of potential reactions to encountering alternative norms and values.

A number of social work theorists provide guidance in this regard, offering detailed descriptions of pre-program orientation that include exploration of students' expectations prior to on-site arrival and daily sessions for debriefing and critical reflection (Bell & Anscombe, 2013; Moorhead, Boetto, & Bell, 2014). Sossou and Dubus (2013) detailed a comprehensive pre-departure orientation process that integrated a social justice perspective through assigned

readings and essays on the unique political, economic, and cultural issues of the host country. Similarly, Gammonley et al. (2007) described how exploration of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) facilitate students' understanding of the relationship between global economics and the local community.

Highum's (2014) use of student journals also provides a means of facilitating critical reflection. After being prepared by assigned essays in response to required readings prior to departure, at the host site students provide written reflections on each day's activities. Within this model, reflection refers not only to students' subjective experience in diverse environments, but also how these experiences link to social work issues of privilege and oppression. In this way, study abroad affords a holistic experience, in which the phases of preparation and on-site study are connected and maintain the focus on education and social work themes.

Examining Ethnocentrism & Western Privilege

An important question to answer when addressing the issue of privilege is how we conceptualize and apply the term to students within the context of study abroad. Reflecting on my own experience, I began to wonder if we were seeing demonstrations of privilege or a lack of preparation on our part as faculty and the university institution overall. In recruiting students for study abroad, are we preparing students for the culture shock they may encounter? Furthermore, are we judging students too harshly when they have strong emotional reactions to witnessing circumstances they may have only read about?

Cultural competence denotes not only understanding diverse cultures, but also the ability to function within a different cultural context (Bodycott, 2012). Consequently, the inevitable struggle toward adaptation and the potential for culture shock should be anticipated. Instances such as the situation in which the American student was shocked by her exposure to harassment in the Indian marketplace may not necessarily be viewed as evidence of the student's naiveté or privilege. Rather, such instances of culture shock are what we would expect when students have second-hand knowledge of oppression but limited first-hand experience. Such a response may not represent a failure to appreciate diversity and the realities of oppression, but simply reflect the difference between knowing about its existence and actually witnessing it. This can be re-framed as an important learning opportunity that one can only get from the study abroad experience rather than a limitation or failing of the experience. Opportunities to process these emotions need to be built into the study abroad process, especially in short-term programs, and educators must anticipate these reactions and prepare for them through discussion before the actual trip. If we disparage genuine reactions, we risk suppressing authentic responses that would generate insight and understanding regarding differences and foster cultural competence.

Lund and Lee (2015) challenged the concept of cultural competency in favor of *cultural humility*, defined as an ongoing process of critical self-reflection on the intersectionality of privilege and oppression. This presents a contrast to the common conceptualization of cultural competence as the acquisition of knowledge and skills vis-à-vis diverse groups. Similarly, preparing students to engage with other cultures with the expectation of *learning from them* underscores the importance of addressing cultural humility as part of the pre-departure

orientation (Gammonley et al., 2007). Again, intercultural engagement calls for a process of self-examination. According to Mattsson (2014), self-reflection enables us to gain greater understanding of the dynamics of structural oppression and our role in maintaining these structures. This awareness can ultimately lead to challenging accepted conventions, such as approaching study abroad as a replication of the traditional classroom or an institutional strategy that prioritizes student recruitment over education.

Implications for the Profession

Social work educators are tasked with enhancing students' understanding of diversity and oppression within the context of an increasingly consumer-oriented model of higher education. This challenge is made even greater by indications that American study abroad students tend to be less diverse and more affluent than students who do not pursue international study. Namakkal (2013) questioned the assumption that universities can shelter students from the realities of poverty and oppression in the context of education abroad, and whether such attempts ultimately hinder learning. She proposed an alternative model, in which students actively engage with oppressed people (e.g., women, gay, lesbian, and transgender populations) in order to fully understand their experience. This offers genuine opportunities for increasing students' cultural competence and awareness of global issues. For social work educators, a focus on a service-learning project, supplemented by readings and discussion of social justice and critical theory may help facilitate students' awareness of the meaning and impact of "culture."

As noted, some of the literature has commented on the lack of objective outcome criteria for study abroad (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009; Walters et al., 2017). However, this privileges a reductionist perspective that frames learning as a series of quantifiable inputs and outputs. Moreover, evidence suggests that quantitative methods, such as measures of cross-cultural competence, have not been sufficiently validated (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). We may gain greater knowledge of students' experience in international contexts through more qualitative methods that capture a deeper understanding of their subjective experience.

While it is certainly possible to define concrete outcomes and methods with which to measure them (Kim, 2015), this could potentially limit the benefits of study abroad. Such an approach fails to appreciate that valuable learning can occur in less structured contexts. Research suggests that students' engagement with diverse people and cultures may provide the most salient learning experiences (Heublein, Hutzsch, Schreiber, & Sommer as cited in Petersdotter, Niehoff, & Freund, 2017). Thus, educators can foster cultural competence by simply facilitating opportunities for intercultural engagement. This finding seemed to be validated by the experience of seeing the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

Toward the end of our stay, we had the opportunity to visit Hiroshima. Despite the fact that we had to travel only an hour ahead of a potential typhoon, the students and faculty wanted to see this historic site commemorating the victims and survivors of the world's only nuclear attack. Students were clearly moved by the experience of seeing the remains of the A-bomb Dome and the potent reminders of the realities of war.

Touring the museum, we were all absorbed in the artifacts and stories of people who had their lives irreparably altered in an instant. While visiting the museum my colleague purchased books of survivor accounts for each student, and they spent the remainder of the train ride back to the host school engrossed in the readings. This incident provided a counterpoint to the structured agency visits we had been going through for the past several weeks. The most affecting experiences seemed to be when students had a more genuine encounter, allowing them to engage with an aspect of the culture that provoked thoughtful reflection.

Conclusion

The necessity for developing culturally competent professionals challenges us, not only as a means of ensuring adequate practice, but also toward the goal of advancing the profession's mission toward social justice. This mandate takes on greater significance given recent indications of global crises and instability as reflected in the increase of political refugees, the rise of nationalism and intergroup conflict, and ongoing threats to the welfare state in response to economic uncertainty (Baron & McLaughlin, 2017). All of these conditions demand a response from social work as a discipline defined by its historical advocacy for human rights. The trend toward international education offers hope of providing the type of intercultural engagement and understanding that cannot be obtained in the classroom.

Ultimately, study abroad can provide an opportunity for social work faculty to advocate for a greater emphasis on intercultural learning as opposed to student recruitment. Within the context of social work education, these programs provide unique opportunities to increase awareness of issues of privilege and ethnocentrism as we examine our own response to cultural differences and strive toward cultural humility in our interactions with different populations.

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Thoughts on Individualism, Collectivism, and Culture

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Abstract: This article aims to explain through narrative a response to the experiences I had while attending a conference in South Africa. It is a work of cultural import to show that the social work professional values are expressed both in an individualist and collectivist society. The insights I reached were that everyone could use some aspects of collectivism to help bridge the gap that exists in society today politically, socioeconomically, and racially.

Keywords: collectivism, individualism, social welfare, self-construal

My visit to a collectivist culture was an insightful experience. Last spring I traveled to South Africa to attend the 40th Annual Symposium of the International Association for Social Work with Groups. The theme of the conference was "Bridging the Divide: Group Work for Social Justice." It took place in Kruger Park, near Johannesburg in South Africa. What better place for a symposium about bridging the divide and social justice? As most of us have heard and read about *apartheid* and a nation that worked together with a great and charismatic leader, Nelson Mandela, I was extremely interested in seeing this country firsthand and experiencing a culture that successfully embraced equality and the ability to overcome so many socioeconomic, racial, and political barriers to arrive at its present state. I do not plan on undertaking a narrative of how this country accomplished what it did but rather to report on my experiential observations and compare them to the culture and attitudes I've experienced here at home in the US. I will, however, touch on the historic factors of the society. I also want to examine some characteristics of the culture that may be helpful in this country.

My story begins with my arrival in South Africa. As I was overloaded with luggage and walking alone, several people offered to help me with my baggage. I was surprised but realized that these were sincere efforts to assist me. My next experience was meeting some of the participants in the conference. These were social work professionals from North America, Asia, and Europe. Some were disabled, and there were people who were reaching out to help them as well. The participants as well as the citizens who worked at the facility were all gracious and helpful to the disabled members of our group. When I arrived in Kruger Park, where the conference took place, I got lost while carrying my luggage, and I was looking quite forlorn. As I passed workers, they asked if I needed help. My nature is to be self-sufficient and independent, so at first I refused. I could hear the workers speaking pleasantly to each other and performing their tasks in a relaxed atmosphere as they worked. Eventually, when I became totally exasperated, I accepted help. The person (helper) carried my luggage and was extremely cordial, and even though she didn't know where to find my bungalow, she asked and got help from others. It became a community effort to help me find my hut. That was my initiation into the new land where I had arrived. Speaking to the natives of South Africa, I heard about the interrelatedness of some of the animal species in the park. For example, zebras and wildebeests are socially very compatible. They graze together and their senses help each other. Zebras have good eyesight while wildebeests have exceptional hearing. Elephants often knock over trees and thereby allow smaller browsers (kudus) to retrieve the leaves that they would not normally be able to access.

They help each other survive against the predators in the park (Siyabona Africa, n.d.).

Learning about the interdependence of the animals was helpful, but after visiting the SizaBantwana (a Christian-affiliated organization) in the Bushbuckridge and Hazyview districts of the Mpumalanga Province, I learned about the collectivist culture of the people in South Africa. SizaBantwana operates an aftercare program for children who are orphaned, homeless, living in child-headed families, and/or terminally ill. Education and economic opportunity are considered by SizaBanatwana to be the most important ways for a community to grow and thrive. The women volunteers prepare hot meals and arrange activities for the children before the children leave for whatever place they call home. The facility presently cares for 661 orphaned children (International Association for Social Work with Groups, 2018). These women are without remuneration and go to the facility each day and care for these children even though they, too, are poor. They arrive each day to set up activities and cook a hot meal for the children. This meal may be the only one that the children get for the day. Some of the children do not even have a pair of shoes. The children lack comfort and care, including physical touch. We (convention participants) were invited to do face painting with the children and play music with them on makeshift drums (old paint cans). We all participated in the activities. As the day waned, the children left the facility and we watched them as they said their farewells and journeyed on foot to their homes. It was a poignant moment to see these children walk away knowing how precarious their futures would be.

That experience prompted me to continue my exploration of the comparison and contrasts to the culture that I have grown up with and that I assume as a cultural norm. In the US, the majority population is imbued with a spirit of individualism from early in their lives. That is, the interest of the individual takes precedence over the group (Watson, 2014). Social workers cherish this ability and try to help our clients do the same. Independence is considered a virtue in our society. Socially, economically, and politically, these values are seen as essential. They help people to succeed in their profession and possibly raise their socioeconomic status. In contrast, the South African culture takes on the cultural value of collectivism. This phenomenon exists when the interests of the group are a priority over the interests of the individual (Watson, 2014). In other words, it has to do with social welfare, and that is a fundamental tenet of the social work profession. Social welfare is defined by Morales and Sheafor (2004) as:

> Society's dominant philosophies into social policies, to be carried out by a system of human services agencies and delivered by human services professionals in order to meet the socially related needs of individuals, families, groups and communities through programs offering social provisions, personal services, and/or social action. (p.7)

This definition adheres to the mission of social work that is to enhance human wellbeing and help everyone meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 2002). According to Watson (2014), the South African critique of individualism is "apartheid in the heart" (p. 135). This term refers to those—no matter what race, creed, or color—who deny their dependency on human interaction. It is considered a form of isolation and hardship. During apartheid, the government turned native groups, such as the Xhosas and Zulus, against each other. Of course, White and Black groups were also separated. The racial divides

still exist, but the democracy is striving for groups to share more commonalities.

Historically, people from groups outside of their clan are usually viewed with suspicion and distrust. The San people were the first inhabitants noted in South Africa, known as foragers and hunters. They, along with the pastoralist Khoisan, were the original inhabitants of South Africa. The San people have the lowest social status and are collectivists among their own tribe. They were banished from their land in the 1770s and the land was given to the new settlers. The history of these groups is bellicose and the San group has virtually disappeared. They were enslaved by settlers and fought against the Khoisan (Marks, 1981). The original tribes have been incorporated into the Bantu population. As the settlers from Holland and England came in the 1800s, pure racial types were assumed superior and the Bushman population became a subjugated group and the object of apartheid (Marks, 1981). The Bantu and San population became subsumed into the Bushman tribe. In post-apartheid South Africa, the Afrikaners (Dutch and European White descendants) maintain an identity of privilege and superiority to the Black South Africans. They have lost their status politically but ascribe to "identity politics" (Verwey & Qualye, 2012). This general separateness would preclude collectivism between racial groups as the cultural divide remains in place. The economic divide also attests to this phenomenon.

Between 1996 to 2001, the economic divide had increased. The poverty discrepancy gap had gotten wider while the country's economy had improved (Schwabe, 2004). Since then, Millennium Development Goals (through the UN) have seen the government pledge to improve public services and bring equity to its poorer populations in Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and Kwazulu-Natal (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

According to Dersso (2017), the South African constitution accommodates for the ethno-cultural differences in its society. It considers the interests and identity of differing groups in the consideration of national integration. This does not account for the economic gaps. In another article by Haj-Yahia (2011), confrontation of unequal groups is frowned upon. In the collectivist society of South Africa, individual loyalty begins with the extended family, then the tribe, cultural/ethnic group, and nationality. They are, therefore, committed emotionally, morally, economically, socially, and politically to their collective. Priority is given to their collective over themselves or any other group. Confrontation by those who are considered strong against those considered weak is "taboo." Women are supposed to submit to their husbands/families and children to their elders, although the government is trying to strive for women's equality (Haj-Yahia, 2011).

The practitioners working with South African people are able to use the techniques that are used in an individualist society but must consider the collectivist context of those they are treating. The implication for practice is to be respectful of the differences and aware of their own cultural competency not allowing it to interfere with the culture of the clients.

In the US, there is more of a deficit in our human interaction and the divide building between racial and socio-economic groups is overwhelming our society. Although "rugged individualism" given to us by our Puritan forefathers exists, it is based on a continuum and seems to be lower in our minority groups that prefer to adhere to cultural norms of their specific

group. Majority members of society certainly would benefit from empathizing with our less fortunate neighbors and reaching out with efforts to help provide the basics of life. An understanding and respect of cultural and ethnic differences would help with our polarized situation. Important values in the collectivist society are "harmony, preserving the honor and prestige of the family of origin, extended family, ethnic group and nation. Ethnic affiliation also determines the individual's status in the society" (Haj-Yahia, 2011, p. 336).

Another aspect of these differences between individualism and collectivism is how people communicate. In individualist cultures, people are frank and to the point when it comes to communicating no matter how hurtful the message, whereas in a collective culture, hurting someone's feelings is reprehensible (Watson, 2014). As well, in collectivist societies, people in families or groups are protected in exchange for loyalty. We see remnants of this phenomenon in some subcultures here in the United States. Again, some people from Asian, Southern European, and African American cultures adhere to this philosophy. Overall, in mainstream America there is pride in independence and resentment if someone asks for help and it is deemed unworthy by the value system at hand.

Yet another feature of difference between individual and collectivist societies is self-construal: that is, independent or interdependent self-concept. Independent self-construal of the person is as an "autonomous, bounded, unitary agent" (Eaton & Louw, 2000, p. 210). The contrasting self-construal is the interdependent being who is flexible and changes with their "context and relationships" (p. 211). Those from collectivist cultures see themselves as part of others. Through their research, the authors viewed the South African interdependent self-construal as an integral part of their culture; this was less so for Anglo-Americans. When the people at Kruger Park were helping me, they became the helpers, not the workers in the village. In another incident, the person who was helping me with Internet connection (for my presentation) at the conference did so until he found a solution to my problem. He never gave up, as if it were his own presentation. His enthusiasm was discreet, but he kept reassuring me that it would work. He was a native of South Africa. It appeared to me that he too had a collectivist outlook and interdependent self-construal. One of my guides told me how he began picking up garbage in his neighborhood and encouraged his neighbors to do the same. He very proudly proclaimed that his neighborhood was now clean and well-kept. He expressed pride in his endeavors.

Conclusions

As I pondered my experiences in this culture very different from my own, I realized that what made me feel comfortable in South Africa was identifying with a culture that is conducive to the values that I hold as a social worker. I can see the advantages of interdependence among people. The animals at Kruger Park gave me the first indication of how interdependence helps to protect and save species in their natural environment.

The staff at Kruger Park was very accommodating and followed through on requests with pleasant responses. It was important for them not only to help but also to bring satisfaction to those with whom they were engaged. They saw situations through with the hope of the outcome being positive even if it didn't impact them. I saw the women volunteers in SizaBantwana

unselfishly helping the children in need, even though they had their own needs as well.

I don't believe that the US should or could become a collectivist society, but interdependence and empathy in social, political, and racial areas of our lives should bridge the divide and allow us to respect and embrace the concept of social welfare, as defined by our social work colleagues. I don't think we can be sustained as a society with the great divides that now face this country. Individuals are opposed to each other and each faction does not want to face our interdependence or acknowledge the others' point of view. Although hate groups reinforce the groups' interdependence, they oftentimes are based on hatred of "the other." According to Buddeberg (2018), this concept is the moral "responsibility for the other human being[s]" to oppose (p. 148).

In summary, my visit to South Africa was both insightful and revelatory. I had never experienced a collectivist culture. I realized that many of the collectivist patterns were aligned to my social work values. I also realized that we could gain a great deal from examining and adopting the social welfare aspect of this collectivist society.

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Bringing Experience into the Classroom: A Shared Journey

Nada Eltaiba

Abstract: Teaching in social work is a great opportunity to share with students the dedication to the profession and experiences in clinical practice. The role of the educator is to facilitate the learning of students, to allow them to develop their professional identity focusing on strength and the self. There are essential perceptions which need to be taken into consideration when teaching. Some of these are the culture, the environment, and the personal and professional experience of the academic. In this paper, I present my reflections on my teaching experience in social work.

Keywords: reflection, teaching, social work, teaching philosophy

In this paper, I present my reflections on my teaching experience and my teaching philosophy with graduate and postgraduate social work students. Since early in my career as a social worker, teaching has been an important goal for me. My plan was to enter the field of social work and obtain experiences in diverse settings in order to later share my passion and experiences with students of social work. Social work is a career that I chose in my early years. I was captivated by the profession's commitment to social change and its aim to empower individuals and communities. This was particularly important for me as a Muslim female who grew up in politically and socially challenging regions in North Africa and in the Middle East (Eltaiba, 2010). Working over the years in diverse settings, such as in mental health and community work, and in cross-cultural practice, such as in developing countries and Australia, has made me more mature but no less passionate about social work and about my teaching. I strongly believe that social work as a profession has much that will promote social change and empowerment. My main aim is to motivate students to think about the gender role in relation to other aspects, such as race, class, religion, and nationality. Another important goal is to inspire students to believe in the importance of their contribution in intervening and bringing about change. I encourage students to think about the context of the culture they work within, the importance of having a social work identity (Dominelli, 2002), and the significance of consideration of international perspectives which are emphasized by globalization (Healy, 2008; Hugman, 2010).

I regard teaching as a great opportunity to share with students my dedication to the profession and my experiences in clinical practice: in short, sharing with students my knowledge. The sharing of knowledge is an outworking of my spiritual and religious values. For example, in Islamic philosophy, "the most generous people will be those who will acquire knowledge and then disseminate it" (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 93). Sharing my experiences is also part of my ethical professional commitment to social work.

I am aware of the importance of being an educator and the inherent power in the position; consequently, I reflect on my teaching and regularly review my motivations for, and aim in, taking on such an important obligation. In the classroom, I make it clear to the students that, while I am facilitating their learning experiences, I myself learn from them. This approach of strength-based teaching is informed by my belief that each student has their own strength and

that they bring to class their own personal and cultural resources. The class interaction is an opportunity for self-discovery and empowerment (Saleebey, 2001). Each student's knowledge and experiences are respected and validated; each student has important things to offer to me and the other students. This is one way in which learning is a shared journey for me and my students. The aim of this paper is to share my reflections in relation to my experience in teaching in social work programs. The use of reflexive methodologies is becoming increasingly popular in social work as an imperative source for providing knowledge (Knott & Scragg, 2007).

My Approach to Teaching

Sharing

I use my practical experiences and my cultural background to inform my interactions with students and to provide a firm grounding for their learning experiences in class. In this way, I transfer knowledge from the field to those training to become social workers. For example, I share with students how the self influences the practice in social work (Al-Krenawi, 1998; Holden, 2012). I illustrate this partly by using my own journey of developing insight—through continuous reflections on my own values—towards achieving a balance between cultural, religious, and professional values (Eltaiba, 2010).

One instance of this was when I migrated from Libya and Jordan to Australia, which challenged many of my cultural perceptions about gender roles, parenting styles, homosexuality, and community. Faced with these challenges to myself and to my professional practice, I needed to develop a new perception of acceptance that applied to diverse settings. The expression of my own unique gender and cultural experiences in ways such as this encourages students to consider and examine their own values, biases, and prejudices and to find their own ways to develop their own professional identity. Often, by way of response, students share their own experiences in class or in their written reflection papers. I perceive these reflective accounts as an opportunity to encourage self-discovery, to locate their current and future position, and to develop insights about personal goals in relation to profession (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

Respect is one of the most important values that inform my practice, both clinically and as an educator (Holden, 2012; Hugman, 2008; Knott & Scragg, 2010). As a teacher, I view genuine respect as an ethical commitment which enhances the learning process for students.

By sharing my experiences and *encouraging* students *to explore* their own, I demonstrate that I respect diversity of culture and gender as well as various ways of thinking and points of view inside and outside of the class. Respect for students allows them to grow, to be independent learners, to challenge themselves, and to be creative. I am passionate about, and committed to, empowering students to be lifelong learners. Students need to develop competencies that will maintain their learning and enable them to respond effectively to rapid global changes, the explosion in knowledge, and the complexity of social and political problems (Saleebey, 2001). I demonstrate this by pointing out to students what was done well rather than what went wrong. I emphasize their strengths and point to areas for improvement instead of weaknesses and faults. Respect for students will empower them and will enhance hope and positive attitudes (Lopez &

Louis, 2009). I consider that focusing on positive aspects in class will assist students to adopt strength-based approaches in their future practices in social work.

Learning Environment and Teaching Activities

I consider my courses to be a shared journey of understanding rather than a mere delivery of content (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Thus considered, my role as an educator is to provide a learning environment in which the students can become reflective, independent, self-directed learners (Louis & Schreiner, 2012). Among other things, I seek to create a friendly and safe learning environment. In addition, the teaching process should motivate students to think critically and creatively. In my teaching, I implement various flexible and planned methods to sustain students' enthusiasm and interest and to respond to their differing needs.

The teaching activities are carefully designed to cater for diversity in the class (Bednarz, Schim, & Doorenbos, 2010). I make sure that the students are clear about expectations and goals, and I use several strategies to encourage students to think critically and to contribute to class discussions. In my classes, participation and sharing of experiences are encouraged both in class and through online student forums.

Some of the methods I use in class teaching include PowerPoint presentations, written texts and handouts, documentaries, "think–pair–share," and guest speakers. Other strategies I employ are role-playing questions, small group discussions, case studies, brainstorming, and, most importantly, storytelling—using that word as Soule and Wilson (2002) do, in the sense of relating real life experiences. I have found storytelling, in which I or students present experiences, to be the most effective way of enhancing the learning process.

One particularly effective storytelling strategy is sharing with the students my experiences in the field of social work, a strategy which highlights the links between theory and practice (Soule & Wilson, 2002). The storytelling aims to inspire insights among students into knowledge, encouraging them to think individually and collectively about their own future practice.

Examples of how I do this include sharing my experiences of working as a practitioner in non-Western cultures and my reflections on how appropriate many of the theories underpinning much social work practice are in non-Western contexts. For example, in the area of theory, I formed doubts about some of the Western-based and somewhat biased concepts and theories that I encountered—in particular, the prominence of medical models based upon scientific and materialist frameworks which took little account of the spiritual or religious dimension that is central to the experiences of many in the Middle East.

Furthermore, I convey something of my early endeavors to explore more culturally sensitive ways to work with clients and families in the Middle East. These include my need to think about the influence of gender roles when working with clients from diverse cultures, about suitable interviewing techniques, and about community work features. Some specific examples from the Middle East include:

- Shaking hands: Some patients might not approve of shaking hands with the opposite sex, whereas others do.
- Working with a social worker of the opposite sex: Some might view this as acceptable, while others would prefer, or sometimes insist upon, working with a social worker of the same sex.
- Making eye contact: Some patients might be comfortable with this, while others might be uneasy about it.

Students were encouraged to think about these culturally appropriate interviewing techniques during placements and also during some of the discussions in class. They would bring some examples from their own cultures and some of their observations about interacting with families. One of the students provided an example: She had observed that she needed to use a formal tone of voice and make sure that she was not smiling with a male parent. This would be more comfortable for both her and the male client, because both come from a similar traditional background where male and female are segregated.

When talking about cultural competency, we address possible biases and ways of looking for various pieces of knowledge that relate to diversity. An example of that is when a white male student asked me how to ensure that he would act in a culturally appropriate way with families from Muslim backgrounds. This question was then explored through class discussions.

Grounding social work in the students' cultural contexts and raising issues such as those detailed above directly engages the students and provides relevant opportunities for them to ask questions—which they typically do. Their questions lead to further conversation as I respond to and explore their queries with them.

Identifying the Needs When Building Curricula

Being an academic who has practiced and taught in different social work undergraduate and Master of Social Work programs in Australia and in the Middle East, I have found that there are certain concepts which I need to locate and identify in order to ensure competency in my teaching. The most important of these are flexibility regarding and acknowledgement of the various cultural and sociopolitical needs of the cohort of social work students and programs (Northedge, 2003).

I make sure that I design effective curricula to engage students in inquiry, aware that an effective curriculum facilitates the learning experiences of students. To be successful, a curriculum must be flexible and responsive to the needs of the learners. Attention must also be paid to the way the curriculum furthers the aims of social work programs. In its development, a curriculum is built on three main aspects: knowledge, skills, and values (Thompson, 2005). I make sure that students are aware of the interrelated nature of these three aspects.

I ask students during the class how the class is going and whether they have any suggestions about something they would like to focus on. For example, students of the social work program at Qatar University approached me with the idea of inviting a prominent scholar, Professor

Edward Canda, to talk about the subject of spirituality in social work. I supported their initiatives, and they followed up on the process by initiating contact with Professor Canda, who kindly accepted their invitation. They then organized a Skype meeting with the whole class. During the presentation, the students had the opportunity to discuss many important points related to the subject of spirituality and social work.

I carefully consider the necessary components of successful curricula, such as the clarity of the goals, objectives, and aims; the structure of the course; the variety of material used; the use of technology and online material; the tools to assess students' learning; and the assessment of the learning outcomes. I share with the students the learning outcome and I use rubrics to assess how students are doing in relation to these program learning objectives (PLOs).

Framework

When designing curricula, I make sure that there is room for students to participate in exploring and delivering certain aspects of the course in relation to a practice framework. The aim of that is to empower students to be independent learners and to thrive (Longman, 2009). For example, I divide some of the teaching weeks—some for the delivery of interactive theoretical material and some assigned for students to present on a subject they have investigated in their group work, to hear a guest speaker of their choice, or to design case studies. I encourage students to start thinking about their *theoretical practice framework*, which will inform their practice as early as possible. I share with them my own practice framework (Soule & Wilson, 2002). My practice is informed by an eclectic paradigm that merges various theories to provide more holistic views (Coady, & Nick, 2007). For example, I explain how post-colonialist views assist me to understand the distributions and effects of power and to examine the dominant notion of Western supremacy in relation to non-Western cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2006). This is a paradigm that I investigated and integrated into my theoretical framework very early in my career, and my commitment to it has grown throughout. I also emphasize my orientation towards spirituality and religion in social work practice (Canda & Furman, 2010). I share with the students my thoughts about the longstanding negative place assigned to religion within social work and how, contrary to this, I have found that religion and spirituality are very significant for clients and families. An obvious, unavoidable example I raise comes from my work with people from Muslim backgrounds who have mental health problems and how such people constantly raise the subject of religion and spirituality in their conversations relating to coping with problems and explaining the causes of their difficulties.

I talk with my students about how I managed to think about spirituality and religion in my practice and outline my early endeavors while working at the National Center of Mental Health in Jordan with patients and their families from Muslim backgrounds. I explain how those families taught me about the importance of religion in relation to their perceptions and their search for help with mental illness.

With regard to theories that shape social work practice, I inform students that my approach incorporates various theories, such as the solution-focused and client-focused theories, recovery, narrative therapy, and the strength-based approach. This eclectic model allows flexibility,

especially when working within diverse settings. I also emphasize how my practice framework is influenced by different political and cultural elements and how it has changed and developed with accumulated knowledge and experiences.

Incorporating Research

I make sure that I present students with my own research experiences and the latest research and theory in the field, and I ensure that this knowledge is placed within its historical context (Healey, 2005). When designing curricula, I update and modify some aspects according to feedback from previous classes, which I obtain anonymously at the end of the course. I also base my modification of curricula on the knowledge gained by attending professional development courses.

In relation to being up to date in the field of social work, I review the findings of most recent scholarly activities and research. I make sure that the reading materials assigned are the most up to date and varied to reflect the most recent resources.

Part of my role as an educator is to encourage and support students to undertake research projects. In large measure, this is driven by my convictions about the evidence-based practice approach, which asserts the need to produce evidence and build knowledge through research (Thyer, 2004). If they are to ensure best practice, then social work practitioners need to continually update their knowledge and build their analytical and critical skills.

I share with students my appreciation of the experience of practitioners and the need to enhance the impact of practice in social work through evidence. To promote a culture of research among students, I informally assist those who are enrolled in research methods courses to carry out their research. I support them to present their research in conferences. I also supervise students on their graduation research or when they are recipients of students' grants or are compiling conference presentations (Healey, 2005).

The teaching-research nexus is an important principle in my curricula development (Griffiths, 2004). My areas of research are mental health and religion, teaching in social work, and child protection in the Islamic context. My focus in research is at both a local and an international level. I believe in the importance of the collaboration of scholars in different universities to enrich knowledge, a belief which is demonstrated by the initiatives I have taken in international research and my strong links with international scholars and universities.

When I am developing curricula, I incorporate my research findings. For example, some aspects of the content of my lectures and the associated learning activities have been developed around my research and findings in the areas of mental health cross-cultural practice and religion. Likewise, I explain to students some of the challenges related to conducting research in a culturally sensitive context and the role of the researcher in ensuring that their research is ethical.

I believe that the link between theory and practice is important, and the practitioner needs to strive to retain that link (Howe, 2008). In designing curricula, I understand the importance of a

learning process in which students can make the link between theories and practices and become convinced of the need to keep theory and practice in balance. It is important to empower students during the process by encouraging reflective critical thinking so that they can make sense of future practical situations. They are challenged through various activities to think theoretically (Holden, 2012).

Identifying Community

Another important aspect of my teaching is to create a collaborative community among students of social work in different years. This is part of my approach to empowering students to be independent learners by supporting them to locate resources and to learn by identifying role models (Lopez & Louis, 2009). I invite students from my previous classes to talk to current students about their experiences and how to enhance study skills. Many students have found the interaction with students from previous classes to be very motivating, and it has helped them feel more at ease about what is expected of them. The students from my previous classes have also found these experiences helpful, because they were able to share their knowledge and to network with future social work colleagues.

I supported one group of students who decided to form a social work club. The aim was to support each other in their learning. They also reached out to connect with other social work students in the region. With my supervision, they came up with innovative ideas, such as inviting local and international guest speakers to address them. They also invited students from previous years to talk about their experiences in field education. The students supported each other in the club to build a strong community.

I am aware of the importance of incorporating into my teaching the needs of the community and of following the directions, recommendations, and guidance of professional bodies. I constantly seek feedback from stakeholders and professional bodies in my teaching-learning process. One way I do this is by building good relationships with agencies. I also volunteer to deliver workshops and presentations to state and non-government agencies and invite guest speakers to talk to our students about agency services and the need for services. These guest speakers provide students with insights about social work practice and what is expected of practitioners.

Supporting Students

I understand that students come from diverse backgrounds and have different needs and life challenges (Longman, 2009). Some are international students; some are parents; some students have health problems or disabilities. In my teaching, I respect students' prior learning, their diversity in thinking, and their different backgrounds and needs. I also encourage them to build confidence and to show initiative. I communicate this respect of diversity by encouraging sharing of different views. I direct students to different ways of learning and to diverse resources.

Students are also encouraged to contact me if they need to reflect on their views about the subject of study. Many come to me to discuss problems related to possible uncertainties about

the course, the choices available after completing the course, and/or their difficulties or queries about starting field work. Some students have come to me to discuss personal issues which they thought might interfere with their study. Some of the students feel safe enough to discuss with me their biases, which might be based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or class. I support students by exploring with them the resources available to them. I also encourage the thinking process in relation to these issues. An example is when a student shared with me that the reflection and critical analysis essays and the discussions in class made her think about her own biases against people from different cultural backgrounds. As the student said, this realization was a shock to her. The student then talked about strategies that she is implementing in order to overcome these biases. Another student said that the reflective and critical discussions in the class encouraged her to talk to her mother about her position in the family as a young female coming from a traditional background. She wrote to me, saying that the exercises were very helpful to her and to her mother in bringing their attention to some prejudices she was encountering as a young woman. They both started to explore the issue further.

A Continuing Shared Journey

From the outset of my teaching career, I learned that being passionate is the most important element in motivating students. I also understand that retaining a passion for teaching might be affected by many factors, such as being tired or overworked, and by family and personal issues. In order to keep myself motivated, I employ different strategies which I have found—and continue to find—very helpful, such as reflecting (Knott & Scragg, 2010), reminding myself of why I want to be in such a position, strengthening myself spiritually, and talking to my colleagues about difficulties and ways of dealing with them. I try to have a balance in my life and, most importantly, to learn new ways to overcome obstacles. Above all, I feel honored that I am part of the learning journey undertaken by students of social work.

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SALUTATORY[1]

By Sonia Leib Abels

Welcome to the first edition of **REFLECTIONS**. We celebrate the journal and its readers. A year ago this week we moved from a two month old status as an independent journal to sponsorship by The University Press and Department of Social Work, CSULB. According to some publishers, a year is a relatively short time to move from concept to reality. We think the appeal of narratives about practice for helping professionals was the primary reason it happened so quickly. Another incentive has been the genuine interest of our charter subscribers.

As journal editor, I feel especially obligated to produce a perfect product. Surely I'm not much different than others engaged in new ventures. My apprehension tuned to perfection relates to the journal's narrative focus.

The articles we publish, personal accounts of practice differ significantly from those of other journals. Our single mission is to publish narratives with good literary quality that contribute knowledge on ways of helping others and creating social change. At this time there are no other such periodicals.

There is a burgeoning literature about the use of narratives as interventions in nursing, teaching, social work, family therapy, clinical psychology, as modes of reasoning in bio-ethics, and as tools of analysis in organizational behavior and administration.

Searching for perfection guarantees anxiety. A colleague recently suggested I should take a Talmudic perspective in publishing this journal. It must contain an error to acknowledge that it is a human endeavor, signifying only G-D is perfect. I am confident that **REFLECTIONS** will acquire a reputation for its quality and distinct literary appeal.

The idea for this journal came out of a history of story telling encounters with academics and practitioners. Two events focused the possibilities for the journal. After an exchange of stories with others about the different experiences we each had teaching and effecting social policy in Lithuania, we realized that if these personal accounts remained as sophisticated gossip, the knowledge lodged in the accounts would be lost. We knew the story tellers would write on social change, but they would not write an article, a narrative that described and explained their affect and reasoning; the ways their behavior, interactions, and those of the officials changed over time, and what happened when they failed. In their expository writing knowledge of the

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[1]b. A greeting addressed to the readers of the first issue of a periodical. . Brown, L.(Ed) (1993). *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (p.2676) Oxford, Clarendon Press.

process of their practice would be lost.

The second event occurred after the journal was started. Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven presented a paper on organizing voter registration at a conference on social work with groups. Several months later we realized their presentation was a narrative, a descriptive and explanatory personal account of their experience. (In this edition)

This journal is engaged in building a public platform for narratives about practice, a platform guided by the canons of logic, verisimilitude and good writing; and the judgment, not of friends in particular, but of masked peers and an audience from the communities of professional helpers.

We hope this journal will persuade academics, researchers and practitioners that narrative inquiry is another, albeit different, legitimate way to generate knowledge about practice. One internal obstacle is my concern with the views of empirical researchers, who hold that "truth can only be known through scientific research methodology." The helping professions have devoted energy and resources to develop well designed scientific studies that produce knowledge to guide and inform practice. A critical and significant thrust of the helping professions has been development of a strong empirical base. Now along comes a journal inviting and publishing personal accounts of experience in practice.

The narratives in

REFLECTIONS convey a mode of inquiry as a way of knowing practice in a new, yet familiar way.

Narratives are ubiquitous; everyone tells stories. We do not claim that narrative inquiry leads to universal or generalizable truths. However it is likely that cumulative narratives will provide empirical researchers with a potential data base for culling generalizable practice knowledge.

A strong motivation of this journal is to offer stories of practice in a pluralistic context, exemplars that document the experience with diverse populations. Much of the helping professions' literature examines and illuminates the differences and similarities in cultural responses and behaviors. Missing from the literature is the discernment of practice within populations. In an informal study of articles on cultural diversity from several professional journals we found most articles advocated cultural sensitivity without differentiating helping strategies and identifying the outcomes.

Explanations of experience constructed into narratives is the classic genre for sharing human experience. Narratives afford the means to understand our own actions and those of others. We tend to fit together their stories with our own. A narrative is contextualy embedded within the individual's larger life story. Standing on its own the narrative voice does not teach or explicate practice implications, or tell readers what they ought to learn. The

purpose of a narrative is to tell a "good" story, to make things present.

The narratives in this first issue convey the meaningfulness of human engagement. Each authors' personal account reinforces the value of storied experiences for describing and explaining professional action. Passion and commitment to engagement in social change and human development shaped all of these authors' narrative structure. We recognize in each story the tone of the author's self-conscious change as he/she describes the process affecting individual and social events. A theme throughout the stories is the unexpected, the force of happenstance on well planned action. Good news and bad are described as the authors fail and sometimes secure better individual and social conditions.

We hope that these narratives rich with descriptive and explanatory power today and in the future serve as a medium for discourse among authors, readers and the community of helping professions; and that this discourse will strengthen and expand community bonds.

Helping professions are moral professions. A story about practice in the context of this journal is a professional's account of her/his experience seeking to enhance the quality of life, strengthen human and social relations and develop a society that fosters these purposes and supports the outcomes. There are many thoughtful practice stories without public platform.

Narrative inquiry can accommodate a wide range and variety of accounts that describe success and failure. We are committed to publishing narratives of all the helping communities.

Certainly a first editorial ought to be welcoming its current and potential readers and blowing its own tuba. Consider this editorial our toot.
□
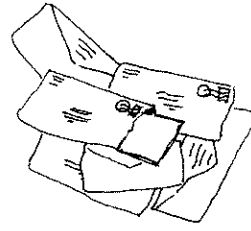
Dear Readers :

Usually letters printed on these pages will come from you. We look forward to your responses. As in all human transactions feedback shapes your being and grounds your endeavors. Getting letters is also great fun. We may not always like what you say or use your suggestions, but it is exciting to go to your jam-packed mailbox thick with news, gossip, critical reviews and subscriptions from you.

Sincerely,

Sonia L. Abels □

Acknowledgments: