REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Volume 26 (2020) Number 3

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Reflections from the Editorial Team: The Power of Creative Expression

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

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 26 number 3 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. In this issue we are excited to introduce our newly released Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography as yet another way of embracing the power of creative expression for which *Reflections* is so well known. Most importantly we highlight 10 thoughtful and evocative narratives by authors who write from the vantage points of practitioners, students, clients, educators, and researchers. Their rich accounts of lived experiences across diverse settings gather momentum as they engage us in their respective journeys.

***Keywords*:** creative expression, poetry, art, photography, professional development, journey

If there was ever a time for reflection, a craving for justice, and a need to find opportunities for creative expression, that time is now. In the midst of a global "reckoning," we hope you will join us in reimagining the ways in which *Reflections* can provide a platform for sharing what can be taught and learned and enacted for the betterment of humankind.

We want to begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, followed by our thoughts on reimagining the ways in which *Reflections* can better serve. Finally, we will provide a brief overview of the articles in this issue and the interconnected themes that emerge.

Thanking and Welcoming Team Members

We have so many people to thank, and we have new team members to introduce. How fortunate we are to be part of *Reflections*!

We are thrilled with the response our Guest Editors Elizabeth "Beth" Russell, Pamela Viggiani, and Debra Fromm Faria received from their Call for Manuscripts on Cultural Humility, leading to two full issues on this important subject. We hope you have had a chance to read these compelling narratives. In addition, much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Lead Guest Editor for a Special Issue on Continuing Education slated to come out in late 2020.

Many thanks to those student team members who work so diligently behind-the-scenes in the copyediting and production functions of *Reflections*. Our deepest gratitude goes to Zoey Pincelli (Copyeditor) and Geetha Somarouthu (Assistant Copyeditor) who moved articles through copyediting into the summer of 2020. Special appreciation goes to Sarah Valek, Michael Dover's Graduate Assistant, who worked with Mike on reading final copy and issuing galley proofs in the production process. Excellent work, Zoey, Geetha, and Sarah!

Continued thanks again to Robin Richesson for her years of service as Art Director for *Reflections* and for the cover of this issue.

A special thanks goes to our Section Editors who volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. Much appreciation goes to Section Editors Jon Christopher Hall (Practice) and Beth Lewis (Field Instruction) who are continuing in their respective roles. Section Editors maintain 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 especially acknowledge the significance of what our Section Editors do because we know they have so many other demands in their respective work environments.

We are indebted to Carol Langer who has served so effectively as Section Editor of Teaching & Learning and just this spring has decided to pass the baton to her colleague, Arlene Reilly-Sandoval. We are delighted that Carol has committed to continuing to support *Reflections* by reviewing manuscripts and so appreciative that Arlene has returned and seamlessly stepped in as Section Editor of Teaching & Learning.

We also want to thank Julie Cooper Altman for her work as Section Editor for Research and wish her well as she steps down from her role to take a well-deserved sabbatical. In the interim, Monica Leisey will fill in for Julie.

Reflections would not exist, however, were it not for our authors and reviewers. The importance of the peer review process cannot be over-stated, and dedicated reviewers are critical players in the editorial process. In this issue alone, at least 20 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to the authors. We have begun listing the names of reviewers for each issue at the end of our editorials as a small way to recognize the behind-the-scenes contributions they make. Thank you for the quality and timeliness of your reviews!

In sum, thanks to all the members of the *Reflections* Team. Yours are gifts of dedication and commitment, and we could not do this without you!

Creative Expression During Times of Reckoning

As your Editorial Leadership Team, we are committed to providing a platform from which the unvarnished truth about the persistence of systemic racism and the disparities and inequities that invade and pervade our communities can be raised. We are reimagining the ways in which our journal can better serve. Our upcoming issues will provide opportunities to look more closely at the impact of the "micro" pandemic of COVID-19 and "macro" disparities and inequities through the lens of race and racism.

We remain hopeful that *all of us* discover new and even more meaningful ways to show up for one another in both our spaces of professional practice and our communities at large.

Over the last months we have talked with the Editorial Board—the Section and Guest Editors—about how to open our hearts and minds to an array of creative expressions. In a time when we

are engaged in a worldwide pandemic, heightened racial tensions, and political turmoil, finding multiple ways to express ourselves is critically important. Those expressions are not only meaningful to the readers of *Reflections* but join a multitude of voices of helping professionals who want and need to reach out beyond themselves to share their deepest convictions, feelings, and lived experiences with others. Silence is not an option.

Embracing multiple ways of creative expression caused us to consider the diversity of narrative types that we have always welcomed but have not always fully delineated. Thus, we reframed our instructions for authors to include three types of narratives:

- A first-hand account of one or more authors' experiences
- An interview that highlights another person's experiences
- A review of one or more books in which their relevancy for the helping professions is integrated into a narrative of the author's experiences

Although we have published all three types over the years, it seemed important to recognize that writing for *Reflections* is inclusive of interviews and book reviews as the core around which a narrative emerges. In a previous editorial on being author-centric, we published guidelines for writing successful narratives, and these guidelines pertain to all three types.

As we talked with Section Editors, Guest Editors, readers, and colleagues during this tragically real and yet surreal time in world and national history, we heard about a proliferation of creative forms of expression in which they and others are engaging. Helping professionals are writing poetry, working on pieces of art, and taking photographs to capture a profusion of emotions crying to be heard. The nurse who is covered in protective equipment, the social worker who is trying to keep long-term care patients safe, the chaplain who trains as a CNA to do "hands-on" care, the physician who watches patients die alone, the immigration attorney who volunteers critical services, the protester who marches during a pandemic, the student who sees their educational experience transformed overnight all have stories to tell. Narratives capture many of those feelings, interactions, and experiences, but it became clear to us that we need to be open to multiple ways of conveying the overwhelming need to connect to others in a world constrained by social distancing and uncertainty. From these realizations and the need to capture these alternative forms of creative expression emerged a new Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography.

Reflections, then, can serve as a vehicle to give prose as well as poetry, narrative as well as art, and writing as well as photography a platform. The poem expressing the heaviness of oppression could join the poetry of hope, the watercolor painting with monochromatic contrast could join the profusion of acrylic color, the photograph of protestors tear-gassed while marching for justice could join a photo of natural beauty that links the environment to the human experience and reminds us that in our ecosystem all life is interconnected. We concluded that all of these expressions could be enwrapped in a contextual paragraph (a mini-narrative) that gives voice to why this creative expression is relevant to the helping professionals.

The Permanent Call for Poetry, Art & Photography is being posted on the *Reflections* website, and these guidelines are provided. This work:

- Is original imaginative work, not yet published in a refereed journal
- Conveys a theme relevant to the helping professions
- Portrays interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, or felt experiences in a creative format
- Sparks engagement, reflection, and meaning-making
- Contains a narrative paragraph that provides the reader with an understanding of what inspired the poet/artist/photographer to produce this creative expression

A review form with these five evaluative criteria has been constructed especially for these submissions. We are so excited to launch this new Permanent Call!

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. If you are using poetry, art, or photography to express yourself, consider submitting your work to *Reflections*. If you know of others who are expressing themselves in creative ways and need an outlet to connect beyond themselves, tell them about our new Call. We want *Reflections* to be a home for an increasingly diverse array of professionals whose lived experiences need to be shared and whose collective wisdom can inspire change.

Highlights of This Issue

Reflections calls for manuscripts by helping professionals who play numerous roles. In this issue, authors write about their experiences as practitioners, students, clients, educators, and researchers. The authors write narratives in which they simultaneously play multiple roles or journey from being a student or client to becoming a practitioner, educator, or researcher. It is through the interface of these roles and the people they meet along the way that their narratives gather momentum and engage us in their journeys.

Three articles begin this issue by enlightening us about journeys in which social workers grow and develop in their empathic abilities to provide services to vulnerable population groups and in their callings to work toward change. Maurici recounts witnessing the devastating effects of poverty, oppression, and inequality endured by children and their families, motivating the author to work in child welfare. As a Title VI Child Welfare Stipend student and a worker within the system post-graduation, Maurici offers candid recommendations to address the stress of working within overloaded systems. Best reveals a journey from being a child in a transnational family, enduring the perils of living in the shadows, to becoming a professional helper. As the author's memories erupt during a meeting with 12 DACA recipients gathered to participate in making a documentary, their hopes and fears are palpable. Cross recounts a field placement experience as a BSW social worker in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the dilemma between keeping residents safe and casting them into forced isolation, Cross offers insights into how interventions such as telehealth must be tempered with humanity. Based on their deep understandings and their emphatic desires to do no harm, all three authors push

forward recommendations for change within human service, education, and health care systems that place clients in peril and perpetuate disparities.

The next three articles focus on journeys in which the importance of community engagement evolves, rich with illustrations of relationship building and self-awareness. Cast in the role of researcher and storyteller, Eady reveals a passion for working with indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia and refers to qualitative research as "data with a soul" (p. 45). Eady likens researchers, who drop into beautiful isolated regions to gather data and leave too quickly, to seagulls flying in and making a mess before they fly away. Drawn to Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Matthew, Ward, and Robinson reflect on the tremendous amount of time it takes to truly engage with community members and the importance of communication and relationship building. Their lived experiences provide a backdrop for illustrations that highlight the depth of their passion and lead to an invitation to dialogue about the alignment of CBPR with professional values. O'Connor and Jones round out this trilogy of articles that focus on a journey into deeper understandings of community. In their narrative they advocate for the incorporation of humane education, in which human rights, environmental preservation, and animal protection are aligned with social work. Infused throughout these three articles is a reverence for humankind, the environment, and all species.

The following two articles beautifully align with the community engagement theme, focusing on the development of curriculum that will engage students as co-learners in their educational journey. Wilfong's article is particularly relevant in a world that is being propelled into virtual learning, writing about the challenges an educator feels when trying to ensure connectivity in the virtual classroom. Designing a distance education course in macro practice is described with excellent examples of activities that captivate student interest. Similarly, Ward and Daniels find ways to offer field supervision using a more inclusive approach. Faced with the challenge of integrating theory into practice for BSW field students, the authors reach out by developing activities that motivate students to learn. These articles offer sound advice to supervisors and instructors who are searching for ways to enhance BSW and MSW student learning.

The last two articles in this issue are deeply intimate, opening windows along the iterative journey of healing that reveal raw emotions and challenges faced by the authors as they engage in the very personal journey of introspection and what it means for who they are as professional helpers. Woods begins by asking the question: "Who offers the wounded healer a bouquet of roses instead of ashes?" (p. 97). Recounting lived experiences of accumulated loss and trauma, Woods, in the role of client, reinforces the importance of the therapeutic relationship on the road to professionalization and how the healer is transformed to walk beside others on their integrated journey. Equally intimate is Lean's narrative. Beginning with a beloved father's inspiration to pursue a career and his death, the author finds "little cause for celebration" (p. 102) in completing a doctoral dissertation. Stepping out of the comfort zone of Lean's private self, and retrospectively analyzing the experience, reveals how critically important a loving partner is in one's journey. Both authors reinforce the power of human relationships in the journey of becoming.

Permeating the articles in this issue is a thirst for meaningful relationships—how those relationships influence our development, are embedded in our identities, enwrap us in

community, and sustain us in our journeys. The authors embrace us as readers by revealing their deepest memories and lived experiences in rich detail, telling us about the choices they have made and the insights they have gained. Some are deeply personal, whereas others are loaded with wisdom gained from community engagement and interpersonal collaboration.

We trust that you will find this issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights that will be useful to educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. 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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Calculated Decisions Entwined in Fate: Reflections as a Title IV-E Child Welfare Stipend Student

Jennifer Maurici

Abstract: Collaborations between schools of social work education and public child welfare agencies have been used as a strategy to improve retention and professionalize the child welfare workforce for approximately 40 years. Funding for these collaborations is provided by Title IV-E of the Social Security Act and can be used to assist current child welfare workers in obtaining their BSW or MSW or to attract social work students to the field of child welfare. This narrative documents my journey, experiences, and insights as a Title IV-E MSW student. It compares my experiences to what the IV-E literature suggests about retention and professionalization within the child welfare workforce and provides recommendations for improving the program.

***Keywords*:** child welfare workforce, Title IV-E, stipend program, turnover, recruitment, retention

Child Welfare: A Profession in Peril

It has been roughly 60 years since the Children's Bureau released a report titled, "In Search of Staff for Child Welfare" which highlighted nationwide staffing shortages within child welfare agencies and encouraged states to use aggressive recruitment and retention strategies (Rycraft, 1994). It appears little has changed since the report's release in 1960. High turnover rates continue to plague child welfare agencies and much of the literature describes this pervasive problem as a "workforce crisis" negatively impacting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children (Faller et al., 2010). Some of the strongest predictors of turnover within child welfare are large caseloads, low salary, feeling undervalued, and lack of respect and little support from supervisors (Griffiths et al., 2017).

Collaborations between schools of social work and public child welfare agencies is one strategy that has been used to address this crisis, according to Zlotnik (2003); one of two major federal funding streams to support these collaborations is Title IV-E. Created as part of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96–272), these funds can be used to attract current social work students to the field of child welfare or to assist current child welfare workers in obtaining their BSW or MSW. The primary goals of these collaborations, Zlotnik shows, are to improve retention and professionalize the child welfare workforce.

I never set out to be a Title IV-E stipend student, never planned to work in child welfare, but somehow, that's exactly what happened....

Calculated Decisions Entwined in Fate

"There is more in a human life than our theories of it allow. Sooner or later, something seems to call us onto a particular path" (Hillman, 1996, p. 3).

In the spring of 1997, I graduated with a BA in Journalism and was immediately hired by a local newspaper in Queens, New York. My career as a journalist was short-lived, however, spanning just shy of a year—the hours were long, the mileage on my car high, and the pay low. The final straw came after I mistakenly reported the outcome of a meeting, and the results became the front-page headline the next morning. Embarrassed and tired, I knew it was time to move on. My friend, the CEO of an employment company, was eager to help.

"I have a great opportunity!" she told me excitedly one day in her office. "It's at a non-profit called Junior Achievement. They recruit and train volunteers from the community to teach business and economics curricula to students in grades K-12. They host volunteer events where employees from a Fortune 500 company go into schools for the whole day, they teach JA, have lunch with the kids, and go out and play with them during recess. It's awesome!"

I did not share her enthusiasm.

"What does this have to do with writing?" I asked, puzzled.

"Well, it doesn't, but I really think you'll love it," she answered, confidently. "Besides," she added, "it's only a temporary position. When it's over, I'll find you something permanent, maybe writing for a magazine."

Desperate for a new job, I reluctantly went on the interview she set up for me a few days later. I had my MapQuest directions printed out and followed them exactly, taking the A train to Chambers Street in downtown Manhattan. Though traveling from Queens to Manhattan took less than an hour, I rarely did it and felt like a tourist standing directly in front of the Twin Towers, head bent straight back, mouth agape, staring up at the mammoth silver buildings that glistened in the sun. I marveled at how they seemed to go on forever until they disappeared into the clouds. I nearly fell backward, and the sudden jolt reminded me why I was here. I eventually pulled myself away and looked at my directions. I crossed the street, looked at my directions again to check the address, and, after some searching, stopped in front of what should have been the building.

"This can't be right," I mumbled to myself, as I checked the address again and compared it to the address on the building in front of me. I shook my head, talking myself out of it, and slowly walked up and down the block, checking the addresses on every building forward and backward until I again stood before the same building.

"Are you kidding me?" I mumbled again, as I walked up to the Buddhist temple. I rang the bell and announced myself, stating less than confidently I was here for the interview, still certain I was in the wrong place—but I wasn't, and the receptionist buzzed me in. I pushed open the door and entered, quietly walking past the room of meditating monks towards the elevator in the back that would take me to the second floor, the smell of incense and chanting following me until the doors closed.

"This is only temporary... this is only temporary," I chanted to myself on the ride up.

The elevator doors opened, and the receptionist led me to the office of the chief operating officer—the walls were adorned with pictures of smiling children and teenagers with their adult volunteers. We immediately hit it off, and soon I was swept up by his excitement and description of the event: corporate volunteers, nervous in the beginning, poring over the curriculum for their assigned classes, then later sitting in elementary school cafeterias surrounded by their students eating sloppy joes, and afterward running around the schoolyard playing tag and double-dutch. Their perfectionism went out the window when they realized these children were just happy to have someone different to share their school day with. He showed me thank-you letters written in crayon and drawings of schools and smiling stick figures. He offered me the position, and I accepted on the spot. This decision would set in motion a five-year career that eventually led me onto the path of child welfare.

The events were held over several months with different groups of volunteers attending different schools throughout the city. Sometimes, volunteers had to cancel last-minute and Junior Achievement staff were asked to fill in. One day, I volunteered in an inner-city third-grade classroom in Brooklyn. The veteran teachers at this school warned me that this particular class was "out of control," and all throughout that morning their regular classroom teacher interrupted my lessons by excessively yelling at them to stay quiet. At lunch, my class surrounded me as we crammed together at the long, white, marble-like picnic table in their cafeteria—they fought with each other over who would sit next to me and stared at me with looks that were simultaneously skeptical, curious, and hopeful. When lunch was over, we went out into the schoolyard and were instructed to form two, silent lines if we wanted to go play. My class couldn't do it. Instead, they pushed one another, yelled obscenities, and made biting remarks about daddies who were missing and mommies who were drunk. One little girl hit another and blamed it on what her mama called "a heavy hand." I watched, stunned. How could these sweet nine-year-olds be so angry?

I pleaded with them to stop, but their anger grew, and they began blaming one another as they watched other classes skipping rope and playing basketball around us. I contemplated, briefly, running off with another class and leaving mine to their fate of yelling and hating, but I could not—would not—abandon them. Instead, I raised my voice and asked, "Don't you want to play?! Come on! Stand in line, like this." I stood as the first person in line and started placing students one behind the other. "Stare at the person in front of you! I want to play with you guys." Now we were laughing, and it became a game. Finally, they stood giggling silently, staring at the head in front of them. "OK. I'm calling her over," I told them and quickly ran over to the authoritative figure who ruled the schoolyard, looking back at my class frequently, smiling and encouraging them to continue to be silent by placing my forefinger over my mouth. I tapped the administrator on the shoulder and beamed proudly at my class who continued to hold their two, silent lines. "I don't believe it," she said as she approached my class, genuinely surprised. "Is this Mrs. -----'s class?" I emphatically shook my head yes and that's when she said the words we had been waiting for: "Go play!" The two straight, silent lines erupted into chaos as we all ran screaming and laughing.

When the day ended and it was time for me to say goodbye, one little boy asked to give me a hug. After we hugged, he looked up at his teacher and asked, "How come you never hug us?" It was at that moment that I realized these children were not "out of control." They were simply

children who were neglected of the attention and affection they so desperately needed and deserved—children who, it appeared to me, were surrounded by apathetic adults who had already given up on them and told them, without saying a word, that they would be forever relegated to this life of anger and poverty. I hoped my lessons in the classroom, and my belief in them in the schoolyard, showed them this was not so. That day, I committed my life to improving theirs.

I volunteered in many classes during my tenure at Junior Achievement. I also recruited, trained, and placed thousands of volunteers from the community in some of the most impoverished schools across New York City. I enjoyed what I did tremendously, but I was also deeply troubled by what I saw; for example, children I barely knew called me "mama." In the stairwell, two sixth grade students were skipping class. When I asked them why, they boasted of aspirations to be "players" and "gamblers" and, as such, school was a waste of their time.

During this time, my emotions ranged from confusion to pity to frustration to anger, as I slowly began to realize I was witnessing the devastating effects of poverty, oppression, and inequality endured by these children and their families. With this epiphany came an increased responsibility to do more. But I didn't know what or how, until yet another decision entwined in fate found me in front of a computer in San Diego searching for a way to help children and their families.

This time in my life gets confusing for me because it all happened so quickly. One minute I was driving from New York to Illinois, finally ready to be together forever with my long-distance love, then the next minute (three months actually), I was told by said love that things just weren't working for him, and that when we had been dating long-distance, things were "safe and easy." After this uncomfortable conversation, I had another life-changing decision to make—stay in Chicago (where I knew no one), move back home to New York (where I didn't want to go back yet) or take my dad up on his offer to move in with him in San Diego. I chose the last option and, keeping with my desire to help children, worked for another non-profit, Best Buddies International. I worked as a program supervisor ensuring the quality of high school and adult volunteer programs that advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Then one day, after living in San Diego for just about a year, my dad told me he was considering buying a house in another state. Yet more circumstances beyond my control requiring me to make more life-changing decisions. What would I do now? Stay in San Diego? Should I move back to New York? Move with my dad?

I had considered going back to school in the past, but it was usually just a fleeting thought. As I calculated my next decision, I resolved to move with him because it seemed like the best way I could go back to school. Now that I had a plan and knew where that plan would take place, I had one more decision to make—what would I go back to school for?

The Child Welfare Stipend Program: A Title IV-E University-Public Child Welfare Agency Collaboration

I don't remember the exact word-search combination I used—*children, families, master's degree, helping*—but eventually, my search led me to the child welfare stipend program at a

Southwestern university; it was a Title IV-E funded collaboration between the university's school of social work and a public child welfare agency. The goal of the program was to provide MSW students with the educational experience necessary to meet the challenges of child welfare practice.

The program covered in-state tuition for two nine-month periods (fall and spring semesters) of the MSW program and provided students with a monthly stipend. In return, students were required to work for child protective services for two years upon graduation. At that time, I knew very little about the social work profession and even less about child protection. What I did know is that I wanted to obtain a master's degree and get a job helping children. Knowing I'd have both—AND have my education paid—made it an easy decision to apply.

The program consisted of two years' classroom education coupled with a field placement. The university is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and, as such, the MSW program follows what Colby (2013) describes as the "profession's preferred educational standard" (p. 5)—a two-year, full-time model with year one focusing solely on foundation and year two focusing on specialization. The Standard Program child welfare stipend students could choose between a Direct Practice (DP) or Planning, Administration, and Community Practice (PAC) Concentration. I chose the latter, because I felt I could make the most difference at the macro level.

Some of the foundation courses for my first year consisted of Human Behavior in the Social Environment; Policy; Research; Diversity and Oppression; and Community and Organizational Change. During my concentration year, I took classes specific to the PAC concentration—Program Planning in Social Work; Social Work Administration; Statistics; Legal Issues in Social Work; and Community Participation Strategies. There was only one class that I was required to take in the second year that set my education as a child welfare specialization student apart from other social work students—Child Welfare Services. As I reflect on what I learned in this class, I believe the content did enable me to be a better child welfare worker. I learned about poverty and its deleterious impact on families and communities; I had a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and their influence on parenting styles and family values; I was introduced to the concepts of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender and how together, they influence the way child welfare services are designed and administered; and I learned how to examine the challenges families face and how these challenges contributed to the need for child welfare intervention.

This class, indeed my social work education, allowed me to have a better understanding of the families that come into contact with the child welfare system, thereby allowing me to be more empathetic and reserve judgment. I learned that many of these parents are not sadistic abusers and have actually been victims themselves—of abuse or neglect when they were children, of systemic racism and classism, of judgment, of inequality, of poverty, and of multiple systems that communicate poorly with one another, causing frustration and anger for those who need help.

When I applied to the program, I believed I was a good fit. In my Statement of Education and Career Goals that I submitted with my application, I stated in one paragraph that I was

"passionate about helping children and their families obtain the services they need to become a loving, cohesive family." This commitment to children and families, according to the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (2005), is one of several positive personal factors that are attributed to retention in child welfare. Another personal factor cited by the study is previous work experience. The work I did at both Junior Achievement and Best Buddies should have also contributed to my staying. Finally, in another section of my statement, I wrote, "I am resolute in my dedication to child welfare and understand the hard work that is necessary to complete this program." According to Jacquet (2012), "When IV-E programs recruit students who express a commitment to child welfare, it is apt to lead to increased retention of the MSWs in public child welfare agencies" (p. 420).

Using all of these personal factors, I was, for all intents and purposes, a good fit for the program. But just as there are personal factors that contribute to retention, there are organizational factors that also influence retention, as well as turnover, in child welfare. When I applied and was subsequently accepted to the program, I was unaware of the latter fact. In the beginning, I was eager and excited to learn about social work, child welfare, and how, when using the disciplines together, I could make a difference in the lives of children and families.

Field Placement

Field placements ran concurrently with coursework. In our first year, all stipend students were required to complete their field placement in an Education Unit as a student intern. These units were placed in three Child Protective Services (CPS) offices throughout the state and provided students with hands-on experience. There are two parts to CPS—investigations and on-going. An investigator is, as the name implies, the worker who goes out to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect. If there is cause for removal and placement into foster care, the case is transferred to the on-going unit. Our first-year field placement was with an on-going unit and comprised a supervisor, a caseworker, a case aide, and roughly five MSW students. We were given frequent one-on-one supervision, coupled with a seasoned worker, and provided experiences such as conducting home visits and participating in a mock trial in which we were given details of a real case and called to testify. We were evaluated on our performance with the children and families we worked with and how we applied our classroom knowledge with our practical field experience.

Our first supervisor was a gruff chain-smoker who had been with CPS for roughly 35 years and retired shortly after we arrived. At that time, I smoked as well, and we often ran into each other at the designated smoking section outside the building. If he provided me with any pearls of wisdom as to how to succeed at CPS during these encounters, I don't remember what they were. I just remember that as it got closer and closer to his last day, his smile got broader and broader, and his presence lighter and lighter, until one day he floated away to retirement and was gone.

His replacement, almost literally, floated in. Everything about her was light—her flowing clothes, her soft voice, her mannerisms. She exuded an aura of calm and tranquility that seemed out of place in this hectic, fast-paced world of family court appearances and home visits. One day I shadowed her on a home visit. As we stepped out of the car and started walking towards the house, an enormous, bony, disheveled dog came running at us, barking ferociously. My

supervisor was a few steps ahead and stopped dead in her tracks. I did the same, as did the dog. It was a standoff. My heart was pounding as I watched her, waiting for our next move. I thought for sure she was going to about-face and yell, "Run!" but instead, she slowly held out her hand as if calming vibrations shot out from her fingertips. The dog cautiously walked over to her and started sniffing her hand. I stared in awe.

"Poor baby," she cooed as she petted it softly. "You're just hungry, aren't you? Where are your owners?"

She later explained during supervision how the dog would sense fear. She explained she respected and loved it because it was a living creature; she did not feel threatened or frightened. She understood that all things are connected by an energy flowing through the universe and felt the animal's pain. She then explained she practices yoga and meditation, and that in this profession, it is important to find healthy ways to cope with the daily barrage of stress and trauma. I had no idea how true those words would ring until I graduated and started my work at CPS.

Field placement in my second year was focused on my PAC concentration, and I was placed at a non-profit child advocacy organization. As an intern, I conducted public policy research pertaining to the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and advocated for its reauthorization. I summarized complex public policy issues concerning child health care and disseminated that information—through fact sheets, email alerts, and sign-on letters—to a diverse audience, including policymakers and lobbyists. I met with state legislators and advocated alongside my supervisor and other staff. I enjoyed the advocacy and research my internship provided and wondered if there would be an opportunity to continue this macro-level work once I was placed at CPS.

In the spring of 2007, I graduated with my Master's in Social Work, PAC concentration, and specialization in child welfare. I felt my classroom education, coupled with my field placements, prepared me for the work ahead at CPS. I also had the Social Work Code of Ethics to guide me. I felt proud my newly chosen profession had a code of ethics. Lastly, I was excited my classmate would be with me. He was my classmate-turned-coworker (and will be referred to as my CTC throughout this paper), and I couldn't have survived without him. We supported one another throughout coursework and during our first-year field placement. I knew that together we would go through district orientation, training, and eventually, we would be placed together in the same CPS unit. Although I was nervous, there was comfort in knowing that we would be there to support one another—that I wouldn't be alone.

District Orientation

The trainees trickled into the blue, windowless room, one by one, and sat at one of the three round tables, six chairs to a table. At each seat was a pink writing tablet for notes, a package of post-it notes, a yellow highlighter, a large binder clip, and a table tent to write our names.

All around the room hung dozens of posters—the agency's guiding principles, its vision, its mission statement, a drug identification chart, meth lab hazards, and a poster titled "A Body on

Drugs" depicting small, square, before-and-after pictures of individuals with body sores and missing teeth, unrecognizable after methamphetamine ravaged their bodies and minds. At the front of the room hung a big sign on the dry erase board that read, "Welcome to ACYF District 1!"

The training began with introductions: name, degree, experience, why CPS? Why now? Most of us wanted to help children—to improve their lives and the lives of their families—to make a difference in this world in some small way.

"I was in foster care," said one trainee. "I'm grateful for CPS and for the system. I want to give back."

A majority of us were social workers fresh out of school, newly obtained master's degrees in hand. Now it was time to put that social work education into practice.

During the three-day district orientation, we were inundated with information. I had no idea this was only the beginning, a pre-cursor for a much longer "marathon training" as one former stipend student put it. Some of the information was administrative—how to fill out a timesheet and mileage report; how we were going to be evaluated; an introduction to our personnel folders, what they contained, and where they'd be sent. Folders and folders of information and paperwork. One was even labeled "Survival Guide," but as I learned after several months on the job, even survival seemed impossible.

We were asked what we think are characteristics of a CPS employee. What are the traits we bring with us? As we called them out, our trainer wrote them down:

"Organization!" shouted one.

"Empathy!" said another.

"Effective communication!" said a third.

Observance, good listening skills, teamwork, patience, a sense of humor—on and on we went—ability to manage emotions, dedication to self-care, problem-solving skills, knowledge of child development, understanding of trauma, understanding of policies and procedures, flexibility and, last on my list, ironically, is time management skills.

Time management. This was impossible for me, indeed for many, in the world of CPS. No matter how many times I arrived at seven am, left at seven pm, worked on the weekends to type up progress notes or close out cases, it seemed I could never catch up, could never quite get a handle on my caseload....

Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI)

After the three-day district orientation, we were sent to another location in a different part of the state for the Child Welfare Training Institute (CWTI). The training consisted of three weeks of

classes, then we would report to our unit for a week of shadowing, then three more weeks of classes, then back to our unit permanently. Once there, we would be on the new employee schedule, slowly getting cases and going out with a seasoned worker who would allow us to lead the investigations and assist when needed, until we were fully immersed in our unit and part of the full rotation of investigations.

On our first day of training, we were given an empty binder.

"Policies change so quickly around here, it doesn't make sense to have a binder already made," explained one of our trainers. "Instead, we'll be providing you hand-outs every day to insert into your binder until, at the end of the CWTI, you have a complete training binder."

We learned an incredible amount during our time at the CWTI, beginning with legal definitions of child abuse and neglect. We were shown a drawing of a dirty home and were asked to identify what was a safety concern (open electrical wire hanging from the ceiling) as well as what wasn't (empty pizza box on the floor). We spent, as would be expected, a considerable amount of time learning how to interview children. We were taught not to ask leading questions. We were taught children struggle with understanding time (last week, last month) so when we ask questions, it's important to ask questions around seasons or holidays or birthdays. "Was that close to when school started? Near the 4th of July?" We were taught about "good touch, bad touch" and how to explain that to a child during an interview. "A bad touch is when someone touches a part of your body that your bathing suit covers. Can you remember a time that happened?" We learned about domestic violence and its impact on children, and we were taught that methamphetamine and "meth labs" were growing to crisis proportions in the Southwest.

Every day brought with it new concepts and new documents to place in our binder. After three weeks of training, we were ready to report to our unit.

Reporting to My Unit

"How's your training going so far?" asked my supervisor during our first supervision session.

Today was the first day I reported to my unit after being at the CWTI for three weeks. For the entire day, I was out in the field, for the first time, shadowing a seasoned worker who was conducting investigations. This was the first opportunity my supervisor and I had to speak.

"It's going well," I replied.

"So, did they scare the shit out of you with the nanny cam video?" he continued.

Oh yes, I thought to myself. Yes, they did.

It's been 13 years since I saw the nanny cam on our first day at the Child Welfare Training Institute, and for as long as I live, I will never forget it. The trainers warned us about the nanny cam. They said it would be disturbing. That is an understatement. There is nothing—no words, no warnings, no vague description of, "You're going to witness child abuse"—that can really

prepare you for the nanny cam. Still, we tried to brace ourselves for what was about to happen. I can still hear the collective deep breath of reluctant anticipation....

I will warn you now, dear reader, as the trainers warned us—what follows is a description of what we saw. If you don't want to read about how a sadistic abuser, as we later learned he was, beat an 11-month-old, then please move on. As I watched this video during training, I wrote down what I saw and what I felt. I'm sharing it with you now because this is what we saw as child protection workers in training—individuals who wanted to make a difference, who wanted to help children....

The trainer hit play, and instantly, the unidentified man, made so by the camera blurring his face, burst into the room with a clear purpose. There was no pause. No hesitation. No second-guessing. In an instant, he yanked the 11-month-old out of her playpen by one arm, held her dangling in front of him, drew back his free arm with a clenched fist, and gave three quick blows to the child's abdomen—BAM! BAM! BAM! With each blow, her limp body swayed back, then forward, back, then forward. She lost her breath and stopped crying. I scribbled as fast as I could, wanting to take down every description, every sound, every sight. We can't be the only ones to witness this, I thought. As my head was buried in my notebook, my classmate next to me cried out, "Oh, my God!" and out of the corner of my eye, I saw him push himself away from the table. We were in the last row of the classroom, and he pushed himself so hard against the table, the wheels on his chair carried him almost to the back of the room. His hands flew up to cover his gaping mouth, his eyes wide with shock. I looked up at the screen just in time to see what appeared to be a stuffed animal being thrown into the playpen. But it wasn't a stuffed animal. It was the baby. The trainer paused the tape and proceeded to ask us what injuries we thought the baby sustained. The trainer then hit play again, and the abuse started again. When the whole horrific event ended, we were told the police responded after viewing the tape, the sitter was arrested, and the baby only had two small bruises on her stomach. The point in all this was to make us aware that it takes a lot to cause bruises, and we should be vigilant. The emergency room doctors said because she was swinging as he held her by her arm, she didn't get the full blows, which saved her....

"...So, did they scare the shit out of you with the nanny cam video?" he continued.

"It was probably the most disturbing thing I've ever seen," I replied feebly.

"Well forget it," he advised. "That's not who our families are. A majority of our cases are neglect. Parents have substance abuse issues, mental health issues, lack of support—no family or friends to help them out. Yes, there's abuse, and we have to protect children. But don't rush to judgment, don't...." He stopped, and then asked, abruptly, "Did your asshole tighten up when you went out on your first investigation today?"

I sat staring at him, caught completely off-guard for two reasons—one because of his complete bluntness and crass matter-of-factness, and two because he was right. When my colleague and I parked in front of our first house that morning, my entire body tightened up. My heart raced faster and faster as we approached the door and my hands couldn't stop shaking. We held nothing more than a clipboard with a report containing allegations, a brochure informing parents

of their rights, and our ID badges.

"We can't carry anything?" I had asked her earlier that morning when we left the office. "Not even pepper spray?"

"Nothing," she confirmed. "Make sure you shake the gate so if there's a dog, it'll come running while you're still outside. Make sure you know which way the door opens, push or pull, when you're in the house in case you need to get out quick, and never, ever, sit with your back to the door or someplace where you're blocked from an exit."

When he saw I couldn't muster a response, he saved me by asking if I wanted another piece of the Italian bread we were snacking on. I nodded, and he ripped off a piece with his hands, crumbs flying everywhere.

I liked my supervisor. I liked his frankness. I liked the way he tied his thinning salt-and-pepper hair into a ponytail that fell into one long spiral down to his shoulder blades. I liked his staccato rhythm laugh that quickly rose and fell until you weren't sure if he had laughed at all, and I told him this during the unit lunch that was held to welcome me and my CTC to the team on our first day.

"Good," he told me. "It's a good thing when I laugh."

I didn't think anything of that statement, but my CTC didn't like it. He said it sounded foreboding, almost like a warning. Little did I know that would be one of many things he didn't like about our supervisor. The importance of supervision, both as a source of social support as well as workplace support, is an organizational factor that can contribute to either retention or turnover (Wilke, et al., 2018). For my CTC, it was a major factor that contributed to his leaving.

But supervision wasn't a turnover factor for me. I felt supported and thought our supervisor was fair to us and our families. I appreciated the way he helped me think critically about my cases. He wasn't a social worker, nor did he have to be—a social work degree is not a requirement to work in child welfare, and while there is some debate in the child welfare literature as to whether or not social workers make better child welfare workers than non-social workers, there is agreement that child welfare service delivery is deeply rooted in the early history of the social work profession, and much of the literature on child welfare competencies and social work education cite direct links between the two (Social Work Policy Institute, 2010).

I observed these links with my supervisor, and there were instances in which I felt he was applying social work skills, both with our families and with us. He would use reflective listening frequently and understood the power dynamics that existed between us and our families. He encouraged me not to rush to judgment and, most importantly to me, despite how busy he was, he was always available for consultation. Whenever I was having difficulty with a case, I would softly knock on his door, which was always open unless he was having supervision with one of my colleagues.

"Got a sec?" I would ask sheepishly, feeling bad I was interrupting.

He would usually be sitting at his computer, reviewing our case notes, reading new reports he was about to assign to one of us to investigate, or conducting myriad other tasks he was required to do as a unit supervisor.

"Of course. What's up?" he'd ask.

"I don't know what to do about this case," I began one day, and flopped into the chair in front of his desk. "I have a 12-year-old girl. She's still wetting the bed. She's hoarding food. She's not showering. Maybe she's being sexually abused?" At this point, my voice trailed off until it was barely audible.

"What?"

"Maybe she's being sexually abused," I said a little louder.

"You do that a lot," he observed.

"Do what?"

"Your voice. It trails off when you're not confident about something, and I can't hear you. No one can hear you when you do that. Even if you're uncertain, say it. Don't let your voice go off into a whisper."

"Really? I never noticed that."

"Don't do that either," he advised. "At least not when you're interviewing kids."

"Do what?"

"Sound surprised. 'Really?'" he said, imitating me, his voice rising sharply. We both laughed. Then he grew serious again.

"If you do that during an interview, a kid will pick up on that and will tell you what he thinks you want to hear. You can't show any emotion when you're interviewing," he advised. "No matter what you hear."

"I had no idea I did that either. Thanks for this."

"So, what do you think you should do?" he asked, re-focusing the conversation and getting me to think about the case I brought to him. "Do you want to remove?"

"I don't know," I said, frustrated.

He eventually helped me think through all of the options. I did not remove the young lady and instead offered in-home supportive services that would help the grandfather with his granddaughter's behaviors, as well as provide therapy for the young lady to understand the

underlying causes of these behaviors. My supervisor and I had many meetings like this, both in supervision and impromptu. He never appeared annoyed and was never too busy to provide guidance.

My CTC, on the other hand, did not feel supported. In fact, our feelings about our supervisor could not have been more opposite. He felt our supervisor was insensitive and did not hold the same ethical and social work values that stipend students held regarding helping people and families. He also felt our supervisor made statements that were very direct and condescending with little regard for how they would be received.

Moreover, my CTC expressed these concerns with our training supervisor, who then elevated it to the human resources director. The latter did not want to intervene and instructed the training supervisor to instruct my colleague to go to our supervisor, and then our supervisor's supervisor if the problem could not be remedied. In short, he should follow the chain of command. Because he was new, he did not feel comfortable doing this. In addition to the lack of supervisory support he felt, my CTC believed he was not suited for investigations and requested to be moved to an on-going unit. This request went unheeded, and he was required to remain in our unit. He felt demoralized and disempowered as a result.

Peer support is another factor in retention, and although my CTC did not feel supported by our supervisor, many of our colleagues in our unit were very supportive. They wanted us to succeed, taking the time to answer our questions and helping us to process what we were observing daily. The floor of our building housed several other units in both investigations and on-going, and in addition to the colleagues in our unit, we met others during our first week of shadowing. Everyone was supportive and grateful to have us on board, but as time went on, it seemed to me the air was always heavy with defeat. My CTC noticed this as well, and as the weeks turned to months, secondary trauma and burnout were evident in some acts of insensitivity and judgmental attitudes. Once we were asked to transport two children to a foster home after they were just removed from their parents.

"I need you two to take this one and this one," said a worker from another unit, as she touched each child on the top of the head.

She said it so matter-of-factly, with no emotion. My CTC and I immediately looked at one another and later discussed how concerned we were by this. The worker did not call these children by name and, it appeared to us, did not even recognize the trauma these children just endured after being removed. We later realized that this type of behavior was a symptom of secondary traumatic stress, and it explained the defeated vibrations I felt. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2016), child welfare workers are at very high risk of developing secondary traumatic stress because of their daily interactions with individuals who have experienced trauma. Moreover, this trauma and secondary trauma experienced by children and families, as well as staff, can affect organizational culture, which in turn can negatively impact child welfare workers who want to help children and families.

Despite these instances, it was clear that those who took a job in child welfare were committed to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Why else would they work such long

hours and put their own safety at risk? I remember I hadn't seen one of my colleagues for a few days. When we finally ran into each other, I noticed she had a circular bruise on her arm the shape of a cup. It was purple and yellow with some green throughout.

"Jesus, what happened?" I asked.

"I was supervising a visit and the parent got upset with me. She threw the sippy cup at me, and it hit me right in the arm."

Fortunately, I was never physically assaulted, but I was most certainly verbally assaulted and intimidated on many occasions, sometimes even before going out on an investigation.

"Hey Boss," I said, as I knocked on the door of my supervisor's office one day, holding the report I was about to go investigate. "Um, the report says there's a gun in the home...?" I said, half statement, half question.

"Welcome to the Southwest," he responded without looking up from the computer.

A few CPS workers even voiced how much they loved their job. When I was at CPS for several months, I had a conversation with a 10-year veteran and asked him what kept him in investigations.

"I can't imagine doing anything else," he replied enthusiastically.

"That's awesome!" I exclaimed in an Oscar award-worthy performance of hiding my shock.

I can't imagine doing this for one more day, I thought to myself.

2008 Journal Entry

"You never know, when you knock on that door, what's on the other side." –14-year CPS veteran

For the past two weeks, every Saturday and Sunday, I go out to the balcony and chain smoke, reflecting on my week. "Don't take your work home with you," advised several seasoned employees. Too late. I've shadowed several investigators on at least a dozen child abuse and neglect reports—watching, learning, questioning, and calculating—what will I do when the case is mine?

Safety. Risks. Family preservation. Policy. Dangers. Strengths. Concerns. Social work. Dignity and respect. They all come together and guide me in making critical decisions.

As I sit staring out at the palm trees, I light another cigarette and recall the last case of the week....

"We're going to see mom, first," said the veteran CPS worker I shadowed. "She's at the hospital. Read the report while we drive there."

A SEN (Substance Exposed Newborn). Cocaine. Six children already removed, and baby makes seven.

"I hate her," I said flatly after reading the report that contained the allegations. Six kids? And now another baby? But why?

I regretted those words the second I said them. My second week on the job and already I broke a code of ethics—dignity and worth of the person.

"I'm not feelin' the love here," my CTC chided from the backseat.

"I know, I know," I sighed. "But that tiny baby."

I can't think about it anymore and grab my cellphone to call my grandfather. I've learned to be patient and let the phone ring at least a dozen times. With each ring, I can see him shuffling closer to the phone.

"Hello?" he finally answers.

"Hey grandpa, it's Jennifer."

"Jennifer!" he says, enthusiastically. "So nice of you to call."

We talk about our favorite radio political pundit, he tells me about the opera he heard on the radio earlier that day, and, eventually, he asks me how the new job is.

"It's OK," I answer. "It's already kind of stressing me out," I admit.

"I don't know how you're doing it," he replies. "I couldn't take it. All those crying mothers. 'My baby, my baby. Please don't let them take my baby!' It was too sad. I had to leave."

I have completely forgotten my grandfather was a family court interpreter.

"Just make sure you take care of yourself," he advises.

"I will," I assure him, lighting up another cigarette and pouring myself a glass of red wine as the clock strikes noon. "I'll be home for the holidays."

"Can't wait," he replies. "Thanks for the call!"

Child Protective Services Specialist II

After shadowing, followed by the other three weeks at the Child Welfare Training Institute

(CWTI), I was ready to start. On my first official day, my first case was waiting for me on my chair, placed in a manila folder with clasps on both sides. On the right was a report which contained the allegations taken by the CPS hotline. On the left, among other paperwork, was a domestic violence screening tool and a brochure detailing parental rights. I was on the new employee rotation so, for now, there was just one case. In time, there would be more. Many more. I opened the folder and began reading the report. It wasn't at all what I expected. No physical abuse. No emotional neglect. It was a suicide—a father who took his own life and a mother who couldn't be located. The suicide note, which he wrote to his 11-year-old son, was included with the report. I read how sorry he was that he did this and how he hoped his son would understand and forgive him. I couldn't believe I was reading this. I felt the corners of my mouth turn down so sharply they hurt. It took all the strength I could muster to not break down and cry on my first day, 15 minutes into the job.

"Good morning," said my supervisor who popped into my cubicle, startling me. "I see you're reading your first case."

"What are we supposed to do with this?" I asked, puzzled. There was no respondent parent. He was deceased.

"We have to go see him," he answered, referring to the child who was staying with a family friend.

Despite the emotional toll of my first case, it was relatively easy in that it was not time-consuming. We found the child's mother, and I supervised a few visits. I didn't observe any safety concerns and, in fact, she appeared doting and loving. I don't recall the facts of the case and why the child was living with his father and his mother wasn't more involved. But after supervising several visits at her home and interviewing the child several times, as well as others who knew the family, I concluded, with my supervisor's consultation, that there were no safety concerns and no reason he couldn't live with his mother. I made referrals for counseling—individual for the child and family for them both—and closed the case. I felt good that I was able to help this family. This, I thought, is why I'm here—to help.

But as the weeks went on, my caseload grew. The allegations ranged from medical neglect (called in by a doctor who felt the parents were not doing enough to help their anorexic teenage daughter), to physical abuse (a child who was disciplined with a hanger), to child endangerment (a mother and aunt who were arrested during a drug raid while the child was sleeping in another room). Eventually, I was put into full rotation, and the cases seemed endless. Just when I thought I may catch up thanks to putting in long hours and working weekends, it was my turn to investigate new allegations, and the cases I was working on the week before still had work that needed to be done—voicemails to be returned, notes to be written, and visits to be conducted. This went on for months and, eventually, I felt like a hamster in a wheel. No matter how fast I ran, how early I arrived, how late I stayed, how many weekends sacrificed, I simply couldn't catch up and was going around and around but not getting anywhere.

In my last supervision session, I was questioned about the number of open cases I had on my caseload—45. My investigations determined they were all "unfounded" which means I did not

have sufficient evidence to conclude abuse or neglect. An "unfounded" case also means that what happened didn't meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect. In these instances, these cases just needed to be closed, but instead they sat in my drawer and showed they were still open on my caseload in the computer database.

"Why haven't you closed them out yet?" my supervisor asked.

"I don't have the time," I explained feebly. This had become my mantra. There was no other explanation. There was never enough time.

The concept of time management was laughable. Every time I turned around, it seemed it was my turn to do investigations. Just when I thought I might have some time to write my progress notes, or finish a court report, or transfer a case to the on-going unit, it was my turn again. When I arrived at my cubicle in the morning, I'd find several manila folders stacked on my chair, each one containing various allegations, all with varying priorities—"priority 1" required us to go out within two hours, and "priority 4," 72 hours.

"Don't wait until the last minute to go out on your P4s," our supervisor advised us early on. "You never know when something will change, when you'll get a P1 that'll push the P4 to the side, and then you'll be late going out to investigate the P4."

"I understand," he said. "But if something happens to one of those kids, if one of them dies, even if the case is unfounded, because it's still an open case on your caseload, it's still on you."

And that was it. That was all I needed to hear. On me?! I felt I had been duped, set up to fail. I didn't blame him. He was the man in the middle, the one who heard it from up top, who heard it from even further up top until I was certain no one had any understanding of what was happening down below. How could anyone possibly think this job was manageable?

In Search of Staff for Child Welfare

"Dear -

Regretfully, as per our conversation... I am resigning from my position as Child Protective Services Specialist II effective... My decision is based on a number of factors including, but not limited to, unrealistic job expectations, irreconcilable priorities, and extreme emotional stress endured throughout my employment.

I will be providing the agency with a more comprehensive letter detailing the many issues and concerns I have regarding both the [stipend program and the agency]."

I walked in and handed my supervisor my resignation letter. He showed no emotion. He was neither surprised nor disappointed. He took the letter from me and said simply, "This is too bad. You were really starting to get it."

I was tempted to take it back, to give it another try and not feel like a quitter. But then I thought

about how I was smoking up to two packs of cigarettes a day, how my eating habits had deteriorated, and how I was attending more happy hours, and buying more bottles of wine than any one person should. I thought about how my ever-growing "To Do" list raced through my head each night while lying in bed praying for sleep—*call the psychiatrist, go out and do that last home visit, return all those voicemails, write that court...*—until sleep finally rescued me; I thought about how every morning when my alarm went off I unconsciously sighed, "Oh f - - - ," as the thought of everything I had to do raced back into my brain, uninterrupted—*...report, schedule the team decision-making conference, go to that school and interview that teacher, should I have removed that child?....* And I thought about the 45 open cases sitting in my drawer and how if something happened to one of those children....

"I'm sorry," I said, defeated. "I just don't think this is for me."

I lasted just one year and two months as a Child Protective Services Specialist. My two weeks' notice turned into one month as I meticulously closed out every one of the 45 cases and ensured the ones that were still open could be easily followed up with. I provided detailed notes and made sure all forms and assessments were complete. I felt bad leaving my unit, knowing that with my departure, and the departure of my CTC (who resigned at the same time for similar reasons), they would be down two people and left to pick up the cases that would have been assigned to us to investigate. I felt bad for my supervisor as well, because I knew he, too, would have to pick up new cases.

Despite my deep commitment to child welfare, my passion for helping children and families, my newly acquired social work education skills, and hands-on field placement at a public child protective services agency, I became exactly what the Title IV-E program was designed to prevent—one more child welfare worker who contributed to the high turnover rate within the profession. My classmate-turned-coworker (CTC) made two.

During our time together at CPS, my CTC became my rock and my sounding board; I was the same for him. I know there was no way we could have lasted as long as we did without one another. Peer support is identified as a retention factor in the child welfare workforce recruitment and retention research (e.g., Griffiths, et al., 2017), but it wasn't enough to prevent us from leaving. Though we encouraged one another and tried to stay positive and see our commitment through, the demands on us—our time, our emotions, our physical and mental health—were simply too great.

We felt we had been set up to fail by everyone involved in the child welfare stipend program at the university and the child welfare agency who knew what this job entailed and didn't tell us. We were so angry we drafted a letter to the governor with the hopes of eventually sitting down to meet with her. We felt we could not let this happen to others. Our letter detailed the "dynamics, issues, and concerns" we had. We emailed other stipend students asking them about their experiences, incorporated our own experiences, and expressed our concern that stipend students were not provided with all of the information needed to make an informed decision, especially as it pertained to the emphasis on paperwork and timeliness of case transfers and closures.

Our letter detailed 28 irreconcilable priorities that conflicted simultaneously or within similar time frames of each other, which included, but were not limited to:

- Completing family and child assessments and investigations within mandated timeframes
- Receiving four or more new investigations each week
- Completing case notes within mandated timeframes
- Completing the Child Safety Assessment/Strengths Risks Assessment within mandated timeframes
- Completing case closures, transfers, and case plans within mandated timeframes

We asserted the time frames, mandates, policies, and expectations could not be completed in a 40-hour workweek, and, coupled with the emphasis on paperwork and timeliness, believed that all of these dynamics were incongruent with all we had learned during our social work education. In short, we believed we spent more time on paperwork and less time providing these families with the help they needed.

On and on we went, for 24 pages, detailing everything we felt was wrong: issues resulting from the irreconcilable priorities (decreases morale of investigative stipend workers); forced overtime (impossible to complete tasks in 40-hour workweek; cannot adequately address families' needs); work environment (being threatened with write-ups if cases were not closed or transferred); and the cumulative and long-term effects of it all (increased mental, emotional, physical stress/illness; burnout).

My CTC submitted his exit survey on his last day. He was detailed and thoughtful in his comments explaining everything we documented in our letter. I, on the other hand, was so angry by how it all played out, and was focused so much on what I wanted to say, that I never said it—the comprehensive letter I planned to provide detailing the many issues and concerns I had with the stipend program and child welfare agency, as well as the 24-page letter my CTC and I spent so much time researching and writing, was never sent. Eventually, I moved back to New York and was immersed in job-hunting and reconnecting with my family. He was also job-hunting and reconnecting with himself, engaging in the self-care activities he didn't have time for during our time together at CPS. In short, our lives moved on.

Conclusion and Recommendations

I may not have been a good fit for investigations, but I never left child welfare. After my experience at CPS, I spent roughly five years as a foster care, adoption, and post-adoption supervisor, followed by another five years working at a legal services organization where I provided direct social work support and advocacy to parents involved with the child welfare system. I am currently employed at a public child welfare agency conducting the macro-level work I have always wanted to do.

In some ways, I also never truly left that Southwest state. I subscribed to daily news clippings and kept my finger on the pulse of what was happening there. In 2013, I learned the child welfare agency had come under intense scrutiny because there were thousands of child abuse

and neglect reports that went uninvestigated. This was the result of a practice that began in 2009, shortly after I left. In an attempt to manage increasing workloads, an increasing number of children entering foster care, and a decreasing workforce, a special unit was created and tasked with identifying the more severe allegations called into the statewide hotline. During this new process, cases were erroneously designated unnecessary to investigate and were closed. While the media, the public, and politicians vilified the agency, I understood how something like that could have happened. It was an act of sheer desperation, of an attempt by those in the trenches to manage the unmanageable, to try to stop the bleeding coming from a wound that had become so deep and so wide that not even the tightest tourniquet could stop the gushing.

The average caseload around that time was well over 100. When I resigned, I had 45 cases that needed to be closed and dozens more that were open requiring varying degrees of follow-up. I had breathed a sigh of relief knowing I had left just in time, but my relief quickly turned to guilt when I realized my workload was absorbed by my remaining colleagues who still had their existing caseloads to manage in addition to new cases rapidly being assigned to them daily.

An issue brief by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016) cites caseload and workload as contributing factors in turnover. According to the brief, *caseload* is defined as the number of cases assigned to a worker, whereas *workload* is the amount of work that's required to "successfully manage assigned cases and bring them to a resolution" (p. 2). Both caseload and workload were factors that contributed to me leaving. Decreasing caseload and workload is a way to improve retention. The child welfare agency I worked for found a way, and the average caseload size dropped from 145 to 22.

Because of my high caseload and workload, I felt the utilization of my newly acquired social work skills was limited. I spent more time doing paperwork than providing these families with the help they needed. One recommendation to address this issue is for public agencies to "review their job expectations of workers and determine whether their expectations for caseloads and paperwork permit workers to achieve their ultimate objective of the child welfare system: helping children and families" (Samantrai, 1992, p. 457). Though this article was written more than 25 years ago, its recommendation is as salient today as it was back then, and it is one I strongly echo.

Although the Title IV-E program did not contribute to my retention, I do believe the social work education I received was instrumental to my professionalism. It provided me with the foundational skills of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation when working with children and families. It also taught me to be culturally aware; to understand the detrimental effects poverty, racism, and oppression had on these families; and to use a strengths-based perspective.

I don't know whether or not these social work skills improved outcomes for the children and families I worked with, and the research on this subject is varied. Hartinger-Saunders and Lyons (2013) conducted a review of the peer-reviewed literature on Title IV-E funded programs and conclude

> Research studies still remain somewhat small [and] current published research at the time

> of this review has not progressed in order to link outcomes related to retention rates, education level, skill and knowledge attainment, and employee and organizational characteristics, to improved outcomes for children and families (pp. 292-293).

In contrast, Leung and Willis (2012) found improved outcomes for children and families who had Title IV-E stipend workers, specifically pertaining to the reduction of time to achieve reunification and on the reduction of time to achieve adoption. Regarding improving workforce retention, Carr et al. (2019) found Title IV-E education may reduce turnover and retain workers who hold an MSW. The study also found that MSW workers who received Title IV-E training expressed higher intent to stay in public child welfare than those workers without Title IV-E training.

Much of the research pertaining to the Title IV-E stipend program is complex and sometimes contradictory, with some studies finding it does improve outcomes for children and families and positively impacts caseworker retention and others finding it does not significantly contribute to either. To be sure, continued research is necessary. Smith (2002) recommends "strengthening evaluations of federally-funded child welfare training through well-targeted questions, strong research designs, strong research methods, innovative methods, and theory-driven studies" (p. 189). This is another recommendation I would strongly echo, particularly with the recent passage of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). The FFPSA allows states to use Title IV-E funds to pay for services to prevent children from being removed from their families and placed in foster care. With this focus on prevention, outcome evaluations of the effectiveness of Title IV-E education partnership programs can be instrumental in bolstering arguments that advocate for the necessity of continued federal support of these programs (Leung & Willis, 2012).

While writing and researching this paper, I revisited the university website and noticed a new section was added. This section advises potential applicants to learn more about a career in child welfare, specifically at child protective services, and to assess whether they would be a good fit using several documents provided on the website, including one dispelling common myths about working at CPS, one reviewing the role of a case manager, one listing frequently asked questions about the stipend and scholarship programs, and one covering information about working for the state child welfare agency. Lastly, a self-assessment is provided which allows applicants to consider whether certain personality characteristics they possess fit with the demands of working for a child welfare agency.

I was glad to see this section was added and recommend all Title IV-E programs do the same in order to help prospective students understand what child welfare work entails. Equally important is for prospective students to research all they can about child welfare work. Visiting the state child welfare agency's website and looking at job descriptions is one way to have a better understanding of what the position entails. If possible, it would also be advantageous for prospective students to speak with former stipend students who are current employees. These recommendations can help prospective students make an informed decision as to whether or not they want to apply. This is important because a recurring concern that was expressed by fellow stipend students was the lack of information provided about working at Child Protective Services. My colleagues felt they were not given all of the information they needed in order to

make an informed decision. To that end, I would also recommend adding a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) video to all Title IV-E stipend program web pages and include a link to the partnering state child welfare agency. This recommendation is supported in the research literature. According to Faller et al. (2009):

> RJPs appear to be a useful strategy for recruitment, selection, and retention of child welfare employees. They may reduce the workload of human relations staff, serve the function of assuring a goodness of fit between employee and the child welfare job, reduce turnover of child welfare staff, and increase job satisfaction (p. 44).

Two final recommendations: 1) Do not place the person based only on the needs of the child welfare agency, and 2) Provide internships and field placements that more closely resemble the work the student will be doing once hired. My CTC recognized he was better suited for on-going work but was required to stay in investigations because he was a stipend student. If we want to improve retention of Title IV-E MSW workers, a balance between agency need and the goodness of fit referenced earlier should be reached. Additionally, our first-year field placement in the on-going unit was not reflective of where we would eventually be working. I recommend providing students field education training units that are representative of where they will be placed upon graduation.

I'm no longer angry at the university or the state child welfare agency. I know now that the individuals who work there each did, and continue to do, the best they can. The additions to the university website, as well as the reduction in caseload made at the agency, demonstrate the on-going effort to improve recruitment and retention of the child welfare workforce.

Everyone who works in child welfare plays an integral part. Some of us work directly with children and families, some of us conduct research to improve policy and practice, and still others educate and train the next generation of child welfare workers. All of us are committed to keeping children safe and families strong and supported—safety, permanency, and well-being. It is our mantra. It is our calling.

Disclaimer

The opinions and statements contained in this writing are those of the author only and do not represent the opinion or interest of any State agency or department within the State.

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I Too Am DACA: Awakened Childhood Memories

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Abstract: On March 1, 2018, many DACA recipients who had work permits and were protected from deportation because of DACA were gathered in a home to discuss their feelings and thoughts about the impending Supreme Court decision that they anticipated was going to cause havoc in their lives and those of their families and communities. While a citizen at the time, I listened to the expressions of fear and anxiety from the people in the room. The mood that evening transported me intermittingly to my own childhood memories as an undocumented youth some 40 years earlier. This reflective narrative takes the reader on a journey which explores the intersection of immigration status, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and identity in America at a time when racism and xenophobia are at an all-time high.

***Keywords*:** DACA, immigration, undocumented immigrants

> *"Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"* (Lazarus, 1883)

On March 1, 2018, I attended a gathering at a former student's home in Connecticut, where I sat in the living room with 12 adults who could be described as members of those *tired, poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free.* We gathered around the centerpiece of the evening—a succulent dinner. Our discussion centered on the impending Supreme Court Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) ruling scheduled for March 5, 2018. The tenor of our conversation did not reflect a metaphorical *Lady Liberty* lifting her lamp beside a golden door in welcome. Rather, it felt as though she had turned her back from the group. The conversation was not unlike many I have participated in, covering topics such as work, children, higher education, our daily activities, and life in general. What made this conversation different from others was the sense of urgency we felt about the negative and growingly hostile environment experienced by undocumented immigrants under the current immigration policy.

This gathering consisted of people who, for the most part, were bilingual and bicultural. As a monolingual/bicultural woman who has lived more than 40 years in New York City, I have attended many functions and venues where I was a numerical minority as it relates to my racial, ethnic, or linguistic identities. As a social worker living in New York City—one of the most diverse cities in the world—I am still frequently present at gatherings where I am in the minority. Oftentimes, I am the only Black person/woman, or the only Afro Caribbean among African Americans, or the only monolingual immigrant among people from various countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, or Latin America.

Moreover, I am often in the company of people who speak a second language, such as Spanish, French, Russian, or Creole (Haitian), Jamaican patois, and several African languages. However, this language was different to my multilingual ear because it was unfamiliar. This unfamiliarity notwithstanding, I still felt a sense of ease and closeness to the mostly young adults in the room.

At first glance, the reason for my familiarity with this group might not be self-evident. As a Black woman who emigrated from an English-speaking country, I am often categorized as African American, an identity I embrace wholeheartedly. However, while Afro Caribbeans or West Indians share the same racial identity with African Americans, and even though the two groups of people share similar histories of oppression, conflating my ethnic-cultural identity with African Americans' minimizes both groups' culture and identities. However, with this group and at this moment, I shared their experiences as immigrants in the United States and felt connected to their experiences as undocumented immigrants.

When I first entered the home, I observed that everyone seemed acquainted with one another. Some of them sat on the couches and chairs in the living room, others stood around, while a few women were cooking in the kitchen. There were about 12 to 15 people conversing in small groups in a language I did not recognize; this foreign language at first sounded a bit strange to me, but as the host walked me over to the different clusters of people that had congregated, she seamlessly interrupted their conversations to introduce me. As she did, they transitioned their conversations from Portuguese to English to greet and welcome me, some with a hug and others with big smiles. Their welcoming remarks and gestures felt authentic and genuine. While I wasn't an insider in this group, I did not feel like a complete stranger.

After dinner, we sat in a large semi-circle while we waited for the host to interview some pre-selected individuals for a documentary she was making to educate clinicians about the immigrant's experience, and specifically the challenges of the undocumented immigrant. The gathering offered an opportunity for those present to share their thoughts of the impending DACA ruling, which was anticipated to have grave impact on their lives, families, and communities, as well as the rest of the DACA population, estimated to be 703,890 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018).

To clarify, DACA is a policy that originated from the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which was a bill that proposed granting legal status to immigrants referred to as "Dreamers" who were brought to the United States as children by their parents (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2019). When the DREAM Act failed to pass, President Obama passed the DACA policy through executive order. This policy gave these young people an opportunity to go to school and work without fear of deportation. However, like many other immigration initiatives passed in the previous administration, the current administration's goal was to end DACA.

On that fateful day in March 2018, many DACA recipients who had work permits and were previously protected from deportation were waiting to find out if the Supreme Court's decision was going to drive them back into the shadows. The discussions illuminated their concerns about losing their jobs, being deported, not being able to go to college or university, or not being able to renew the work permits they obtained during the Obama administration.

As they spoke, I listened intently and participated minimally because I understood this gathering was about them, not me. It was also about the people and communities who were not present that night, but may have been at other gatherings across the United States—talking, worrying, and supporting each other through the life-changing event looming over their heads. Men, women,

and children from places like Mexico, Korea, China, India, the Philippines, Guyana, Japan, Ireland, Poland, Haiti, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and Jamaica to name a few (Hooker & Fix, 2014). I listened as a citizen and social worker who empathized with them but clearly held a privileged position. Yet, as an immigrant, I couldn't stop the intrusive thoughts and memories of the undocumented child within me from interrupting my focus.

I migrated to the US during a time when the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 stimulated a surge in immigrants arriving from non-European countries. When I initially traveled to the United States, I did not understand the different immigration statuses or appreciate the meaning of my family's visas. However, once we outstayed our visas and our immigration status went from *legal* to *illegal* under US law, I began to grasp what it means to be categorized as "undocumented." As I listened to the individuals in the group talk about their children and extended family members, both in the US and in their country of origin, I, too, began to recall what it was like being a child in a transnational family—family members living across national borders (Salazar Parrenas, 2015; Schmalzbauer, 2008). I remembered the apprehension I felt each time someone from our social network called to let us know that immigration raids were taking place. I also remembered my mother's words of caution. Yet as a teenager in those days, I felt conflicted. While I loved my mother and wanted to be with her, that meant giving up my life in Grenada with my friends and boyfriend and living in a new country, going to a new school. Then, I remembered my mother's sobering admonishment accompanied by her cut-eye looks when I would make statements such as "I don't mind going back," or "I miss my life," or "I don't want to live in this cold place anyway. Give me the sun and the beach any day."

That night, the people in the house who had been living here for years and had submitted their paperwork for permanent residency discussed what it was like to be approved to work but still awaiting the illusive "green card" (permanent resident card)—the ultimate confirmation that they could live and work without fear of deportation. As I listened to one of the men in the group speak about waiting four years to get his green card, his statement brought back memories of my mother speaking about the many barriers between her and the coveted green card. I recalled her discussing paying unscrupulous lawyers or people who *claimed* to be lawyers who promised her a green card within a certain period—as long as she would pay. Yet, after many years, and much more money than originally stipulated, all failed to deliver.

The conversation brought to mind the moment when my mother finally received the green card. It was not just any card; for my mother and many undocumented immigrants, this card gives legitimacy, identity, autonomy, confidence, self-worth, and agency. Gaining it improved our self-esteem and our overall health and by extension decreased our fears, anxieties, and looming doom. Once we had it, I stopped worrying about deportation every time I walked out the door and instead focused on being a teenager. The newly found freedom from the pressures of having to worry about my undocumented status made room for other life-changing events. Being a Black teenage immigrant girl in America took on new meaning for me. As a teenager in Grenada and in the US, I was always awkward in my five-foot 11-inch frame. But in America, in addition to my physical unease, I received messages in various ways that as a Black youth I was not as valued as my White counterparts. I received these messages in school and on television, which I watched far too much back then when I initially arrived in NYC. One of the most difficult

psychological issues I had to deal with was the label "minority." I found it very hard to accept and adjust to. Coming from a country where almost everyone looked like me, I never thought of myself as a majority—but that was a privilege I had that immediately disappeared when my plane landed at Kennedy airport.

In addition to all the perils of being a Black teenager in America, I had an accent, which made me stand out whenever I spoke or felt forced to respond to a teacher's question. I went from being an extrovert to an introvert who was insecure about my body and identity. I was tall, skinny with no curves like those of my many Latina classmates in the Bronx school I attended. In America, I was a naïve, insecure, and depressed teenager. I felt devalued and invisible to most people, except when my almost-six-foot frame and my accent outed me. Americans—Black, White, Latino and Asian alike—constantly reminded me I was different with comments and questions like "Where are you from?" or "What did you say?" If that was not bad enough, the few West Indian classmates I had often reminded me of my "small island" status. At the age of fifteen, I was a stranger in a strange land. Everything about me heightened my exposure to being "othered" by the dominant group as well as my proximal host group.

So, what made me accept the invitation to attend this gathering with this group of people? Like them, I too had lived a secret life. For years, I was haunted by the secret of being undocumented, which meant living dual identities (Du Bois, 1994). While I interacted with my classmates and teachers, I kept a significant part of my identity from them. Living in the shadows meant living in an environment with a heightened sense of vigilance and apprehension, not unlike many of the people in the room with me and the over 11 million undocumented immigrants living in this country (Krogstad et al., 2019). I was constantly fearful of seeing police cars patrolling the neighborhood I lived in, afraid that any interaction with them could inadvertently reveal my secret. Consequently, I did not have many friends, as I was concerned that bringing visibility to myself could cause me to accidentally share my secret and risk exposure to authorities. At the time, conversations with my cousins about the latest news on workplace and domicile raids were the one opportunity to openly discuss my fears of deportation, which meant leaving my mother. I lived in constant fear from one day to the next because I did not know at any given day if I would make it back home or get stopped, arrested, and deported.

My concerns were mostly for my mother. I was worried about her ability to cope with what it meant to her to be deported. Not only would deportation make her feel like a failure, but I understood that such an outcome would devastate her. Like many immigrants, my mother's immigration vision of a "better life" included obtaining some level of financial security, but for her it meant much more than that. Her life in America also meant escaping traumatic childhood memories and failed personal relationships. In America, she was a survivor. Back home she lived in a small village, in a small country where everyone knew each other. In that limited space, there was no escaping the pain or physical and emotional abuse and the shame she was made to feel as an orphan. My mother carried her childhood traumas shackled to her ankles, easily seen by those who looked beyond her physical beauty. America for her meant more than the ability to work and take care of herself and her family; it meant anonymity and freedom from her past. Here no one cared or knew she was an orphan, or that she grew up in poverty. My mother's life in America allowed her to escape her sadness and a lifetime of judgment found in small towns/spaces.

While she initially worked as a nanny when she first arrived, she later went to college and transitioned from having three jobs working in people's homes to one job working for the City of New York for over 20 years before she retired. In one of our quiet mother-daughter moments during the early part of her retirement, she reflected on her life and shared with me what moving to America meant to her. She said, *"I started over. I became the person I wanted to be, not who people decide for me. Grenada was too small for me. I didn't have the opportunities there I had here. Hell, you—" and she gestured to me, "—wouldn't be able to accomplish half of what you did with a single mother. I know it wasn't easy for you with me gone, but I did it for you as much as for me."* My mother's immigration gave her *agency* and provided opportunities for me that I wouldn't have had. Yes, as a child it was a huge sacrifice, which included at times feeling abandoned, lost, and alone but, as an adult, I do understand her reasons for uprooting my life, both when she left me to travel to America and five years later when she sent for me to live with her. In retrospect, I am less angry (a work in progress) at her and more understanding of the sacrifices *we* made.

As I examined the people in the room on that March night, I observed their interactions, including the interviews for the documentary. I hoped to be a dispassionate observer but found myself relating at a deeper level given the similarities in our experiences. I understood that, in certain ways, being an undocumented immigrant today is living in a much more hostile climate than I did. Their expressed concerns resonated on many levels, in particular the separation and loss inherent in the transnational family experience (Best, 2014) and their experiences with transnational parenting (Best-Cummings, 2009)—parenting from a distance. As a result of the current archaic US immigration system and restrictive laws, it is not uncommon in immigrant communities for parents to live in the US for a period of time while their children remain in their country of origin. These mothers and fathers are not able to have physical contact with their children and vice versa; this separation can last years since the law does not allow undocumented immigrants to return to the US if they leave to visit their children. Also, without permanent resident status, parents are unable to simply take their children to the US with them in a process known as family reunification—derogatorily called chain migration.

The Dreamers in the room shared what it was like for them to live in two worlds, being American because they had lived here as long as they could remember, yet lacking the rights of other Americans. Specifically, they shared their fears of deportation to a country they do not know and whose language they do not speak well enough to survive professionally. Some of them discussed that, while they do speak Portuguese, they speak it like foreigners and not as educated professionals in Brazil speak; therefore, if they were deported they would be at a disadvantage. Some talked about cultural and ethnic invisibility because they are often referred to as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Colombian, but never Brazilian. Others spoke about race and the intersection of colorism. For example, some were able to pass for White because of the color of their skin, yet had to deal with the restriction of their immigration status that the majority of their White counterparts did not have to deal with. While many of the people gathered in the room were construed socially as people of color in America or may themselves have claimed that part of their identity, in Brazil they identified as White. In America, many of them chose to "pass" as Whites in order to survive the legal ramifications of their immigration status. In America, the stereotypical phenotype of an undocumented immigrant is a person of color, so passing for White makes you less of a target for restrictive policies, such as stop-and-frisk, detainment, and

"broken windows" policing (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). As one young man who emigrated here when he was six years old pointed out, "Most people think I'm Irish because of the color of my skin, especially when I grow a beard. They have no idea I'm from Brazil."

Another young man shared his struggles to get into college prior to President Obama's 2012 DACA executive order. In this young man's case, he was lucky to have had someone in his life who saw his academic potential and paid for the first semester of college while he and his parents worked to pay for his second semester. Due to the enactment of DACA, he was able to complete college with an engineering degree and he now works in his field. As he shared this very tense time in his life, he exhibited cues of his anxiety by rocking back and forth in his seat. He reported, "I followed and read everything about DACA. President Obama signed the order in June and it went into effect in August. I had my paperwork ready on the first day and I submitted it immediately so I could get a social security card. In school, you are nobody without a social security card."

These stories were not new to me personally or professionally, but when the host turned to me and asked me to speak on camera, I wasn't prepared for it. As part of the documentary, she asked me to tell my story as a child who was also an undocumented immigrant, adding the caveat of using my privilege today as a citizen, professor, and researcher. My first reaction was to share my story from the perspective of the "color" of immigration, using policies that are based on xenophobia and theoretical frameworks that included globalization, capitalism, and oppression, including racist restrictive immigration laws that have excluded poor people and people of color. These immigrants' labor is only valued during wartime, when it's farm work, or when it's "niche" work (Eckstein & Peri, 2018) in the service industry, taxi cab industry, or hair dressing, nannying, housekeeping, or in the medical field, etc. However, I was gently reminded of the purpose of the documentary. Our host wanted to help clinicians understand what it's like to be an undocumented immigrant in an effort to build empathy, knowledge, and effectiveness in their work with this population. She redirected me to focus on my experience as an undocumented youth. Speaking about my experience was exhilarating and painful, yet cathartic because it awakened many old memories riddled with vague losses and feelings of abandonment or, as Boss (1999) referred to it, "ambiguous loss." Memories of my childhood as part of a transnational family and a life in the shadows flooded me. It made me realize that even though I am now a citizen who researches the immigrant experiences, like many immigrants who arrived earlier and overstayed their visas, I am very connected to an earlier part of my life as an undocumented immigrant—I too am DACA.

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COVID-19 Journal Entry: The Perspective of a Bachelor of Science Social Work Student in Field Placement

Emily Leann Cross

Abstract: As a senior Bachelor of Science in Social Work student, I have been able to see firsthand how a macro event, the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts micro practice social work. In this journal entry, I discuss my experience as a student completing my practicum at a hospice agency during the COVID-19 pandemic. This journal considers the needs of vulnerable older adults during this pandemic and critically discusses the ethics behind implementing telehealth, as well as the isolation experienced by the older adult population.

***Keywords*:** COVID-19, student, social work, telehealth, older adults, ethics, pandemic, macro, isolation

As a senior Bachelor of Science in Social Work and Bachelor of Science in Gerontology student, this pandemic has been a very emotionally devastating time. Similarly to many of my peers, I have had many academic and personal plans cancelled. As a first-generation college student receiving Summa Cum Laude honors, I was prideful and anxiously waiting for my family to see me walk across the stage this May. Although there are many negatives during this time, I must look at the positives. This pandemic has been an amazing learning experience for me. As a social work student, I have been able to see how policy and societal changes at the macro level impact mezzo and micro practice.

Amid the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have advised all people to stay home unless it is absolutely essential to leave. As a result, many businesses, schools, universities, daycares, social service agencies, etc. have closed their doors and have instructed their workers or students to work from home if applicable (Godoy, 2020). As Godoy (2020) describes, this is all part of an effort referred to by epidemiologists as "flattening the curve," the goal of which is for all people to limit their interactions with others to slow the spread of the virus. As seen in other countries, COVID-19 spreads extremely fast from person to person, and healthcare resources need to be available to treat the growing number of infected patients. The impending lack of resources has made COVID-19 a pandemic (Godoy, 2020).

However, vulnerable populations' need for social work services does not stop amid this pandemic. COVID-19 may cause additional stress, economic hardship, and could negatively impact the physical and emotional well-being of clients and social workers (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2020). As of now, the only guidance provided by social work governing institutions (such as NASW), has been to switch to telehealth when applicable and to try to obtain proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when interacting with clients. Although telehealth is not new to social work practice, it is noted that many social workers have been thrown into telehealth practice with little to no notice and/or training.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, many social workers were left questioning how to provide their services to their clients and/or communities. This move towards telehealth and remote services has helped social workers uphold the NASW Code of Ethics. The most important ethical code we hold as social workers is our responsibilities to our clients. More specifically, as stated in 1.01 of the NASW Code of Ethics, social workers have an ethical requirement to remain committed to their clients (NASW, 2017). Of course, any time the use of technology is discussed in social work practice, we must address that this use is not accessible to all clients and agencies. Additionally, the use of technology may not be appropriate for some clients based on their cognitive abilities and/or the emotional sensitivity of the conversations (NASW et al., 2017).

For example, at my field placement hospice agency, we work mostly with older adults and their families. The biggest barrier, in my opinion, is the appropriateness of telehealth. All our clients have a terminal illness and a prognosis of less than six months. The social workers in this setting provide psychosocial support through conversation and normalization of death and the dying process. Additionally, hospice social workers provide end-of-life education, connect clients to needed community resources, and assess for complicated grief that may require more in-depth counseling. In my opinion, these are not emotionally appropriate conversations to have over the phone or a video calling platform. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic, I cannot think of another solution to keep providing services. Many long-term care facilities are on lockdown; due to the vulnerability of our client population, they need to be in quarantine. The entire goal of hospice is to provide and enhance the comfort, peace, and quality of life of our clients at the end of their lives. No one, regardless of terminal status, wants to die a painful death fighting for air due to COVID-19. Due to the nature of how COVID-19 spreads and the timeline of the symptoms, we do not want to be responsible for a client's pain or untimely death. So in this situation, it may be appropriate to provide telehealth services.

However, there are many barriers facing the older adult population. According to a 2013 study, many older adults feel uncomfortable utilizing telehealth services and many do not have access or the required knowledge to utilize many online video calling services (Cimperman et al., 2013). However, this study did show that some older adults feel comfortable receiving remote services over the phone (Cimperman et al., 2013). This was the method that was utilized most at my field placement hospice agency. The clientele felt more comfortable with this option and my field supervisor reported that she was still able to create a therapeutic relationship with clients to assess their psychosocial well-being (N. Corl, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020).

Overall, many older adults are uncomfortable with the impersonal connection of telehealth services (Cimperman et al., 2013) and this trend was seen at my field placement hospice agency. As stated before, it is a social worker's ethical responsibility to be committed to their client's well-being (NASW, 2017). In these unprecedented times, it may be unethical to cause more stress by making older adults utilize a type of service that makes them uncomfortable. This is now a huge ethical dilemma in the geriatric healthcare community because older adults still require and deserve services. I am thoroughly interested to see how this emergent use of telehealth may improve or worsen the comfort level of older adult clients utilizing the service. This pandemic could cause changes to service delivery in the geriatric healthcare community

lasting years after it ends.

Additionally, it is worth noting the trend of isolation among older adults and how COVID-19 has worsened the experience. In 2017, the US Surgeon General declared a "loneliness epidemic" among the older adult population (Berg-Weger & Morley, 2020). Berg-Weger and Morley (2020) found that COVID-19 and the vulnerability of the older adult population to the virus has resulted in increased isolation, but this increase has provided a platform for professionals to further discuss and research what can be done to alleviate this isolation and loneliness, even after the pandemic.

Social workers are in a unique position during the COVID-19 pandemic to develop and implement interventions that may decrease the loneliness experienced due to the isolation of older adults throughout this pandemic and in general (Berg-Weger & Morley, 2020). This unique situation provides social workers the opportunity to improve how we assess for loneliness. This also provides the opportunity to further develop and adapt existing evidence-based interventions for isolation (Berg-Weger & Morley, 2020). Additionally, the implementation of telehealth services provides older adults the opportunity to learn how to use and access non-traditional ways of maintaining communication with their friends and family (Berg-Weger & Morley, 2020).

Within my field placement hospice agency, I saw these interactions occurring as the social workers had to focus more deeply on assessing for loneliness and had to assist their older adult population with utilizing the technology available. My field placement supervisor reported having more emotionally in-depth conversations with her clients and their families than she had ever had in the past. This shared experience of COVID-19 made her patients feel more comfortable sharing their experience and further utilizing her psychosocial support during the stressful time (N. Corl, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020). Another social worker at my field agency reported that serving clients throughout the pandemic was stress-inducing (C. Madigan, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has been a complicated and unique situation. More specifically, my supervisor reported that at the start of the state-wide stay-at-home order, when the rules and expectations were not clear, hospice patients who were actively passing were unable to be visited by family members or members of the hospice psychosocial team at the time of death. Only the hospice nurse was allowed in (N. Corl, Personal Communication, June 8, 2020). Additionally, as a student, it was frustrating as I had to step back interactions with clients so the social work team could have the opportunity to learn and advance their telehealth skills. Additionally, many clients felt uncomfortable with me joining on a phone call with their social workers. Understandably, the last couple of weeks of my internship were spent doing paperwork and research for the agency so the social work team could focus on adapting their visits to the unique situations of each client.

My field placement hospice agency was unprepared for this pandemic. Although it is hard to plan for the conditions of an unknown pandemic, there are steps that could have been taken. For example, the leaders within the organization could have researched and found courses for all staff to take to uphold the quality of the agency's services and the competency of the workers. This pandemic has provided the profession with the opportunity to learn more about assessing

and intervening with older adults experiencing isolation. I, and many others, expect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to be lasting, and more research is needed to see what social workers and other professionals alike can do to better assess and intervene in isolation-induced loneliness. Additionally, more research is needed on effective interventions and the implementation of telehealth services with the geriatric population. Overall, I have seen firsthand the impact of a macro level traumatic event on everyday social work practice. While this situation is not great, I am now more knowledgeable and better prepared to serve my future clients.

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Respectful Research: A Reflection and Insights from One Perspective of the Ongoing Journey of Research with Indigenous Communities

Michelle J. Eady

Abstract: This paper is the sharing of my story: a story that comes from what I saw, what I did, and what I know made a difference in a variety of Indigenous communities in Canada and Australia. My story may not be applicable everywhere, but perhaps you will find yourself thinking about and measuring its relevance whether you are an Indigenous researcher learning from outside your own community or a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous communities. This paper reflects on the ongoing journey of an academic's work with Indigenous communities and reminds us of the importance of careful focus on being culturally sensitive and respectful of the opportunities shared with us. It also recommends that academics introspectively examine the drive of their research projects that, in some cases, continue to be controversial for these communities.

***Keywords*:** Indigenous communities, Indigenous knowledge, research, respect

Introduction

In 1916, American poet Robert Frost wrote a poem called "The Road Not Taken." The last few lines are particularly poignant to me: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference" (p. 30). While there is some controversy about the true meaning that Frost was trying to convey, to me it was always clear—taking risks makes life more worthwhile. I have lived with this poem echoing in my mind and, amongst other amazing adventures, have traveled and lived in remote and isolated Indigenous communities, both in Canada and Australia, learning, teaching, and experiencing life.

I recently watched an interesting talk in which a qualitative researcher called herself a *storyteller* and described qualitative data as *data with a soul* (Brown, 2010). I found myself relating to this at a deep level and believe that it is important to provide an overview of my experiences so as to add value, depth, and meaning to this paper and for you, as the reader.

As a child in primary school, about age 10, I had to write about my heritage. Seeing that I had a Canadian father and a Dutch mother (how very boring, I thought!), I asked my father if he could tell me something about myself that I did not already know. He said, "Didn't you know that your great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was Old Chief Lone Cloud of the Mi'Kmaq Tribe and that you are actually an Indian princess?!?" Of course, I was thrilled beyond comparison at this news and, upon returning to school, I insisted that my friends bow to me because of my newly bestowed "royalty"... which led to my first (and only) visit to the principal's office. While this is a story that has been shared many times, I did not realize how my life path would pull me back to tell this story over and over again.

I have always felt destined to work with Indigenous people, communities, and their children, and to help others understand the strengths that lie within these communities. I am very passionate about this work. After graduating as a primary school teacher from the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia, I traveled back to Canada and started my work in remote and isolated communities in Canada's north. I spent some time in a Cree community called Fort Severn (located as far north as possible in the province of Ontario) and there I taught a Grade 3/Grade 4 composite class. The following year (that not being far enough north), I ended up in the Northwest Territories working in a Dene community called Tulita. This amazingly beautiful place comes equipped with tundra, ice roads, the northern lights, and, most of all, culture... rich, deep, meaningful culture, traditions, and language, which the people there are fighting to keep alive with every precious word spoken. After a number of years close to the Arctic Circle, the pattern of *Northern Exposure* continued when I relocated to Northern Ontario, Canada and spent many years working in the adult literacy field and traveling to 18 of the 26 Ojibway, OjiCree, and Cree communities of Ontario's north. This work focused on adult literacy and building an online, live-time literacy support network for Indigenous adults in remote and isolated communities who wanted to improve their literacy skills in preparation for college or to help their children with homework, for example. As a result of these efforts, I was honored to be awarded the Province of Ontario's Council of the Federation of Literacy Award for Innovation in Literacy in 2007 and met the Premier of the province at that time to discuss the literacy issues and possibilities for these communities and their inhabitants. This work also provided opportunities to travel both nationally and abroad as an invited speaker, workshop leader, and conference presenter to share the methodology and successful results of the program. At one such conference, in San Francisco, USA, I met a woman from the Digital Bridge Unit in South Australia. She showed great interest in the work that I was doing in Canada and invited me to visit the communities where she worked should I "ever find myself in Australia." During her presentation, she showed a slide of a red dirt road that winded far into the distance. The title on the slide said, "Learning in Australia's Outback." I felt the photograph to be strangely familiar to me and it wasn't until weeks later when I was sorting through my own snapshot collections that I realized I had taken a photo very similar to hers, the difference being that my photo portrayed a long, barren road carved into the ice and snow, also traversing far into the distance. It was my equivalent experience, which I could have entitled "Learning in Canada's Outback."

Later that same year, I was awarded an international scholarship from the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia. In all honesty, this felt like winning the lottery, not only because my tuition and accommodations were paid for during my studies, but mainly because I was the first in my family to attend a tertiary institution and now had the opportunity to return to embark on a PhD. I did not hesitate once I arrived in Australia to seek out the invitation to visit South Australia and, as a result, my "San Francisco connection" led me to visit three distinct remote and rural Indigenous communities, all showing interest in my research. Each of the communities was so welcoming and unique that I found myself on the phone with a friend, perplexed as to which community I should work with for my study. My friend asked, "What is happening around you right at this very minute?" I was standing at the end of a pier looking over the ocean at Port Victoria when a dolphin jumped out of the water right in front of me. "If dancing dolphins aren't a sign, I am not sure what is," my friend exclaimed, and so (as seen in Figure 1), my PhD study took place in the Narunggan community of Point Pearce in

South Australia. Just like my experiences in Canada's north, once again a learning curve of acceptance had to be traversed before the research could be completed, and many lessons were acquired along the way.

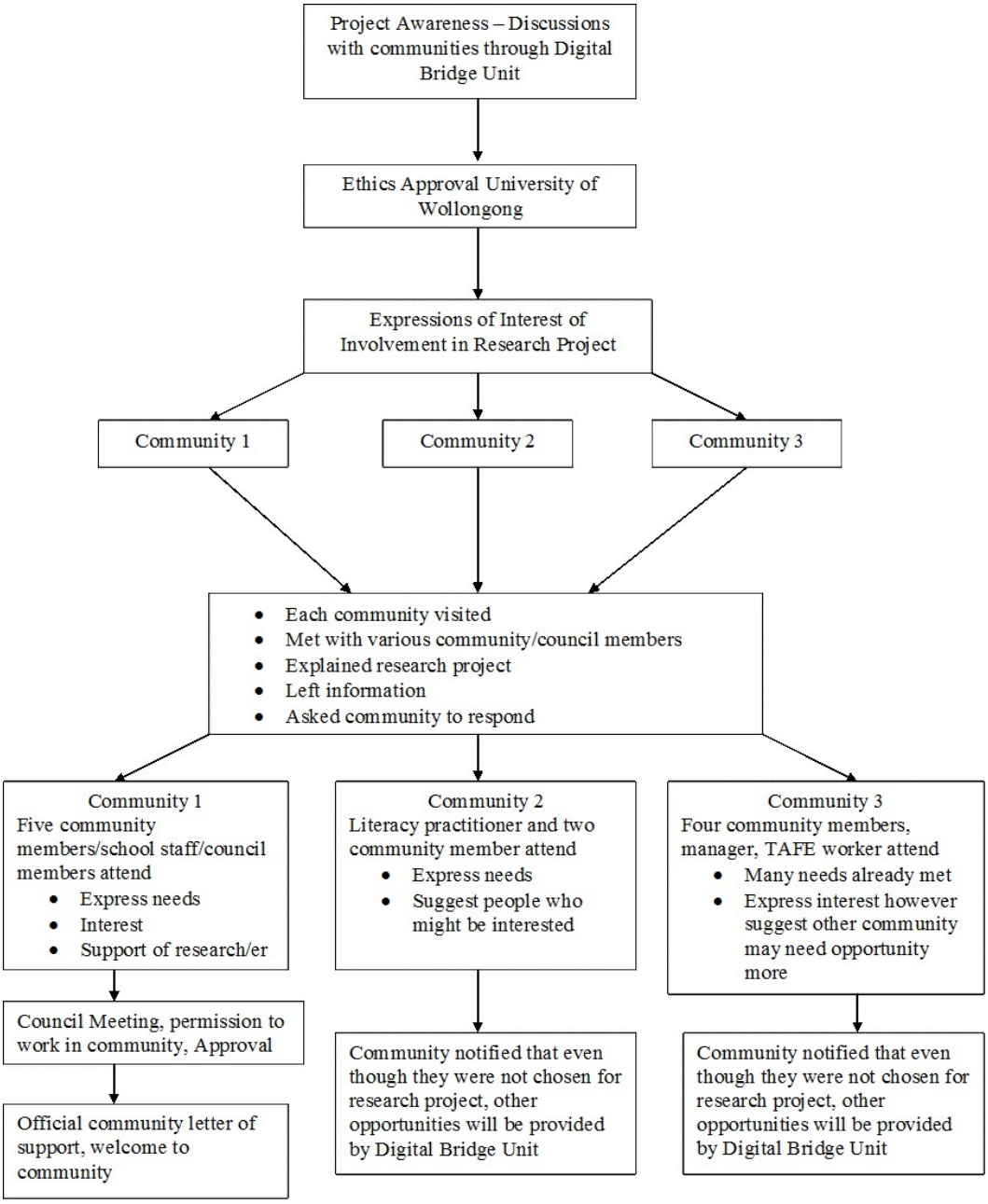

Figure 1. Sampling strategy for this research project.

It was around this time that I did some navigation of my own ancestry, only to find that my great-great-grandmother, Clara Jack, was a Mi'Kmaq woman whose family was part of a much broader Mi'Kmaq collective that lived in the area (off-reserve) in Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia, Canada. This information provided some connection for me between my father's story of my childhood and my passion for working together with Indigenous communities. As a researcher, it was important for me to think about my particular place and the lens through which I view my

work with Indigenous communities. The research space can be seen as a power relationship, and I felt it important to know my connection and my place in the contexts that I was exploring.

I have always considered my approval from these communities and community members as a precious gift. I have never taken my opportunities to work together with them for granted. It is in my years in these remote and isolated places with Indigenous people, First People of the land, that I began to truly understand the importance of preserving and protecting culture, stories, and ways of knowing and teaching. These experiences have heightened my awareness of the sensitivity of sharing this sacred and timeless information with others (Eady, 2012).

Let me explain it this way. For Indigenous people, when an Elder (a respected senior person) of a community passes away, the tears shed are not just for that person as they were in body, whether that be as a mother, grandmother, or sister, or for their role as a community leader, teacher, artist, or hunter and gatherer. The most devastating part of losing that person is the knowledge that is lost with them. An Elder is seen as an entity that embodies a wealth of intellectual, spiritual, and traditional knowledge and keeps it safe. Until recently, this knowledge has often not been video or audio recorded, written down, or practiced by others. This is not due to the Elder's lack of trying, but rather the dwindling opportunities to preserve culture, as the concept of survival in the 21st century leaves little option but a disconnect from country. Unfortunately, it is the generation in the middle—the parents of the youth and the children of the Elders—who seem to feel the pain the most. It is for these reasons—the importance of their culture, their heritage, and the very knowledge that makes them who they are—that these First People of the land protect their traditional knowledge and ways of knowing with such fervor.

For too many of these communities, researchers have effectively parachuted onto their land and conducted a "study" that has resulted in a news report or article leading to an overarching message of negativity and shame for the community. Drew (2006) describes this with eloquence and calls it "The Seagull Imperative" in an article worth the read. If you have ever been around seagulls, you will understand how quickly they can arrive, make a mess, and leave just as fast. Unfortunately, this can also happen with researchers coming into Indigenous societies. As a result, many communities are cautious, resistant, and even unwilling to meet with researchers in an attempt to preserve their Indigenous knowledge and protect their communities and their people. My research was about working collaboratively with the community to share their strengths and about determining what approach to learning would effectively build on those strengths. However, along the journey of the project, it became evident that the way I approach the research I do with Indigenous communities is just as important, if not more important, than the research itself.

Key Concepts to Consider when Researching with Indigenous Communities

Relationships

While I believe that many principles are important for successful research, I am especially fond of the following word: relationship. In all of the time I have spent as an outsider in Indigenous communities, the one thing that I felt was vital to successful research was building meaningful

and reciprocal relationships.

For me, this was about my responsibility to show the community that I am interested in their daily life and have the time to learn, participate, and share of myself—and in return, the rewards were tenfold, repaid in a lifetime of acceptance and kinship and an adoption of body and spirit. In the Arctic, there were many instances where I was given the opportunity to foster relationships and connection. During my stay, I was shown traditional dancing, invited to partake in preparing meat, and taught how to bead traditional clothing. By "sticking my neck out" and showing that I wasn't afraid to try, in return, I may have been laughed at a bit, but I was also respected and perhaps even won a singing contest or two during festival weeks. Thank you, John Denver!

I can remember at one of the community events, one contest was to see which team of two could boil water and prepare a cup of tea from scratch in the fastest time. I singled out my fellow outsider Ben, who was in town working on a caribou study. "We can do this!" I foolishly encouraged, and with a "three, two, one, go!" we were off. It didn't take long to see that I had been very naïve. We had chosen the greenest twigs imaginable to build a little teepee to start the task and we were still trying to get the fire going when our competitors down the line already had their water starting to simmer. In the end, it was Ben and me against the world, as all the other groups were already sipping their tea. A large group of locals encircled us, and we were blowing into our little fire encouraging it to grow and trying with all of our might to get that little pot of water boiled. The locals were having a great time pointing and laughing and, to be honest, so were we—but then, the greatest thing happened. As we put the tea into the boiling water to steep, Maurice, a very well-respected community Elder, walked towards the crowd. Then, in the same fashion as the biblical Red Sea parting at Moses' command, the crowd stepped back to make a clear path for him to approach us. He steadily walked, crunching in the snow, until he reached our pathetic fire and said in his deep voice and heavy accent of Slavey (the mother language of the Dene people), "Serve me tea." The crowd waited in anticipation as my hand shook, more from nerves than from the cold, as I poured the old man a cup of tea. He took it, brought the steaming mug to his frost-callused lips, and with all eyes on him he declared, "It is good!" and the gathering instantaneously erupted into thunderous applause and cheers. Honestly, this was one of the best feelings I have ever had, and the rest of the weekend we jigged to the fiddler late into the night and felt more accepted into the community than ever before. All of this because we took a risk, made an effort, and weren't afraid to fail.

From this point on, it was clear that I was accepted into the community. Yes, I was there to teach the children, but I also attended funerals, went fishing, helped at feasts, and played bingo. In fact, over a decade later, I received an invitation to be the guest speaker at the high school graduation of my first kindergarten class in that same Arctic community: an honor not to be taken lightly, and a memory that I will cherish forever.

Permission

Once I had the opportunity to study in Australia and was preparing my proposal and ethics review, I sought out the Indigenous representative on the ethics committee at the university. It

was important to me to form a connection with this person so that she could learn who I was, the experience I had in working with Indigenous communities, where I came from, and how my work with Indigenous communities would be used for the good of the people in those communities. I felt it was my responsibility as a researcher—and as a people person—to connect with the Indigenous representative on the ethics committee, and I asked for her guidance and support. This was a positive step forward in all the research I conducted with communities and something that I continue to do with every study that I lead. To me, it is a sign of respect and a courteous gesture to ask for guidance from the respected Elder on the ethics committee. This person was a trusted member of the Indigenous community, who likely would have taken the request to be on that committee to other Elders for guidance on her decision to accept. I have made it my practice to always meet with, share with, and actively listen to the Indigenous representative on the ethics committee.

The importance of taking great care in ensuring that I have permission and that I am welcomed into a community, and to treat that as a privilege and with great respect, cannot be stressed enough. In most cases, the community councils treat requests from researchers as agenda items for their community meetings. The question of the researcher's presence in the community is put on the table and the letters from the researcher and their intended research plan, as well as ethics, are discussed. Depending on that meeting's outcome, a researcher can then be welcomed into the community, and this will be advised by the head of the council.

I have found that when I first embark on research projects with Indigenous communities, it has been very helpful to ask a respected community Elder to escort me around the community and introduce me to key community members. Impromptu meetings have been most effective when they take place in busy local venues, such as the medical building while community members are lined up for the doctor, the school, or the TAFE (community college), and may even include knocking on other Elders' doors to see if they have time for tea.

In the case of one of my projects, I started this process with a request for a meeting with the community council members in my efforts to gain support. During this meeting, I explained the purpose of the research project and explained how this could only be done with the help of the community. The council was very supportive, with one man saying, "I think that this is a great idea for our people; to give them the opportunity to learn like this is important." Two other council representatives, who were women, sat on the other side of the table and whispered to one another for a bit, then nodded their heads in approval. One said, "You have our full support." The council members were asked to spread the word around about the first focus group and perhaps suggest to some people who they think would be good additions to the group. The council also asked me to draft a letter that they could all sign to show support for the project.

After the council meeting, council members helped me to hang up signs around the town. I created posters with information about the project I was going to do, advertising the focus group and welcoming anyone to join. The community members were asked to volunteer their time for a period of two months, during which time they had the opportunity to work together to create a meaningful literacy experience and learn to use a synchronous online platform, which was available for their community to use. All community focus group and council members received

a copy of the community members' participant information sheet, which I read aloud with the group. All the community focus group members and council members signed the community member participation consent form. Figure 2 below depicts the strategy for the recruitment of volunteer community members.

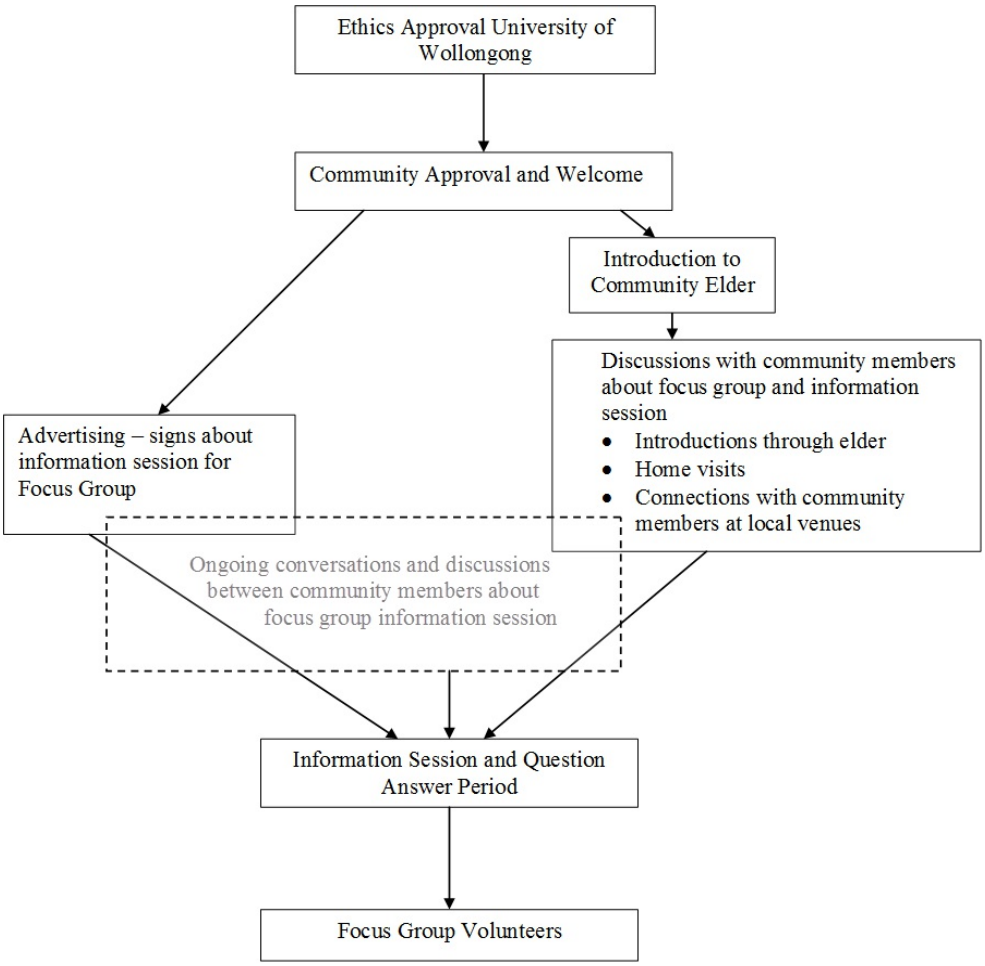

Figure 2. Recruitment in Indigenous community.

Compliance and Understanding

It is ethical practice that all of the participants involved in a study are informed of matters of the study prior to the research taking place. Therefore, I took extra precautions in reading the information letter and consent forms aloud with the participant volunteers, defining any academic terminology or unfamiliar words, and answering any questions that the participants might have. Another approach is to ensure that the participant information letters and consent forms are written in very plain and simple English, or better yet if possible translated to their appropriate first language, to ensure that all participants understand the research and their involvement in it.

I have learned that when working with Indigenous community members, it is important to

collect data at a time that is most suitable for the participants' schedule. I always try to be as flexible as possible and understand that plans for collecting data may change at any given time. This may be for simple things like getting a ride into town for groceries or more serious situations, such as a community member passing, which can result in communities shutting down for a period of time. During longer sessions with focus groups, I provided refreshments such as juice, fruit, and ice blocks (popsicles) on hot days. During some of the discussions and collaborative work times, deeply emotional and personally sensitive stories, recollections, and photographs were shared. In this setting, the availability of a community counselor for anyone who wished to discuss in depth the emotions and memories evoked through looking at the photos and sharing in the discussions was a valuable consideration that I provided, and I always reassured participants that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Collaboration

Another concept that has been important to consider in my work is collaboration. As stated above, it is important to acknowledge my connection with the community and that I understand my place in and relationship with that community. The research that I have completed has never been research *on* or research *about* a group of Indigenous people. It has always been and always will be research *with* a group or community of Indigenous people. My research is never about collecting data—it is about sharing knowledge and working together in community strength.

Most recently, I traveled to Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. My work there was unique because in this case the school was not interested in working with me, but the community was. In this instance, my permission came from the institution ethics committee based on the welcome from the community council as well as the traditional owners of the land. These owners provided two women to work with me and walk through the town over several days, introducing me and gathering participants for that particular project. By the end of my time there, I had been adopted as a "yappa" (sister) to one of the Elders: I was blessed with a skin name and welcomed into the family with an evening of ceremonial singing and dancing.

Working together with a community with the goal to share positivity and strength has also resulted in a request, on the part of one community, for non-anonymity. In my PhD work, the community council and focus group members asked that their real names be used, and they wanted their community to be identified and recognized for the work of which they had been a part. Perhaps this challenges the risk assumption on the level of ethics and ethical engagement with communities and urges the researcher(s) to give the communities a choice in the matter and not only think of Indigenous communities and participants as those who need protection from research, but as those who need recognition through research.

Cultural Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge and heritage are sacred gifts and responsibilities that must be honored and held for the benefit of Indigenous peoples and their future generations. It was my responsibility as a researcher to be aware of and act consistently with the unique laws of each group of Indigenous peoples that I had the privilege to work with. There have been times in my

experiences when I have unknowingly made mistakes and had often wondered why "the rules" had not been properly explained to me. I can remember being invited to visit a teepee where women were preparing the meat after a recent and successful hunt. Wearing my rubber boots, I entered the tent and applied my utmost interest looking over the cuts of meat, the moose head in the corner, and the smoking fire in the center of the teepee curing the thinly cut strips of caribou laid over handcrafted wooden racks. The following day, I thanked the Elder who had extended the invitation. "You won't be invited again soon," she replied. I was shocked. She went on to explain that I had broken a variety of rules, such as wearing my boots in the teepee and stepping over the meat. As I am a woman, the meat was ruined when I stepped over it. Horrified, I realized that I had so much to learn and that it was actually my responsibility to ask before acting.

From that point forward, I sought out an Indigenous Cultural Mentor when I was doing work with the community—someone who knew the community and its people—to act as a liaison to help guide me through the appropriate steps to ensure that the core values of the community were always respected and that cultural norms and traditions, as well as the core values, were not just known, but comprehended and abided by. The Indigenous community members who participated in the projects were reminded and, at times, made aware of their rights in the research process as outlined in the "Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders" as updated by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NMRC) in 2018 and in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2012) document entitled "Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies." Intellectual property rights were kept at the forefront of all parts of my research projects and care was taken to conduct the research in such a manner as to not violate these rights, but instead to validate them and encourage their use. In this way, the community and the participants who volunteered their time and wisdom own the information that they share, the stories they tell, and the presentations they make. I felt extremely honored and secure in my PhD research thesis when a well-known, respected Elder and educator went through every page of the thesis and marked the pages to ensure that the community was satisfied with what was said and how it was presented. This version of my thesis means more to me than the leather-bound copy on my shelf. I fashioned a small "graduation celebration" in the community when the project was completed, and each research participant received a copy of the thesis. The same Elder was also invited by our Dean of Education to be the guest speaker at the university convocation when I graduated.

Compensation

For many remote and isolated Indigenous communities where I have spent time, alongside the societal challenges that distance and small community politics can bring, there are often accompanying financial struggles. In my experience, when I begin the journey with a community, there is a common query of whether there will be financial incentives for those partaking in the research project. As is the case with many researchers, my projects, unfortunately, have no allowance in the budget that could provide cash reimbursement to participants. I have never had a community turn me away or decide not to be involved on this basis. What I always have to offer is my authentic self, a listening ear, the desire to learn, and the

acknowledgment of all individuals and participants who volunteered for the projects. I have also sent letters of thanks and tokens of appreciation to focus groups involved, and, in all cases, we held a celebration feast for all of the community to recognize and celebrate our accomplishments.

Final Thoughts

American Lecturer Peter Senge (1998) said, "Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping one another develop new capacities for action; it is about creating learning processes" (p. 11). The experiences, stories, and lessons learned and shared within the paragraphs of this piece provide reflections for future researchers engaging Indigenous communities. Some of my experiences may be applicable to you, and some may not. As a researcher, I am very aware of my own limited Indigenous connection with these communities, but I make it a priority and a privilege to continue to build relationships with each community and all the members of the community possible. Working together to build knowledge and understanding together with Indigenous communities is not a quick and easy process and should not be undertaken lightly nor hurriedly. Just as with any other relationship, it takes time and careful nurturing.

By considering the opinions and reflections presented in this narrative, I feel confident in knowing that I am respecting Indigenous knowledge and learning practices, engaging community leadership, and, most of all, remembering to focus on the needs of the communities themselves. In sharing this story with you, I believe that I have shared my knowledge about how we can lessen the divide between Indigenous communities and other communities in our society and respectfully embark on research together. This is success for us all.

Acknowlegements

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Engaging in Community-Based Participatory Research: "Death of a Career" or a Research Approach in Need of Professional and Institutional Support?

Rebecca Matthew, Trina Salm Ward, and Helen I. Robinson

Abstract: Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is on the rise not only within public health and allied health professions, but also within social work. This may not be that surprising when we recognize the rich alignment between the underlying tenets of CBPR (e.g., strengths-based focus, empowerment, social justice) and social work values (e.g., dignity and worth of the individual, human relationships, social justice). Despite noted benefits related to capacity development, community self-governance, and social justice, CBPR is challenged by a seemingly antagonistic relationship with academic expectations regarding "scholarly productivity." To explore further this tension, the current work brings into conversation the reflections of three individuals: a doctoral student, a junior faculty member, and a newly tenured faculty member. We highlight our own challenges in navigating CBPR within academia and offer recommendations to encourage the development of a professional infrastructure supportive of this approach and, thereby, its related benefits.

***Keywords*:** community-based participatory research, CBPR, social justice, macro social work, social work research and practice, professional development

Introduction

Over the past few decades, community-based participatory research (CBPR) has steadily ascended within the fields of public health, social work, and other allied professions (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Understood as a research *approach* rather than a *method* per se (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011), CBPR attempts to move research towards (socially just) action. It does so by employing a strengths-based perspective, acknowledging community as a unit of identity, supporting capacity building among all members, and involving partners throughout the effort—from identification of issue(s) to dissemination of findings and beyond (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler, 2010).

Such an approach has evidenced positive outcomes. With respect to process, it is lauded for its ability to (re)center community engagement and foster trust-building, power-sharing, empowerment, and capacity development (e.g., Baffour, 2011; Branom, 2012; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). These elements are then thought to support more distal outcomes, with scholars repeatedly noting the development of culturally and contextually responsive programs, interventions, and data collection tools; enhanced science from, for example, participant recruitment to effective (and rapid) dissemination of findings; and enhanced health, well-being, and social justice (Balazs & Morello-Frosch, 2013; Salimi, et al., 2012; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). And, within social work specifically, it is lauded as a promising means through which to enhance the profession's foundational values, such as social justice, service, and the dignity and worth of a person/community (Baffour, 2011; Barbera, 2008; Branom, 2012; Gehlert &

Coleman, 2010; Jacobson & Rugeley, 2007; Sohng, 1996).

Benefits notwithstanding, several researchers comment on the associated challenges of this approach. Replete within the literature are concerns regarding *time* investments (e.g., Baffour, 2011; Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013; Salimi et al., 2012; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). Time to (re)build trust. Time to build, maintain, and grow (authentically) collaborative partnerships. Time to navigate funding expectations. Time to negotiate and carry out a research agenda with community partners (e.g., identification of research questions, design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination). Common among these is the challenge associated with navigating CBPR timelines and the requirements associated with academic promotion and tenure (Ferrera et al., 2015; Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). That is to say, CBPR partnerships (done well) often take *years* to develop. For an untenured or early-career faculty member, this may be time they cannot spare.

To explore further the seemingly antagonistic relationship between the value and impact of CBPR and its associated challenges within the academy, we offer personal reflections from a doctoral student ("Testing the Waters," Helen), a junior faculty member ("Diving into the Deep End," Rebecca), and a newly tenured faculty member ("Waiting for the Right Time to Jump In," Trina). We highlight why we are called to CBPR and the challenges and possibilities therein. We conclude with suggestions regarding the ways in which we—individually, institutionally, and professionally—might together build a more supportive CBPR culture.

Narrative Reflections

Although each of us possesses unique and intersecting identities, there is a uniting thread: We all come from working-class families and communities. We grew up with and felt viscerally the experiences of economic precarity—of families and communities that were looked down upon and marginalized (in various ways), despite their strength and resilience. It should come as no surprise, then, that we connected. Almost immediately, there was a felt sense of understanding, of shared experience and kinship.

For example, I (Rebecca) still remember my first days as a new tenure track faculty member at a Research I University, designated so for its engagement in the highest level of research activity. I had that strong—and familiar—sense of being out of place, of not belonging. I sat in meeting after meeting, slowly beginning to immerse myself into a foreign, academic culture. I still remember the first time someone asked for a clarification of "Robert's Rules." All I could think was *who is Robert and why haven't I met this guy?* Thankfully, I started to notice Trina, a fellow junior faculty member. I deeply appreciated the ways in which Trina engaged fellow faculty with gracious humility. It signaled, at least to me, a lack of entitlement, which resonated with my class background. We came to discover many shared experiences. Our families were made up of hardworking farmers, truck drivers, and service workers. Neither of us had set foot on a college campus until later in life. And, we certainly never imagined that we could someday be professors.

Similarly, I (Helen) came back to college later in life. Based on various personal and

professional experiences, I was keen to develop my ability to engage in community-responsive health programming, so I applied and was accepted into a dual master's program (MSW/MPH). Awarded a research assistant position, I was assigned to a new, junior faculty member (Rebecca). Before our first meeting, I eagerly downloaded her CV to get a feel for who I'd be working with for the next two years. As I scanned her CV the word *community* kept jumping off the page. Although I didn't yet know the meaning of all this language—"community participatory research" and "CBPR"—something about her experience and scholarship spoke to me. These words seemed to ground her research, like it meant something more authentic and powerful for people and the issues they sought to alleviate. On the day of our first meeting, I entered Rebecca's office and proclaimed that it was my intention to help create health and social programs that actually helped people, that made their lives easier not harder, and that harnessed their potential and fostered empowerment. Her face lit up as she leaned towards me and asked, "Have you ever heard of community-based participatory research?" We spent hours that day, and many days since, talking about community practice, community engagement, and the ways in which our formative experiences shaped our interest in and commitment to methods that (re)center community voice and self-governance.

So it was, given a constellation of personal and professional factors, that we all came to find ourselves at the same institution at the very same moment in time. Although two of us have since moved on, we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to have found (and enriched) a CBPR-supportive community during our time together. We continue to collaborate and provide ongoing support and mentoring as we, as reflected in the personal narratives below, engage in CBPR.

Testing the Waters

I (Helen) was being primed very early to become a social justice-oriented researcher. Having to navigate almost every social service available to a teenage mother, I experienced being frustrated by the dignity-stripping and belaboring protocols of the various agencies necessary to ensure my young family's survival. It was as if no one at the welfare offices had a clue what it meant to be poor, African American, a woman, a mother, and a student—and how these intersecting identities shaped my experience in accessing and utilizing services.

As an undergraduate public health student, I would again witness the missteps of experts' good intentions and their profound impact on so-called "service consumers." After my last semester of coursework, I joined a research team in Guatemala to help evaluate the relevancy and accessibility of medical services provided by a large American-based NGO working in underserved communities. What we uncovered was that the health interventions and clinic services created by expert researchers and program developers—efforts intended to provide relief—were *instead* creating even more barriers to healthcare. This perpetuated the discrimination experienced by an already marginalized community and, in some cases, put clinic users—women in particular—at an even greater risk to experience violence.

I was on a mission—I thought, *how can I responsibly attend to health issues, in good faith, without causing more harm, knowing that they are only a small part of a whole host of social*

and political injustices that complicate the intimate lived experiences of communities? I decided the answer was to get master's degrees in both social work and public health and try to figure it out.

Working with Rebecca, I would pick up where a previous graduate student left off, conducting the initial research for a scoping literature review to explore the ways in which CBPR is utilized (or not) in social work research. It would require that I read and dissect over 100 articles describing CBPR efforts that ranged from qualitative research informing the development of culturally tailored depression care, centering African American women's experiences of racism, violence, and social context (Nicolaidis et al., 2010) to quantitative, cluster-randomized controlled trials assessing the impact of a parenting intervention on parents' heavy drinking for Mexican heritage youth (Williams et al., 2014). Rebecca also suggested I read Freire and feminist thought to understand CBPR's roots and CBPR pioneers and advocates like Israel and Minkler. Of course, I also had to do "the work" of CBPR—as she calls it—if I were to really learn CBPR.

So, I became the community-engagement research specialist for a local initiative seeking to assess youth development issues. I'd learned the academic basics of CBPR-oriented efforts from my research, and now it was time to put that into action. Anyone who has engaged in community work, and in particular CBPR, knows that the process of building trust takes time. I will never forget one of the community research partners reflecting this as we walked through a public housing development chatting with residents and families he had once supported: "No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care, Helen." This process *takes time*—time to show up for various community events, have coffee or break bread with community leaders and residents, and, frankly, time to re-establish and/or heal wounds from the often-exploitative use of marginalized communities by universities and researchers.

Over the next three years, Rebecca continued to provide mentorship, insisting that I take special care in building authentic relationships with community members and engaging in collaborative and mutually beneficial research activities. As I did, I quite organically began to re-balance power, seeing myself as part of (as opposed to "overseeing") this process, learning alongside community members and grassroots service providers—like longtime community resident "Ms. June Borrow," who contextualized the city's history from a perspective only she could provide, a perspective that deepened and illuminated the importance of our research. She provided insight into how the landscape of youth services had changed over the years and how those changes impacted the current state of youth resources and opportunities.

Or "Ms. Kayla Dawson," mother of two teenagers, who, in addition to having a full-time job, ran a grassroots community youth agency. She had been doing this work for over 10 years and had witnessed grand city-level programs and initiatives come and go without much notable improvement in youth outcomes. She reflected one day, "Instead of funding all these outside people, maybe the city government could fund the grassroots folks who been doin' this work for years and will do continue to do this work: grant... or no grant." Collaboration with community leaders like Ms. Borrow and Ms. Dawson led to specialized benefits for the community—for example, capacity development among grassroots service providers (e.g., free skill-building

workshops identified by the community and led by community leaders, such as Grant Writing and Reporting), and the development of a community-responsive and research-informed report that continues to support youth development efforts responsive to community vision (e.g., support for a Kids-Ride-Free program with the local bus line to address transportation barriers).

Bearing witness to the transformational possibilities of CBPR, I excitedly applied for and was accepted into a doctoral program at a Research I University. Though I was eager to do the work with faculty identified as CBPR scholar-practitioners, I slowly began to realize that CBPR is executed quite differently in spaces where expectations regarding research productivity are high. Building relationships with community members, inviting their input, and enabling their expertise to guide the research process is, as I was told, a luxury not afforded at such institutions. I was told in various direct and indirect ways that my vision of CBPR was idealistic; at best, a researcher had done their due diligence if they had held a community focus group or partnered with local service providers. While my new advisors acknowledged the benefits of community-engaged research for both the community and research outcomes, I was promptly encouraged to explore other less time-consuming means of community engagement—*if* I was to involve community at all.

Further, the first year of a doctoral program brings with it the shock of PhD-level coursework, exposure to teaching experiences, balancing the execution of newly acquired research skills, and the realization of what it means to actually do research. Those very idealistic and romanticized dreams of conducting elaborate dissertation research have started to become tempered into a plan that is more "manageable" and "doable" in a four-year time frame. Because, as recently suggested by one of my committee advisors: "A good dissertation is a done dissertation" ...and probably not one on CBPR time. *But*—I continue to struggle with this—if the dissertation serves to "craft" a research agenda that will "brand" me in the academy, shouldn't I impress upon it the (CBPR-informed) trajectory I intend to pursue? Indeed, the first year has left me feeling somewhat research homeless, questioning *should I have stuck to community practice?*

Even so, as a self-proclaimed social work practitioner-researcher, I am committed to learning how to conduct research that at once produces contributions to the field and (most importantly) acts as a mechanism of social justice and change. Of course, having access to a formal CBPR training program would not only prepare masters and doctoral students like myself to conduct research and develop programs infused with community expertise, but also help correct long-standing power and equity imbalances (e.g., universities exploiting surrounding communities for the sake of their research alone). It would also help the academy shift the ways in which it views and supports social work faculty who elect to pursue CBPR to guide their research.

Diving into the Deep End

"Oh, you don't want to do *that... that'll be the death of your career!*"

Comforting. Supporting. Encouraging—no? Just the words a newly minted PhD, poised to start their first year as a tenure-track professor at a Research I University, needs to hear.

What had I professed? That I (Rebecca) was going to train elephants to provide art therapy? No, I had uttered to a senior faculty member that I called upon CBPR to guide my research.

I know. I'll give you a minute.

Shocking, right?

I mean, *how* could I? *Why would I?*

The truth is, it chose me—a long time ago. Growing up in a rural, economically (and otherwise) depressed New England abandoned mill town, I learned very early on the power of the collective. Of people coming together to make ends meet, often in spaces where the state had relinquished responsibility or didn't care from the get-go. We bartered for all sorts of things: food, firewood, plumbing repairs, and haircuts. We shared stories of frustration and hope. *And, we accomplished more together than we could have ever done alone.*

That left a mark, a deep one. A mark that guided me as an enlisted soldier in the military. As a secretary at a property management company by day, community college student by night. As a student of psychology, then public health, then social welfare. In all these spaces, I questioned, for better and for worse. I questioned why nearly all of my enlisted brothers and sisters came from economically marginalized families/communities and felt *this*—possibly risking their lives—was their *best* option. *Really?* I questioned why some families could live in multi-million-dollar gated communities, while "Billy" panhandled outside our office for enough money to stay a night at the motel. "The fancy ones that had showers and everything," he used to say. And, I questioned why so often in academic spaces we toss about words like *justice* and *solidarity*, yet often call upon methods that further alienate and pathologize individuals rather than systems.

That didn't sit well. So you see, CBPR chose me.

My first exposure came while pursuing my MPH degree. Frustrated by the individual-level focus of an undergraduate degree in psychology, I was eager to explore community work and participatory models in support of collective health and wellbeing. Only later would I come to realize how *incredibly* lucky I was to learn with and from a highly esteemed CBPR-scholar and practitioner: "Georgia." Based on personal and professional experiences, Georgia understood the power of community—the power of individuals coming together to identify strengths and challenges and collectively determine a path forward. Through course readings and a year-long, community-engaged assessment project, Georgia encouraged my classmates and me to explore the ways in which CBPR presented an alternative way of moving beyond platitudes and engaging in the *work* of justice (or at least striving—with intentionality—to get closer). Work that fundamentally saw the power, potential, wisdom, and vision of *all* people. Not only those with access to various forms of privilege. Despite this being my only academic exposure to CBPR, it was nonetheless powerful. It demonstrated that it *could* be done.

So, I jumped in headfirst, right into the deep end. Was I outraged, upset, and rattled by the whole

"career death" thing? *Without a doubt.* But I had already jumped, so my only option was to learn to swim in these waters.

I spent the summer prior to starting my tenure-track position working to make connections in the local community (*not* working on publications off the dissertation—we'll get to this later). My Dean at the time, a lifelong champion of justice, provided a warm introduction with an executive director of a local community development corporation. We held weekly two-hour meetings (always at the organization) for months discussing the community, our partnership, and ideas regarding the assessment and its progress. We collectively decided that our primary goal was to *listen*. We wanted to hear from the community. We wanted the university to support the process, not *overtake* it. So, we collaborated with community leaders to convene and facilitate listening sessions and a visioning process. Therein, community-determined priorities naturally emerged, as well as bi-directional learning opportunities among community members, researchers, and 12 MSW students who supported the effort. Later, while attending a community festival, a community member said to me, "You know, I want you to know that the most powerful thing you all did was *listen*. You didn't come in with your ideas; you listened to ours. And that made all the difference."

For the past two years, I've been engaged in a community health worker (*promotora*) program that has prioritized leadership development and access to health and social services within the local Latinx community. Given limited fluency in Spanish, I am quiet—nearly silent—during all of our *promotora* trainings. As a person that relies on words to engage, to connect, to build relationships, this has been hard. Really hard. I want to jump in and contribute, to offer my thoughts and insights, but I can't. As hard as I try to translate in my mind, it's never quick enough. So, I sit and listen. From this place of quiet, of letting go of "control," I have witnessed our bilingual/bicultural graduate research assistants assume leadership positions, develop culturally and contextually responsive trainings, and flourish as community-engaged scholars. I have likewise witnessed once-reserved *promotoras* coordinate training opportunities, support service providers to develop culturally responsive practices, and emerge as vocal leaders and advocates for their community.

So, nearly all of my research efforts as a junior faculty member have involved CBPR. Has it been challenging and exhausting in countless ways? *Yes and yes.* Have I grown and been humbled and been a part of efforts that have resulted in real, palpable, positive change along the way? *Yes, yes, and yes.* So, you see, the challenge (at least in my experience) has really been the effect of trying to balance the time demands of community engagement, trust (re)building, and relationship development *with* also having to identify *other* research opportunities that translate more quickly into publications and other "countable products."

I think (at least for now) we've got to jump in and learn to swim as we go. We've got to figure out how to publish and present on the processes *and* outcomes of these efforts, as doing so keeps our collective head (okay, maybe just by a nostril, but *still*) above water with respect to "productivity" and (importantly) begins to shift the discourse regarding what is (and isn't) considered "research." We need mentoring by people who have actually done this. We need to train the next generation of social workers to engage effectively in CBPR. We need professional

and institutional support in the form of adjusted promotion and tenure criteria reflective of the inputs and outputs of CBPR, as well as external funding mechanisms, conferences, and publishing venues that are interested in and supportive of this approach. We need *time* to do this right.

Waiting for the "Right" Time to Jump In

I (Trina) initially became interested in CBPR as a doctoral student. I decided to pursue a PhD program after learning about the wide racial disparities in infant mortality in my adopted hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Because of the color of their skin, my white daughters were two to three times more likely to *survive* within their first year of life than African American babies. I felt this disparity was completely unacceptable, especially considering all the technological advances available to us here in the United States. As I researched this topic more, I discovered these disparities had existed for *decades* in Milwaukee, and over this same timeframe I found news story after news story announcing new initiatives, steering committees, and research projects focused on this issue. But none of them were successful in significantly reducing the racial disparities. As I looked more, it seemed that most of these initiatives were missing a critical component—the voices of residents who had experienced these disparities firsthand.

I saw CBPR as a way to engage community members in determining the complicated underlying causes of these disparities and proposing new and creative solutions. I also realized that CBPR was not a commonly appreciated approach in academia. Early on in my PhD program, I was invited to attend a meeting to discuss yet another initiative aimed at achieving healthy birth outcomes so that I could provide administrative support for writing the grant application. Surrounded by an impressive group of well-published researchers from multiple fields, I tentatively asked, "Shouldn't we get community members' input on this idea?" One of my colleagues responded, "*We're* the experts!" In that exchange, I realized it can be difficult for academics (who are expected to become experts in our topic of research) to privilege the "lived experience" and knowledge of community members who are experiencing and observing this topic on a daily basis.

My academic preparation related to CBPR included taking one public health elective in my doctoral program that introduced CBPR as a social justice approach. The course required students to develop and propose a project to a community partner and seek their feedback on our idea. At the time I was terrified at the thought of talking to a community agency, but when my partner and I proposed our idea, our community partner was so excited that they talked us into completing the project with very limited funding—all while we balanced full-time jobs and doctoral coursework. The experience of negotiating with a community partner, as well as gaining their feedback on our approach and insight into what we thought we were finding, was a rich learning experience and cinched for me the benefit of involving community partners in all aspects of research.

That being said, I also experienced the CBPR challenges noted in the literature: the considerable amount of *time* required to collaborate with community partners and the importance of

relationships and *communication* therein. Under the mentorship of a CBPR scholar, our team later explored these tensions in an article (Salm Ward et al., 2017). We (the students) spoke of our "learning-on-the-fly" about CBPR, and our community partner reflected on their experience training future academics in what *should* matter in research (e.g., the courage to call out structural racism when they see it). This experience was at once deeply rewarding and utterly exhausting, leaving me quite reticent to pursue CBPR for my dissertation. I decided to heed the warning of a senior faculty member—*"the best dissertation is a done dissertation"*—and chose to analyze an existing data set.

Fast-forward to my first tenure-track faculty job at a Research I university in a new state, where I worked to launch my program of research with new partners while also balancing an administrative program coordination role. I knew that truly engaged CBPR work would require a considerable amount of time to build trusting and meaningful relationships with new community partners. But I also realized that I had very *limited time* with my administrative appointment and the looming expectations of promotion and tenure. I was told that in order to be promoted, I needed an "h index of at least 12" and NIH funding. With that type of pressure, I felt that my main priorities were to publish as quickly and as much as I could while writing grant proposals. This didn't allow much time for building relationships with community partners. Instead, my strategy was to publish quantitative, population-level work while also trying to launch a smaller qualitative project—hopefully, my publication record and work in the community would catch a community partner's attention. So, unlike Rebecca, I spent the first part of my tenure-track position mostly in my office working on publishing my dissertation papers, *not* out in the community making connections.

During the first few years of my tenure-track career, I decided to strive for "community-engaged" research versus CBPR. I felt that I could at least try to call upon *some* of the principles of CBPR, even though I didn't have the bandwidth to engage in a truly CBPR approach. This translated into working with community partners to do community outreach and education in my area of expertise and serving as a program evaluator on a poorly-funded—but community partner-led—program. My justification to my Department Chair for doing the project (despite the time commitment and minimal funding) was that I could "get a paper out of it," which would count towards my goal of promotion and tenure. As I talked with potential community partners during that time, I transparently told them that the things I needed were either publications or funding, or preferably both, because those were the "products" that counted in academia.

Despite these pressures, I remained committed to community engagement. I found ways to balance academic expectations by working with community partners to publish preliminary results and contract for small amounts of money (i.e., what my community partners could afford, versus large grants that my university would prefer). Although not valued as highly as other efforts, these smaller, community-engaged projects—in many ways—resulted in greater impact via direct and immediate translation of research into practice. For example, in one of our projects, we were able to make the case to public health leadership that the project was worthwhile to continue, then directly translated our study results into improving and updating parent training materials on safe sleep.

In the latter part of my early tenure-seeking process, I received a small grant to pilot-test an intervention study based on the preliminary research I had done in my area of expertise. At the same time, I also returned to my hometown of Milwaukee to a tenure-track position and was able to transition the grant to my new institution. As I worked to implement my project, I spent the first year of the grant re-connecting with community partners, re-introducing myself, and sheepishly telling them, "...So, this is what I have funding to do." Luckily for me, my community colleagues have been very supportive and excited to assist me with carrying out what I proposed, including support with recruitment. However, I can't help but feel that I'm doing this all backward. Instead of proposing my own intervention (with my limited understanding of the issue), I would *like* to be talking with community partners about what they are doing, exploring what seems to be working well, and identifying ways for me to support *their* efforts.

This past summer, I was granted promotion and tenure, and I now have the benefit of reflecting on the first part of my career. On the one hand, I am glad I prioritized publications and funding because they helped me achieve the milestone of promotion and tenure. But on the other hand, my program of research up to this point has not truly benefited from the rich insight and expertise of community partners as active members of a research team (versus just serving as recruitment sources). With tenure behind me, and a little more space to breathe, I plan to reorient my research approach to more closely embody the principles of CBPR by finding ways to join ongoing efforts with my community partners instead of designing my own. By incorporating CBPR principles into my work, I believe my research will truly benefit from the rich insight and expertise of community partners, and we'll all be more successful in addressing this issue.

Conclusion

Individually and collectively, our experiences reflect those found in the literature. Social work scholars and practitioners highlight the ways in which CBPR can foster trust-building (e.g., Nicolaidis et al., 2013); capacity development among all partners, including community partners, academic researchers, and students (e.g., Sangalang et al., 2015; Wahab et al., 2014); the identification of issues that are of direct importance and relevance to community members (vs. externally defined "needs" e.g., Scharlach & Sanchez, 2011); culturally and contextually responsive interventions (e.g., Austin & Craig, 2015; Mellins et al., 2014); health and well-being (e.g., Spencer et al., 2011); and alignment with social work values (Baffour, 2011; Barbera, 2008; Branom, 2012; Gehlert & Coleman, 2010; Jacobson & Rugeley, 2007; Sohng, 1996). Several scholars likewise note challenges associated with incredible time investments (e.g., Spencer, 2015; Wright et al., 2017), promotion and tenure expectations (e.g., Aisenberg et al., 2012; Ferrera et al., 2015; Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013), and a lack of mentoring, educational, and training opportunities (e.g., Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013; Scharlach & Sanchez, 2011).

This approach asked of us to let go of some things while richly gaining in others. A lack of formal and/or ongoing educational training (e.g., beyond one class or one week's readings) meant we all had to embrace "learning this on the fly," as Trina suggested. Some of us had to let go of being able to produce a plethora of articles and academically "recognizable" products, thereby impacting yearly reviews (and related "merit" raises). Some of us had to let go of the approach altogether to complete doctoral training and move towards tenure in a timely manner.

Despite these challenges, however, we each remain committed to this approach precisely because of all that is gained. We have been humbled in our work to (re)balance power, bearing witness to its empowering effects among students and community partners. We have witnessed the reception and impact of culturally and contextually responsive programs reflective of community vision. And, in many ways, we have yet to see the ways in which these seeds will continue to bear fruit.

We are, thus, not alone in acknowledging the simultaneous benefits and challenges that emerge, not only as a result of the approach per se, but also by virtue of being implemented in spaces that have *not yet made appropriate accommodations*. That is, if we're able to flip the script and see the noted challenges not as inherent to the approach but instead largely a result of external factors, our point of departure is quite different. Instead of bemoaning or dismissing the approach altogether, we *could* start to think through how we might adjust our own orientation and those of professional and organizational structures to be more affirming and supportive of this approach (given the tremendous associated benefits—many of which align with values foundational to social work).

This is going to require a shift, *possibly* a seismic one. One that truly sees the merit in opening space for CBPR. One that respects and supports research efforts that involve long-term (often *multi-year*) collaborative research partnerships with community, that prioritize power-sharing, capacity development, and social justice. An appreciation—that is quantified in some tangible way—for the time spent (re)building trust with communities, challenging power imbalances, and (re)centering justice as a guiding framework. Towards those ends, we offer several preliminary recommendations at the personal, institutional, and professional levels.

At the personal level, we encourage individuals to seek out opportunities to further develop their skills and capacities to engage effectively in CBPR (ensuring fidelity to the approach), to include these: targeted coursework (if it doesn't yet exist, *ask for it*), doctoral and professional pre-conference workshops, post-doc training opportunities, professional special interest groups, and conference proceedings. Seek out colleagues, practitioners, *and* mentors engaged (or interested) in CBPR (Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013). With respect to mentors, one would benefit greatly from the insights of both senior (i.e., one who has successfully navigated promotion and tenure with a CBPR-informed research agenda, possibly obtained funding in this regard, and can help to identify potential reviewers for your promotion and tenure materials) and junior (i.e., those that might share creative, real-time solutions) faculty colleagues. Likewise, it would be of benefit to seek out mentors within (to assist in navigating your own institutional environment) as well as outside your university (to provide a broader perspective).

At the institutional level, universities are encouraged to consider the ways in which CBPR can enhance the university's ability to achieve its community engagement mission (*particularly* among land- and sea-grant universities). Enhanced training for and with institutional review boards will likewise encourage greater familiarity with, for example, emergent research designs and the logistics surrounding the active involvement of community research partners (Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013; Shore, 2007). Universities, schools, and departments are strongly encouraged to review promotion and tenure guidelines to identify opportunities to amend review criteria and

language; this is both to be more responsive to the process and outcomes/products of CBPR-informed scholarship (Lowry & Ford-Paz, 2013; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006) and to recognize a broader array of scholarly impact beyond peer-reviewed publications and extramural funding. This should include, for example, research dissemination at the community level, engaged service-learning opportunities for students, and social action resulting from CBPR-engaged research.

Finally, at the professional level, we recommend the continued development of undergraduate- and graduate-level CBPR-informed curricula, postdoctoral training programs, and ongoing professional development opportunities to further enhance awareness, skill development, and chances for social workers to engage with and contribute to CBPR. Other allied health professions have, for example, outlined CBPR as a proposed core educational competency (Institute of Medicine, 2003). Several social work scholars have long called for such curricular developments (e.g., Anderson, 2002; Baffour, 2011; Berge et al., 2009; Branom, 2012; Dulmus & Cristalli, 2012; Heckel & Moore, 2009; Hyde & Meyer, 2004; Scharlach & Sanchez, 2011). We likewise encourage professional social work journals and organizations to invite CBPR-informed scholarship by ensuring 1) the scope, aims, and calls for papers of journals and 2) conference themes, tracks, and professional awards are inclusive of CBPR-informed research and practice.

Final Thoughts

In exploring the seemingly antagonistic relationship between CBPR and academia, we come to see many of the noted challenges as stemming from a lack of multi-systemic support—a casualty, if you will, of an academic culture that values (and, in many ways, incentivizes) particular research approaches and methodologies while discrediting and marginalizing others (directly or indirectly, the effect is still the same). While other research approaches (e.g., implementation research) demonstrate positive outcomes (e.g., dissemination of evidence-based research intended to address the lengthy gap between research and implementation), prior scholarship and our own experiences suggest that CBPR is particularly well-positioned to foster unique processes *and* outcomes, to include (as noted above) (re)building trust between community partners and academics/universities, community capacity development, and social action.

As such, we humbly offer these reflections as an invitation to dialogue: an invitation for social work and allied professions to come together to creatively (re)imagine multi-systemic supports that recognize the benefits of CBPR and allow all those engaged—community, students, academics, practitioners—opportunities to flourish.

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When the Professor Becomes a Student: Reflecting on the Importance of the Relationship Between Social Work, One Health, and Humane Education

Ashley O'Connor and Amber Jones

Abstract: Social work is a field containing theories, such as cognitive behavioral theory, that include the environment when thinking about people in society. However, in practice and teaching, sometimes the environment gets taken out of the equation as social workers fail to consider the physical environment when addressing patterns of behavior. This paper describes the journey of a social work professor who entered a graduate program in humane studies in order to make her practice and teaching more inclusive of the environment and other living things. It also includes narrative from an MSW student who learned about the paradigms of One Health and humane education through the social work professor. Through a mix of explaining these paradigms and our lived experiences, this paper encourages others to think more about the importance of the interconnectedness of humans, living things, and the environment in their helping profession.

***Keywords*:** One Health, humane education, person in environment

This paper was developed as a result of a social worker with a PhD entering the world of academia and quickly realizing that social work theories and practices were not enough to make the changes needed in society. It is my (Ashley's) hope that this paper will get others to be more contemplative in their understanding of the meaning of social work to be the most impactful they can be in society. It took me many years of practice to realize what I was missing in my interactions with others. I always spoke about the importance of the environment and thinking about reciprocal relationships with other living things but did not quite understand how to incorporate that into my life. This paper discusses my journey, briefly explains the paradigms of One Health and humane education, and includes narratives of changes in my work, as well as narrative from an MSW student on including these paradigms in her own work, as she will soon enter the world of social work more fully.

Growing up, I loved exploring nature and thinking about how humans interacted with one another and other creatures. In grade school, I connected to other students by showing off my cat and asking others if they had any pets. One of my teachers noticed this and made sharing about pets a part of class. I would also take friends on walks with me and take notice of how many other types of living creatures we saw.

As a result of the strong connection I felt with animals, I dreamed of having a job in the future where I could work with them. As the years went on, I changed my dream from "veterinarian" to "therapist" because I knew I wanted to make an impact on society, but didn't think I had the strength to work with sick animals or see their owners' sadness over their state of health. In 2010, I gained my MSW degree and began work as a clinical research assistant with veterans who struggled with symptoms of posttraumatic stress (PTS). (As a note, I want to point out that I

don't like to include "disorder" when I write about what others consider PTSD. From the many individuals I have worked with who experienced trauma, it has become apparent that their "disorder" is a natural reaction to enduring situations the majority of humans are lucky to never have to experience.)

I chose to work in research because I felt like I could see the impact of my work on an individual level, but research could also change things for veterans on a larger level. Somehow, I still felt like I could do more. A life-changing event happened when I started working with veterans in a college setting. One of the student veterans had a service dog for their PTS, and not only did I hear their stories of how the dog made them feel like they could finally breathe and live again, but the dog's presence helped create a sense of comfort among other veterans on campus and helped them create social connections with one another.

I had also just recently moved to San Francisco at that point, and I was experiencing adjustment concerns. I finally adopted a dog, and it changed my world. I went from never wanting to go for hikes and being afraid of new experiences to fully embracing life and spending way too much money at REI. Knowing this personally in conjunction with the student veteran and fellow students' reports made me realize that maybe I *could* work with animals in my career. It was then that I decided to get my PhD in order to research the human-animal bond.

In 2015, after I finished my PhD courses, I was lucky to gain employment working as the clinical research coordinator of a VA PTSD dog study in order to gain further understanding of the benefits of human-animal interactions. Previous research findings on the positive relationships between animals and humans have indicated they are useful in improving physical and mental health. In general, positive interactions with animals can reduce stress by releasing oxytocin, a hormone in the body that naturally reduces stress; also, chemicals that stabilize mood and help with happiness, like serotonin and dopamine, can increase (Beetz et al., 2012). Interactions with animals can also lead to relaxed muscle tension, a decrease in blood pressure, and more regulated breathing (Beetz et al., 2012). However, in the majority of studies, the well-being of the animals is not examined.

During my job as the VA PTSD dog study coordinator, I had conversations with other researchers who were interested in the human-animal bond and realized that there seemed to be a struggle between researchers in the field who wanted to study the impact of animals on the well-being of humans, and those who felt that animals should not be seen as instruments to help with well-being. The study employed clinicians to ensure the safety of the veterans in the study and dog trainers to ensure the dogs were not being impacted negatively. I felt there should not be a divide between the different types of professions: Why can't we all ensure well-being for both the humans and the animals in the study? Luckily, this is what happened with my team members, and we discussed how to ensure the welfare of animals in research and mental health.

Upon finishing that study, I knew it was going to be my turn to create research to study the human-animal bond, but I wanted to make sure I knew enough about the welfare of animals in order to bring this care of both sides into my work. So, I decided to get a second master's degree in humane studies online through Madonna University. I started the program in 2019 and have

one semester left as I type this. Humane studies was developed as a concept in the late 1800s (Unti & DeRosa, 2003) but has recently gained traction through the work of Zoey Weill, who created a Humane Education Certificate Program in 1997 (Institute for Humane Education, n.d.). The mission of the Center for Humane Studies at Madonna University is to contribute to the development of the cutting-edge field of humane studies linking social justice, environmental conservation, and animal protection. The two courses I took that really started to help me use this education in my work were Do Animals Matter, and Humane Studies. I had previously considered the importance of the welfare of animals in research by exploring the paradigm of One Health, a model applicable to studying the human-animal bond.

One Health is an approach to health created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that recognizes the connection between the health of humans, animals, and the environment in allowing for the spread of disease and other health-related concerns (CDC, 2018). The paradigm of One Health encourages humans to think about prevention of the spread of disease and promotion of the well-being of society as a whole in a different light, in that the sole focus of health cannot only be on humans, animals, or the environment. Instead, exploration of these three factors' interaction and connection must be performed so that promotion of lasting change can occur on both the micro and macro level, as the CDC (2018) explains. The One Health paradigm, the organization says, can be linked back to research completed as early as 1821, when Rudolf Virchow established a link between human and veterinary medicine while studying infectious diseases. Since that time, the domain has been expanded upon and was ultimately adopted by resolution in 2007 by the American Medical Association as a means of promoting increased collaboration between the human and veterinary communities (CDC, 2018).

Humane Studies Program

In my humane studies program, I have been given the opportunity to gain an education so that I can think more about human-animal interactions and the connection between social work and humane studies in social justice. I was also lucky to gain the opportunity of an internship in humane education, which was a paradigm I had not quite been familiar with before. The Humane Education Coalition (n.d.) offers that humane education is a teaching methodology that encourages learners to develop sensitivity and appreciation for all living things. Encompassed within this framework is the idea that human rights, the preservation of the environment, and animal protection are all interrelated, and that in order to adequately address one of these concerns, we must acknowledge them all (Institute for Humane Education, n.d.). Initially, I was hesitant to take on an internship as I had also recently accepted a job as an assistant professor at a university and felt like these dual roles were a contradiction. However, this experience led to me thinking about my work in an entirely new way.

The Connection Between Social Work, Humane Education, and One Health

While I had previously recognized the importance of the connection between humans, other species, and the environment through the paradigm of One Health, being immersed in the world of humane education took my interest even further as I thought about these paradigms and the connection to social justice. While the connection between these areas started in week one, I was

unaware that this was actually something that others in social work had thought about. However, during the creation of an annotated bibliography for my internship, I discovered an article by Bretzlaff-Holstein (2018), in which the author explored the similarities between social work and humane education. Bretzlaff-Holstein linked the fields together, as they are both based on the concepts of social justice and equity. In addition, both social work and humane education support solution-focused, interdisciplinary interventions that aim to address both micro- and macro-level factors that impact societal issues. The Humane Education Coalition (n.d.) states that the mission of this paradigm is to collaborate, educate, empower, and inspire. This is in line with the National Association of Social Workers (2017) Code of Ethics, which lists empowering the oppressed and promoting responsiveness of social institutions as part of its mission.

However, Bretzlaff-Holstein (2018) also wrote that social work has historically failed to include the natural environment and other species in the person-in-environment framework, which is a large focus of humane education, and that social work should attempt to also include this. This can be seen when looking at different theories utilized in social work. One example is cognitive behavioral theory, which promotes looking at learned patterns of behavior that have developed in response to life events (González-Prendes & Brisebois, 2012). In this theory, the life events are considered to be the environment in which the person is viewed. However, this often fails to take into consideration one's actual physical environment or interactions with other species. As such, it stands to be further developed. Through a literature review, the importance of the connection between One Health, social work, and humane education became even more complete.

Existing Literature

The spreading of diseases addressed through One Health and the humane treatment of animals in humane education are both concerns that impact the well-being of humans, making them valid focuses for social work. An example of this is interpersonal violence. While social workers utilizing the person-in-environment theory examine many different factors that impact the experience of interpersonal violence, they often fail to look at the natural environment or the impact on and of animals. Ross (1996) proposes that there is a connection between the mistreatment of animals and humans. Ross suggests that the mistreatment of animals can be an indicator that interpersonal violence is occurring between the individuals involved. Faver (2010) also discusses this connection, looking at the relationship between witnessing or experiencing violence and perpetrating violence on animals.

Faver (2010) also discusses the development from abusing animals to abusing humans. Research has indicated that animal abuse may be an indication of abuse of humans to come, and individuals in the justice system who have committed more violent crimes are more likely to have a history of abusing animals (Overton et al., 2012). The mistreatment of animals can also include lack of adequate health care, which is why it is so important to also factor in the ideas of One Health. An animal that is mistreated and poorly cared for can also act to spread disease, which will further impact the humans that interact with it. As such, I argue that the social work person-in-environment approach must be expanded to include the theories of both One Health and humane education in order to address the situation of interpersonal violence.

This concept of interpersonal violence is just one example of the ways in which One Health and humane education can relate to social work, but the implications extend far beyond this example. Currently One Health, humane education, and social work utilize comprehensive approaches to view interactions between animals, humans, and the environment. However, they often focus on separate topics and influencing factors, with One Health focusing primarily on environmental health and the spread of disease, humane education on building empathy through human-animal interactions, and social work on individuals.

Research on the connection between humans, animals, and the environment is limited, but growing. A recent publication by Rambaree et al. (2019) supports the need to increase connections between social work and one's physical environment by proposing the expansion of social work to include a greater focus on ecosocial work. Ecosocial work recognizes the interconnectedness of all lives in our ecosystem and provides a holistic framework with which to promote sustainable development (Rambaree et al., 2019). The inclusion of ecosocial work within the larger field of social work is therefore expected to contribute to a healthier physical environment, which aligns with the goals of One Health (CDC, 2018).

Boddy et al. (2018) make a similar argument, suggesting that the environment needs to become a central focus of social work theory, ethics, and practice. However, neither of these publications makes a strong connection between ecosocial work and animals, suggesting the need for additional work to eliminate the remaining disconnect between humans, animals, and the environment. It is therefore proposed that social work must expand to take into consideration the paradigms of humane education and One Health in order to make sustainable, micro- and macro-level changes that positively impact our society.

Including an MSW Student in the Conversation

The more I learned, the more I thought it was important to start teaching my own social work students about One Health and humane education. I started by including a student I was working with on a potential service dog study in discussions around the connection between social work, One Health, and humane education. Being new to Alaska, I was lucky to find a student there who was both knowledgeable about service dogs and experienced in working in animal shelters.

As we studied service dog organizations and therapy dog resources, I realized that we were learning from one another. I brought up my MS program to her and started to explain what humane education was. Seeing her interest in the discussion was what led to the development of the concept of this paper. I asked her if she was interested in being included in it and explained that I thought it was important to share both a student and a professor's views in order to reach a broader audience for this topic. She immediately agreed and we got to work.

An MSW Student's View

After graduating with an undergraduate degree in psychology, I (Amber) accepted a position in Western Alaska working at a domestic violence shelter. I took this job in order to gain real-world experience and a little adventure before pursuing a PhD in psychology. However, the

real-world experience ended up teaching me that I was much more interested in the field of social work than I ever was in psychology.

Social work seemed to capture a more authentic version of individuals' lived experiences than psychology did. My experience of working in the shelter and seeing the complex needs of the women who came through our doors taught me that simply diagnosing and treating that diagnosis was not effective. Rather, the person-in-environment (PIE) view promoted in social work seemed more effective for our clients, as it took into account the many factors that could be impacting an individual's mental health.

As I have begun to study social work more closely through a master's program, I have come to think that even the seemingly all-encompassing PIE perspective is lacking in scope. While PIE involves examining how individuals interact with and are impacted by their environments in order to gain a better understanding of their situation and mental health, I would argue that the current PIE view could stand to be expanded. As such, I propose that the next logical step in the development of social work is to expand the concept of PIE to include a greater focus on factors that are addressed through other fields, such as One Health and its connection with humane education.

Theoretically, the PIE view includes one's physical environment, however, the emphasis is on interactions with systems and people in one's environment more so than the physical environment itself. One Health suggests that one's physical environment impacts an individual's health and, as such, one's physical environment is of extreme importance. Climate change and changes in land use are cited by One Health to be examples of important environmental factors that contribute to the health of both humans and animals, yet they are not typically focused on in social work.

The domestic shelter where I worked provides an example of the need to blend environmental factors into social work. Staff members were routinely working with women to help get them into safe, long-term housing, which often included living with relatives back in their home villages. When discussing these options with clients, we performed safety screenings as it related to the other individuals in the home—are the other occupants safe and supportive, does the client feel comfortable in that home, etc.? The World Health Organization (n.d.) lists access to safe water as one of the most effective mechanisms for ensuring health, yet we didn't always screen for factors impacting the physical aspects of the living environments, like if the house had running water and if the sewer system was functioning.

We frequently met with women who had homes they could move into where they would not be at risk of physical harm, but where the environment was not conducive to healthy living due to a lack of clean water or a heating system. Furthermore, several clients could not return to their home communities at all because their homes were being destroyed due to the erosion caused by climate change. Not only does this impact whether a woman is able to leave shelter, it also impacts her mental health and well-being. Failing to address these factors thus prevents social workers from gaining insight into a client's full story and, as such, limits one's ability to provide meaningful assistance.

Creating a Fuller Field of Social Work

In order to fully blend One Health with social work, I (Ashley) feel it is necessary to not only examine the ways in which humans and animals interact with the environment, but also how humans and animals interact with each other. The interactions between humans and animals can tell us a lot about a person's situation. Humane education is a relatively new field of study that attempts to view the ways in which we can nurture compassion and respect for all living beings by drawing attention to the positive impacts derived from interactions between humans and animals (Humane Education Coalition, n.d.).

Ross (1996) wrote of an Indigenous belief that one could learn about the health of a community by looking at their dogs. Ross described how abuse often gets passed down from stronger to weaker, until ultimately the only remaining being to be harmed is the dog. In Western Alaska, a common criticism from outsiders is that people take poor care of their dogs in this region. While I believe this issue to be fairly complex, an argument can certainly be made for Ross' theory of power and abuse being at play. Working on the inverse of this theory, if we can foster a sense of connection, care, and respect between people and their dogs through humane education, these feelings could in turn promote the same sense of connection, care, and respect between humans.

This is supported by a study by Faver (2010) that looks at how humane education can foster empathy and prevent violence in humane education students. Furthermore, Bretzlaff-Holstein (2018) discusses how humane education can lead to improvements in human rights, environmental preservation, and animal welfare and proposes that humane education should be considered an important aspect of social work. This also pairs well with One Health, which attempts to promote the overall health of people, animals, and the environment (CDC, 2018), falling in line with the missions of both humane education and social work. As such, it seems that connecting humane education, One Health, and the current PIE perspectives in social work will lead to a more complete and holistic approach to care.

In order to fully integrate humane education and One Health into the field of social work it is imperative that social work education begins to place a greater focus on the physical environment. Further collaboration between the fields is also needed. One Health notes the importance of collaborating with other professions to address the animal-human-environment interface, which opens the door for a partnership between One Health, humane education, and social work (CDC, 2018). This would provide an opportunity to address many aspects of wellness previously discussed while also leaving opportunity for including additional development, such as how the spread of disease impacts the overall well-being of humans, animals, and the environment.

We can use the information from this paper to improve social work education. I was lucky to be able to develop and teach a BSW/MSW human-animal interactions course this summer. As I was creating the course, I realized I could have been creating three courses. While other professors and students at first thought the class was going to be all about mental health dogs, I knew I was going to include information about One Health and humane education as a quarter of the course's content. I was pleased that some of the students wrote that they learned more than

anticipated in the class and were going to be able to apply content from it more often in practice due to its inclusion in the course map. Please email me at my correspondence if you would like to see the syllabus and content for that class.

Conclusion

Engaging in a master's degree program in humane studies has been more educational and useful than imagined. I knew I was missing something in my work, and I feel that considering the interconnectedness of humane education, One Health, and social work was that missing piece. Being able to share the utility and excitement about thinking more humanely in social work practice with my student was an unexpected positive as well. I am lucky that my dual role as an educator and student broadened my views so that I can continue to incorporate these areas in all aspects of my career. I hope to continue this conversation with others in all fields so that we can truly work together for the sake of society and living creatures.

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Learning How to Teach Macro Practice Online: A Commitment to Social Work's Roots

Jordan Wilfong

Abstract: Despite the growing level of social inequality occurring in communities across the US, evidence suggests that social work programs are less frequently emphasizing macro practice courses and the importance of addressing community-level problems, usually since students have less interest in it. I found this particularly apparent in my first semester teaching an online macro practice social work course, during which students from all across the country expressed varying interest levels in and opinions on how to address community social problems. This article traces my experience overcoming difficulties teaching online social work students about the importance of macro practice and my overall concerns about distance education. An additional discussion is included on the need for online education to maintain social work's macro practice and social justice roots.

***Keywords*:** online education, macro social work, social justice, community practice, policy practice

Introduction

The belief that individuals should work together within their home communities to address social problems is the main reason I became a social worker. This conviction has been rooted in US social work for over a century, beginning with organizations such as the Hull House and Charity Organization Societies, which pioneered work to address poverty, inequality, public health, and other critical issues (Kirk & Reid, 2002; Reisch, 2016). Therefore, when I was offered as a doctoral student to teach in an online social work program, my initial reaction was one of reluctance. More to the point, my concern stemmed from a belief that social work education could lose sight of its original objective of helping students solve social problems within their home communities.

This article traces my experience navigating how to teach macro social work practice online while remaining true to my belief that social workers should focus on addressing local problems and building communities. Specifically, I reflect on whether distance education represents a step forward for social work or lessens students' ability to develop practice skills like they would within an in-class setting. Furthermore, I describe an activity from my online class that helped students analyze social problems within their home communities.

My Skepticism of Online Social Work

My decision to become a social worker is among the best I have ever made. I often reflect on how the values and ethics of social work are almost an exact replica of my own. My path to social work began when I decided to enroll in a Master of Social Work (MSW) program after graduating college with a degree in anthropology. This pivot from anthropology was a natural

one since social work is dedicated to addressing many of the systemic issues I learned about in college. More specifically, anthropology examines how global systems of oppression, manifested through colonialism and imperialism, have created suffering and disadvantage for large swaths of people across the world. However, upon graduating from college, anthropology did not provide me with a clear path to address the issues I had learned about. Social work, due to its focus on creating community change, provided the opportunity to make a legitimate impact on issues related to justice and equality.

I enrolled in an on-campus MSW program, which was nothing short of a transformational experience. As an MSW student, my personal and professional development was in large part due to the fact that every class I attended was held in a classroom, thus providing the physical and emotional space to learn and grow alongside professors and classmates. These daily interactions were instrumental to my development of the social skills and passion integral to becoming a change agent in the field. Through joining an educational community that was committed to social justice, I could practice the ethics and values of social work while also forming relationships with people from many different walks of life. I walked into my MSW program as an aspiring social worker trying to develop a professional identity and left poised to carry out the mission of the field by helping to bring about community change for individuals and populations in need.

The skills I learned as an MSW student were directly transferable to my social work practice as a child and family therapist. Empowered and emboldened by those transformative experiences in the classroom, I entered the field prepared to advocate for my clients at an organizational and community level. In fact, I often found myself looking back at my classroom experiences and using them to inform my practice. The skills needed to work with children, families, and their surrounding systems were largely generated through those classroom interactions, and my ability to advocate for clients stemmed directly from them.

Furthermore, my decision to study for a PhD in social work and become a professor was driven by a desire to provide the same type of educational experiences for students that I had received. Therefore, I was naturally skeptical about online education after being asked to teach it as a doctoral student. My transformative time as a student in an on-campus program created reservations about whether online education adequately prepared students for the field. I wondered whether social work, a field centered around connecting with others, could fulfill its mission through an online educational forum.

Despite my concerns, the evidence shows that social work has embraced online education. According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, n.d.), there are at least 73 master's-level and 30 bachelor's-level online social work programs. Given this rise in the number of distance education programs, I accepted the offer to teach an online class with the intention of seeing for myself how well students were trained. The class I was offered to teach was MSW Macro Practice, covering a branch of social work that specifically focuses on creating community-level change. My experience teaching this course online is described in the subsequent sections.

Teaching Macro Practice Online

There is a significant amount about the social work curriculum of which I am fond. Macro practice, however, is the one I find most important to advancing our field's objective of expanding opportunity for all populations, particularly those experiencing discrimination and marginalization. Macro practice, given its emphasis on advocating for change at a societal level, distinguishes social work education from other helping professions (Reisch, 2016). The cornerstone of all macro practice courses is teaching students about the role of non-profit organizations in advancing social justice and dismantling the societal structures that manufacture racism, sexism, classism, poverty, and other forms of oppression (CSWE, 2015). Despite this critical objective, research shows that social work education programs focus the majority of their coursework on micro-level clinical practice, primarily as a result of students being more interested in it (e.g., Lightfoot et al., 2017; Mizrahi & Morrison, 2013; Reisch, 2016; Reutebuch, 2006; Weiss, 2006; Weiss et al., 2004). Nevertheless, during this era of growing social inequality in the US, I believe it is critical for social workers to understand how to address community problems on a macro level.

My first semester teaching macro practice online was a challenge, particularly with regard to engaging with students about the content area. After spending time reflecting on this challenge at the midpoint of the semester, I came to believe it occurred for two reasons. First, my online students were spread out across the country and had varying beliefs about how to address community problems. As such, I felt there was a barrier between myself and many of the students with regard to discussing community practice and social justice, both of which are central to macro practice. Lacking any legitimate understanding of the social problems occurring in their communities, I struggled to connect with my students on how to address them. Secondly, I struggled to connect with students about the importance of social justice on a macro level and felt many of them were simply going through the motions and expressing little interest in the role of social work in creating community change.

I ultimately became frustrated with online education and wondered whether it provided a platform for tapping into the field's deep roots of advocating for community change. The challenge of teaching online and not having the opportunity to meet with students in person started to become isolating. As a consequence, I started to wonder whether the inherent challenges I experienced were, for lack of a better term, indicative of social work education "selling out" for distance learning to increase enrollment and profits while forgetting about the importance of solving social problems on a local level. This theory lacked verifiable evidence, but it went through my head regularly during my first semester teaching online. While I had respect for the people running social work online programs, I had significant doubts about its capacity to adequately train students.

Nevertheless, a central characteristic of an effective social worker is persistence. As a result, at the midpoint of the semester, I sought to change the situation instead of accepting it. This involved making several changes to my engagement with students and the course content. More specifically, I made a more deliberate effort to connect with students on an emotional level while simultaneously developing a learning activity that focused on community change and policy

practice. My efforts to connect with students involved making more video lectures, responding in greater detail to each of their assignments, and writing supportive and encouraging weekly emails on Monday mornings. While I had already performed these activities in some capacity, I ramped them up in an attempt to develop closer relationships and reduce the emotional distance of online education.

Furthermore, to better teach students about macro practice in their home communities, I developed an activity covering two key aspects of macro practice: community practice and policy practice. Community practice involves understanding the needs of communities and developing interventions and strategies for addressing them (CSWE, 2015). Policy practice encompasses advocating for change through public policy, particularly by fighting against injustice and inequality within disadvantaged communities (CSWE, 2015). Through focusing on these two components of macro practice, I felt the activity would help students learn about techniques for fostering social change in their communities.

I landed on two instructional resources that provided a foundation for covering community practice and policy practice. Given the politically polarized climate in which we are living, I chose content supported by relevant statistics about social problems and policies. As an academic, I needed to ensure the sources for the activity were grounded in evidence and included social work's emphasis on social justice and the dignity and worth of all people. While my political beliefs are most likely in line with the vast majority of social workers', from my experience they do not always align as closely with students'. Additionally, my students were spread out all over the country, therefore making it important to avoid getting involved in the partisanship common within our current political culture.

To begin the activity, students were assigned to read a United Nations (2018) report describing numerous social problems experienced by US citizens at significantly higher rates than those in other industrialized nations. The report detailed how US citizens experience poverty and various health issues far more often than individuals in other industrialized nations, and also provided an analysis of how racism, classism, and oppression increase the occurrences of these problems (United Nations, 2018). I chose the United Nations article, titled "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights on His Mission to the United States of America," to help students recognize how certain social problems are relevant to social work practice regardless of where they live in the country. As such, online students would have the opportunity to recognize how poverty and health disparities are common across the country, thus providing a local connection to the material.

To develop knowledge about policy practice, students were next assigned to watch a video from *The Nation* (2017) magazine titled "Social Democracy vs. Free Market Capitalism." The video described how the citizens of Denmark receive more government-funded services for quality education, healthcare, and childcare, in addition to greater access to worker's rights, retirement benefits, and vacation days (*The Nation*, 2017). Furthermore, the video explained how Danish citizens encounter fewer economic and health-related challenges during adulthood and made the connection between policies that provide more assistance to citizens and positive adult outcomes (*The Nation*, 2017). The point of assigning this video was to show students how policy is

integral to providing resources for individuals and communities, in addition to explaining the role that social workers can play in carrying out these policies within their communities and advocating for changes to existing laws.

Next, students were assigned to answer several questions about the article and video. Each student was required to post their answers in an online discussion board in order to engage in conversations with each other about macro practice. To cover community practice, each student was asked to write an essay in which they designed a macro intervention to address a social problem relevant to their home community that was also mentioned in the United Nations report. Second, to cover the policy practice component of the activity, students were assigned to write another essay in which they provided opinions on whether the US could reduce the level of social problems in the country through implementing policies similar to Denmark. After posting the essays, students were also required to comment on the work of three of their classmates and subsequently engage in a conversation about the importance of community practice and policy practice on creating social change.

To my delight, the students learned through the activity about addressing social problems on a macro level. More specifically, students were able to effectively comprehend the need to implement more macro interventions to address the issues presented in the UN report. Another theme from the student responses was the lack of recognition within the US of the need to create more opportunities and services for individuals and communities in need. For example, one student stated:

> If needed social services are available for all citizens, this leads to better health outcomes, less harsh of a line between the "well-off" and the poor, more academically capable citizens, happier people, and higher productivity since people are functioning better.

An additional theme involved students discussing how the social programs described in *The Nation* (2017) video helped them think more critically about how these policies could help Americans. For instance, one student mentioned the following:

> It seems as if the U.S. is so far behind in social programs and setting up children to succeed. Comparing our country to others and researching successful programs can help us further our careers as social workers, especially if we are in a position of creating new programs that could benefit our community.

Furthermore, I was a consistent presence in the discussion board conversations between the students. By providing feedback on their essays and comments, I was able to connect many of the points to macro social work. This allowed for the opportunity to convey critical issues about advocating for equality for individual communities and in the US as a whole. Moreover, I always encouraged students to consider implementing the macro interventions they were suggesting within their communities and to remember the historical role that social workers play in addressing social problems.

Reflecting on Online Education

My challenges teaching online made me contemplate whether the setting is sufficient for students to obtain skills to address community problems. I, therefore, found it rewarding that, during the activity mentioned above, my students demonstrated knowledge about macro practice. However, I still have concerns about online education as a form of pedagogy. As someone who benefited greatly from attending an on-campus social work program, perhaps I will always have a bias against online education. Nevertheless, looking back objectively at my experience teaching in a distance education program, my opinions of it are still mixed. While many graduates of online programs have undoubtedly done exceptional work during their careers, it is necessary for social work researchers, particularly those teaching in online programs, to fully measure the practice effectiveness of online students after entering the field.

Still, the current research on social work distance education is limited and the existing studies have mixed findings. One study indicated no differences between the learning outcomes of online and on-campus social work students (Forgey & Ortega-Williams, 2016). However, another study identified that online instructors frequently found it difficult to teach students about social work practice (Levin et al., 2018). As a result, the current research does not fully examine how well online students are prepared to address the critical social problems encountered by individuals and groups of people throughout the US today. Social work researchers and educators must therefore consider how distance programs help students develop the practice skills to address the social problems affecting communities across the country.

As social work becomes more closely aligned with distance education, I believe it is important for educators to remember the field's deep well of history regarding macro practice. Social justice has been the foundation of social work since its inception, and we must continue to promote equality and opportunity. I encourage all social work educators to help students remember these roots. We must ask ourselves the tough questions about how well online education can accomplish our professional goal to address the immense social problems facing our society today. As people committed to justice, we owe it to our clients and those who came before us to push forward the mission of our profession. In my current role as an assistant professor at a social work school that does not have an online program, I will continue to follow the research on distance education and consider whether or not to suggest that we move forward with it. I urge all of my colleagues throughout the country to do the same.

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A Little More Supervision Won't Hurt: Group Work as a Supplemental Supervision Method at the Bachelor's Level

Rolanda L. Ward and Cassandra Daniels

Abstract: Supervision is an important component of professional development for social work students. Supervision helps students process decision-making and link practice decisions to social work competencies, knowledge, and values. Even though social work educators know supervision is critical to the learning process, we also know the realities of field educators' schedules. Therefore, it is important for field staff to develop supplemental methods of supervision that will provide students consistent and thorough feedback. This article explores the implementation of a supplemental supervision model in field seminar in order to deepen students' connections to theory and practice.

***Keywords*:** group work, supervision, field education

After graduating from a doctoral program, I began the quest of securing a tenure track position. My quest was filled with uncertainty about how I would perform as an academic. My very first academic offer was right in my wheelhouse: a growing BSW program in a rural setting needing a macro social worker. I knew I could teach the courses they were looking to fill, but there was one catch to their offer—the position also included coordinating field. I was a little reluctant about accepting the offer but, after consultation, I thought I could do this job. My rationale for accepting: I was once a field student and served as a field liaison for macro students when I was a doctoral student.

Of course, retrospection provides great insight, especially after spending years in the position performing the job, learning the program's strengths, and identifying areas for program improvement. But as I look back at my naïve thoughts—that is, my initial assessment of my field education skills—I certainly was not capable of performing at competency when I began my job as field coordinator.

My first year as field coordinator was filled with little guidance. There was limited instruction about how to do field and, without instruction, I did not know what to expect from students. I did not have much knowledge about what to do as field coordinator. The only source of information that provided some sense of direction was the field manual. After reviewing the manual, I thought field education was about securing placements, having students fill out learning contracts, asking field educators to keep track of students' practicum hours, sending field evaluations, securing those evaluations, and asking field educators to conduct weekly supervision with their practicum students. I was heavily focused on the task, and I did not have much knowledge about the process of supporting emerging social work professionals.

In addition to performing my administrative responsibilities, I had to teach a field seminar class. While I had never taught a field seminar class, I was well equipped to teach social work classes.

In my doctoral program, I had actually spent four semesters preparing to teach—how hard could it be to teach a class with only 11 students in it? When I asked for the syllabus for field, however, a quick glance left me asking, "What are students supposed to master in this course?" The syllabus essentially identified seminar as a place for students to link classroom theories and practicum experiences. Students were asked to come to seminar ready to talk about what was going on in field. There was no assigned text for the class and no assigned work products.

At the same time that I was teaching seminar, I also served as a faculty liaison. As the liaison, I had to meet with students on an individual basis and also with field educators. In these meetings, I soon learned that some students were not receiving consistent supervision in their field settings. Some students shared that they had not seen their actual field educator in a few weeks, that supervision only happened when their field educator could squeeze in a meeting, or that their supervision meetings consisted of mainly task discussions.

I quickly learned in my first year as coordinator that most of our students are placed in organizations that are doing more with less—less funding, less staff, less time. As a result, some of the more common statements students shared with the other field coordinator or me were things like "I never see my supervisor" or "I don't have supervision with my supervisor"—this became a nagging critique of our field placements and a more clear indication that our students' learning needs were not fully being met in their agencies. While their statements were at most times worse than the reality, their statements occurred in both seasoned and newer field placement sites. Even though we attempted to address students' need to process field activities, we soon found it difficult to meet those needs through informal processes and office hours. And I have to admit, as a tenure-track assistant professor who had to teach, coordinate field, and conduct site visits, I did not have time to supplement students' integration of field and theory on an informal basis. There simply wasn't enough time in the week. Professionally, it would have been easier to defer to our trusted relationships with field educators who were undoubtedly doing their best to educate our students. Year after year, our field educators were accepting students and, in a rural setting, this was a make-or-break issue for our social work program. However, I knew we could not continue to educate our students in this cumbersome way. I knew that without supervision I was turning a blind eye to the settings our students sometimes had to negotiate. I felt compelled to consider what could be done formally to help students process their field activities and develop their skills in order to move them toward competence and graduation.

My reflections from this early experience left me with a significant quandary: How were students supposed to link theory and practice if they were just supposed to talk in class? The first few weeks in field felt more like chit-chat among friends. Students mainly talked about what they were doing in field. Some shared what happened when they went on home visits, others shared reports they filled out, and others talked about some of the community meetings they were able to attend. Seminar was unlike any other class I had taught. There was no contracting, no demand for work, and no summaries of learning.

After experiencing this format for one academic year, I knew more depth was needed. I attended

a field educator pre-conference session at a national social work conference, then began to learn from my peers different ways to think about seminar. Although I was seeking clarity about what to do with our class, I soon learned that seminar is a hodge-podge learning activity across social work programs (Dalton et al., 2011). I knew that my students were not being given a method to ground their conversations about their field experiences. I also knew BSW students did not have significant practice knowledge to know what to talk about in seminar and that they did not know how to respond to their fellow students without repeating things like "I agree with you" or "Wow, you get to do that in your placement?" After one year of learning how students were doing field education, I decided to ask the returning field liaison and the new assistant field coordinator their thoughts about how to strengthen field seminar.

The three of us met prior to school to talk about the goals of field seminar. We talked about some of the challenges students experienced in field, the key skills and knowledge students must be able to demonstrate as emerging social workers, and what resources were needed to support students in field. We each shared our experiences teaching seminar, focusing on not only students' tasks but the process of students' learning. After discussing our individual perspectives, our perceptions could be categorized into these areas: theoretical discussions about practice skills, discussions about individual experiences in field, and mutual support of classmates' experiences in field.

Once we figured out what constituted field, we had to figure out how this content would be delivered. We wanted to provide students with an opportunity to show their skills on a weekly basis. We were particularly interested in elevating all students, including those who would rather not talk in class. Our ongoing conversations about the needs of students and our thoughts about how students become practitioners left us thinking about ways to stretch students so they might discover who they were as practitioners. Having experienced excellent supervision in my own foundation placement—particularly, consistent weekly individual and group supervision—I thought we could use the tasks of supervision to help our students complete the three goals we had established for seminar.

I knew from my MSW field educator that supervision allows practicum students to learn and develop new skills to determine their efficacy and to move from primary learners to practitioners (Kadushin, 1985). My supervisor used good old-fashioned process recordings in supervision.

I looked to the literature to help guide the team's conversation about how we could support students' growth in seminar. Bogo and Vayda's (1998) Integrative Theory to Practice Loop is an established reflective process that helps students link theory and practice; it reinforces a social work perspective. Bogo and Vayda's four-stage model links students' practice to reflection, to knowledge, to their professional response. In our team conversations, we discussed the idea of building a seminar class that addressed our two needs: move students beyond chit-chat and provide consistent process opportunities. In other words, we thought about seminar as another form of supervision. Even though we felt our conclusion made sense, we also acknowledged the pedagogical difficulty some fellow educators would have with our use of seminar as a supervision strategy. Our profession broadly agrees that social work supervision is the primary

responsibility of the field educator and the current purpose of seminar is to facilitate the integration of practice and theory in a class-like setting. But given that social workers use supplemental supervision methods outside primary places of work, we asked ourselves this: Why shouldn't students be introduced to the idea that good supervision should be sought at all times, especially when it may be inconsistent at the primary source?

In order to move students towards our new model, we had to communicate a new set of expectations to students. At the beginning of the semester, we shared our expectations about seminar with students. Students were told they would engage in peer supervision and help to facilitate their classmates' learning. Students were educated on the roles individuals play in groups, the stages of group work, the benefits of using group work, and their role in assisting each other in processing field activities. We had to assign students readings about supervision and about group work. This provided students theoretical knowledge about the process we would use to support their learning. We also changed the syllabus to reflect the new goal. Work products were added to the syllabus. Two primary work products were added: weekly reflection/journal and facilitation.

Student movement from passive to active learning required the addition of weekly online journal reflections. We discovered that schools of social work already use journal writing to promote integration of theory and practice (Sullivan & Bibus, 1991) and these classroom products can be similarly meaningful in field seminar. Glazer et al. (2000) suggest journal writing allows students to record feelings (i.e., fears, frustrations, anxieties). While journal writing is a reflective tool for students, it can also be used as an instructor tool (Sullivan & Bibus, 1991). Journals were submitted on our learning platform. Students were given an assignment sheet that outlined what needed to be discussed, then wrote about the choices they made in field, any social work values observed in their practice, and how social work knowledge informed their decision-making. We stressed in class that weekly journal reflections were not simply a list of activities performed in field; rather, journals were a re-creation of communication choices (i.e., verbal and nonverbal encounters) with clients, community members, and/or staff.

Faculty liaisons read the weekly reflections prior to class. After reading, we selected excerpts from the reflections that supported the unit topic being discussed that day. I was truly amazed at the growth of students once we introduced our new method and when we grounded each week with readings. Journal excerpts were cut and pasted to a separate document. At the start of class, students were given a handout with de-identified excerpts about particular client/community interactions for all students in seminar that week. In addition, the handout contained that week's theoretical linkages, mainly taken from a field seminar workbook. For example, one week students read about and considered how to prioritize tasks when working with multiple clients. On the class handout, skills pertaining to prioritizing were outlined above the excerpts. Faculty liaisons led discussions about text readings in order to ensure students were building their social work knowledge and identity through common vocabulary. In addition, to promote additional group learning, facilitation, and mutual aid, students were assigned a week to lead at minimum a 30-minute group conversation about excerpts. Student facilitators were able to use the excerpts to generate initial observations about a particular field experience and were able to provide

feedback to classmates about the outcomes of their decision-making process (see example).

Example Handout
Week 7 Unit Topic: Prioritizing in Field
Knowledge, Skills, or Values: partializing, time management, Code of Ethics Value Integrity
Excerpt: This week in field, I had to meet with three clients in one day. This was a new experience for me. I had felt overwhelmed and I think I made my field educator angry because I forgot to file a referral that was needed that day.

Example Class Discussion: Readings
Faculty Liaison: This week, your reading discussed prioritizing the work in field. How does a social worker begin to prioritize the work?

After discussing the reading, the class is turned over to the student facilitator.

Example Class Discussion: Excerpts
Student Facilitator: Our first excerpt talks about how hard it is to prioritize clients when we are new to our field sites. Tammy, can you talk about any situations in your placement where you have experienced this scenario? Can you share what were your competing values when you felt overwhelmed?

Not only did this method take the pressure off of students to expose themselves when all of them were learning how to manage the workload in field, it promoted conversation by making this very familiar experience relatable. Students were easily able to share their experiences. This is the process we were seeking. For us supervision simply meant students would have an opportunity, every week, to discuss how they were becoming a social worker (i.e., how they were using skills, knowledge, and/or values).

Even though we were committed to the implementation of our supplemental supervision method, we also quickly realized that students were students and that our social work knowledge was needed to help integrate the more challenging practice experiences to theory and/or to challenge students if they missed opportunities to do so with each other. We accomplished this challenge in and outside of seminar. First, after reading reflection journals, we asked students to deepen their learning with quick electronic feedback about their field practice decisions. This activity ensured students were consistently being asked about their practice decisions, even if they were not discussed in seminar. Second, if students identified more sensitive practice decisions in their reflections, we could meet with students before or after class to provide supplemental supervision. Finally, we used elements of the kids' freeze game to stop the group process for a teachable moment. We had to keep a "students are learners" framework in the forefront of this pedagogical experiment in order to not allow the development and/or reinforcement of less competent skills. But we were also cognizant of the fact that freezes can be disruptive to the group process, so we used them minimally. Finally, at the end of a student's facilitation, we asked the rest of the group to summarize the group facilitator's successful skills and which skills needed more practice. The group concluded with the facilitator summarizing the group's work

that day.

We know social work programs are places of learning and practice. However, sometimes, we don't always get the learning process right. Therefore, it is essential that we, the field directors and educators, think about supplemental activities or learning opportunities that will help students apply and critique their learning in order to deepen their practice of social work. Our process worked for us because we were a small rural program. Our team was able to quickly check in with one another and schedule meetings to see if our process was making a difference in our program. We recognize that as professionals we are called to be consumers of knowledge and producers of knowledge. Therefore, it would be imperative to the development of field that our supplemental supervision method is researched to see if it can be scaled up. Good supervision not only has implications for students, but implications for our profession: Good supervision develops good social workers.

As field directors, we do believe the ideal location for supervision is in field placement with field educators. However, when the ideal cannot be accomplished on a consistent basis, it is also essential for programs to think outside the box and to provide students a supervision supplement that fulfills the function of good supervision. Therefore, we believe our supplemental model supports the thought that a little more supervision won't hurt.

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The Integrated Journey of a Wounded Healer

Sherri Harper Woods

Abstract: Understanding the impact of life experiences on the therapeutic relationship begins with self-reflection. This reflection examines the impact of the traumatic wounds experienced by me as a therapist and the journey of my wounds and healing.

***Keywords*:** wounded healer, formational prayer, EMDR

Who heals the Wounded Healer? Who offers her a bouquet of roses instead of ashes? Who delivers her messages of joy instead of doom? Who restores to her a praising heart instead of a languid spirit? Who will help rebuild the old ruins of her post-traumatic stress disorder? I did not have the answers when I asked these questions—nor did I know that the path to find hope, healing, and health would be the same path that would guide me to the integrated journey of finding myself as a wounded healer. The same journey taught me how to offer my wounded condition to others as a source of healing.

Jung is noted for coining the term "wounded healer" in the world of psychotherapists. However, Nouwen (1979), in his text *The Wounded Healer*, examines what it means to be a Wounded Healer in the modern world. Nouwen speaks about the wounded healer:

> For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for him to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings. (p. 87)

I had no doubt that I was wounded but had every doubt that I was a healer. I did not know how such intense suffering could serve as part of the healing journey for myself and certainly not for others. Yet, in my frailty, I examined my pain and wounds and I discovered the many identities of Sherri, the Wounded Healer. There was the Wounded Healer, the Client; the Wounded Healer, the Teacher; the Wounded Healer, the Student; the Wounded Healer, the Therapist. The pain was necessary and was purposed. It was purposed to integrate the segmented parts of me. It was purposed to teach me that joy and sorrow can coexist. It was to teach me to count every day and make the days count.

After a six-month journey where traumatic stressors became bags I carried with me daily, it was time to seek help. I sought out a Christian, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)—and Formational Prayer—trained therapist. Step by step, day by day, month by month, over the course of a year, we made sense out of my woundedness and how the wounds could become a sense of healing for others. The story I wanted to hide became the story I could not wait to share. I found myself, the person of the therapist, the wounded healer in the midst of pain and great weakness. I found an inner strength planted within me that was watered and nurtured through the pain and sorrow. It took six months for my walls to crumble down, but it would take over three times that time to rebuild. The first contributor to the wall of healing was discovered as the Wounded Healer became the client.

The Wounded Healer as Client

Who heals the Wounded Healer? Another Christian Wounded Healer. It was important for me to seek out a Christian therapist because my faith offered me hope. As a clinical social worker, I believe that to eliminate faith and spirituality from the treatment process as a source of hope is to deny an opportunity for healing. I believe it and I witnessed it in the dark night of my soul. At Emerge Counseling, with the help of my therapist, I rediscovered that when the darkest part of night was holding on to me, God was holding on. It was the therapeutic alliance and my therapist's disclosure of her faith that created a healing environment. "The importance of a solid, empathic therapeutic relationship takes on special relevance when we are working with traumatic stress issues" (Marich, 2014, p. 115). The relationship and faith were a dynamic duo resource during my treatment process. It is my faith that gave me a reason to search for light. It is my faith that helped me to believe and hope for the light even when I could not see it. It is my faith that led me to the light.

Within a period of six months, traumatic events took turns entering my life and slowing down my will to live. Time stopped, and when it began again, I realized I was experiencing textbook symptoms of post-traumatic stress. The nightmares, fear, flashbacks, panic attacks, and feelings of despair were common companions. When I could no longer medicate the wounds of sorrow through eating, I sought care for my journey to hope, healing, and health. As mentioned, my journey companion was a Christian EMDR therapist who specialized in Formational Prayer. She walked alongside me on my journey to healing. She helped me to sort through the rubble and build a new, stronger city out of the wreckage. She helped me brick by brick to build a transparent tower that would help others to climb over their adversities.

As we floated back to the first, worst, and most recent memories of my traumas, I began to see light in the darkness. We spent several sessions working on stabilization and resourcing. The session where light met darkness was also where Formational Prayer met EMDR protocols. As I explained to my therapist, I could not get rid of the image of my sister being found dead even though I was not present when she was found. We began with the Safe Place Exercise, a regular EMDR stabilization exercise—but my therapist also integrated the spiritual aspects of Formational Prayer. The safe/peaceful place is a resource used for calmness and to reduce anxiety (Parnell, 2008). It was through this experience that I felt Jesus lifting my bowed-down head and relieving me of my depression.

Therapist: Find a comfortable way to sit so that your feet are comfortably rested on the floor. Close your eyes and pay attention to your body and how it feels. As you slowly breathe in and out, imagine that as you are inhaling you are sniffing a flower. Exhale as though you are blowing out a candle. Let the inhale and exhale be smooth and gentle. Be present. What are you noticing?

Sherri the Client: I am noticing that my body is feeling relaxed and my shoulders don't feel as heavy as they did.

Therapist: When you are ready, allow your imagination to take you to your safe and peaceful place. Nod your head when you can visualize your safe place.

Sherri the Client nods.

Therapist: What are you noticing?

Sherri the Client: I see a field of daisies, and I am sitting under the tree. The air smells of fresh rain. The flowers are moist beneath my feet, and I can feel the dampness on my bottom.

Therapist: Go with that.

A few moments of silence.

Therapist: What are you noticing?

Sherri the Client: I notice that I feel at peace and the flowers are inviting me to run wild in the field, so I run.

The session continued with me sharing what I noticed. At one point, the therapist asked if I wanted to ask Jesus to join me in this safe place. When I did, I understood what it meant to let Jesus be the keeper of my peace.

In my spiritual imagination, I invited Jesus to sit under the tree with me in the field of wet daisies. I laid my head upon his lap. I told him about my sorrow and how I missed my sister. I explained how the pain in my wrist and the screw which held it in place did not allow me to write on the whiteboard in the classroom. I wept over the losses of the last several months and told him that I could no longer handle the weight of the sadness. Jesus invited me to hand my sorrows over to him. He said, "Cast your burdens upon me and I will give you rest." I explained that I did not know where to start. He invited me to begin to hand over one burden at a time. I placed my car accident; my son leaving home; my financial stressors; my new job anxieties; and my physical, emotional, and spiritual pain in the palm of his hand. He assured me that a great exchange had been made and that my tears were water for the daisies. With every tribulation, something beautiful would grow within my life. I sat in silence for what seemed like hours as peace overtook me and ushered me into an atmosphere of hope and healing. Health did not come right away, but through multiple weeks of intensive EMDR and Formational Prayer, I ventured on the path to wellness.

I sought peace and I found it. Each session was full of a holy healing presence that helped me to remember that peace is a promise God keeps. He stayed true to being the peace-giver even when chaos came to wreak havoc in my mind. Through prayer, Christ-centered mindfulness, EMDR reprocessing, and other cognitive behavioral and narrative therapy strategies, I found there was a blazing, healing light shining through the darkness and overshadowing my wounded soul. As a client experiencing EMDR treatment, I found light. I found light when the darkness called me to flash back to the sound of screeching tires and the image of the shiny black BMW slamming into the side of my van. The light overshadowed the sounds of the dark cries of my children as they learned that my youngest sister died from a heart attack that taunted me day and night. The light peaked through the fear of starting a new job in the midst of grief. The light offered me a pillow

to cry upon when my son left home for college. The light led me to see how this journey through grief and suffering was equipping me to be a better teacher.

The Wounded Healer as Teacher

Who offers the Wounded Healer a bouquet of roses instead of ashes? The integrated journey of the wounded healer could not have come at a worse time. My bags were not packed for this adventure. PTSD and depression jumped into my luggage just as I was beginning my career aspiration of assistant professor of social work at the university where I worked for ten years before receiving this position. This is where, on my journey, I learned that joy and sorrow could reside in the same place. By the time the semester began, sorrow had become my constant companion. She joined me every day. Some days she sat quietly in the back of the classroom, and other days she bullied me and tried to take over my class. She taunted me and chased me down the academic highway. Somehow, I managed to outspeed her and gain the lead. My teaching experiences became a safe haven and escape from my grief. They became stops on the journey to hope, healing, and health.

While teaching Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Cultural Diversity, Service Learning, and Civic Engagement in Health and Human Services, I found hope. While still receiving therapeutic treatment and reprocessing unresolved trauma in my life, I wrote courses that were directly related to my healing process. I wrote the classes Spirituality in Social Work and Trauma-Informed Social Work Practices. As I researched and read dozens of books and articles, the writing of the courses became a teaching tool for me to process my own wounds. As the wounded healer who was a teacher, I could stand outside of my trauma and write a course to help others discover that spirituality matters in social work. I could read about the impact of an empathic therapist and the power of the therapeutic alliance in the healing process. After reading many texts, I selected the text, *Spirituality Matters in Social Work* (Dudley, 2016) which introduces spiritually influenced and spiritually sensitive interventions such as mindfulness, prayer, meditation, sacred texts, and guided imagery into the treatment process.

As I wrote about a spiritually sensitive approach to the interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation, I experienced these from the other side as the Wounded Healer as Client. My clinician was utilizing my faith in the treatment process through many of the practices Dudley (2016) suggested, and I was witnessing the effects of providing a holistic treatment that integrates faith into the treatment process. My journey was beginning to integrate. One of the activities I included in the Spirituality in Social Work course that I was writing was for the students to listen to the song “Here” by Jobe (2012). The video invites listeners to rest and lay down their burdens. Just as my Safe Place experience had invited me into the arms of Jesus to rest, the students were able to be exposed to the same experience. The artist includes within the song a diaphragmatic and complete breathing exercise during the bridge of the song. The artist instructs the listener: “Breathe in / Breathe out / You will / You will find Him here” (Jobe, 2012, track 12). The instruction for the exercise was to allow the “Him” described in the song to represent the person’s masculine, nurturing figure. Within the Trauma-Informed Social Work Practices course, as a part of the safety and stabilization exercise, I was able to introduce muscle relaxation, breathing, grounding, and other trauma-informed strategies that I experienced

within my own treatment process. I was being nurtured and was able to integrate my experience into the teaching environment.

Through the teaching experience, the ashes of my sorrow were being traded for the rose bouquet of teaching. As I sought to sharpen my expertise in trauma-informed care so that I could share it with my students, I became the Wounded Healer as Student.

The Wounded Healer as Student

Who delivers the Wounded Healer messages of joy instead of doom? The best teacher is one that is willing to be taught. I enrolled in the Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Certification training through the Institute for Creative Mindfulness to ensure that I had intensive training in trauma-informed practices. The Basic EMDR Training Parts I and II were building blocks in my wall of recovery. These trainings are interactive and hands-on, utilizing therapeutic learning labs as a part of the process. I anticipated learning; I did not anticipate healing.

The training followed the trauma-informed protocols and produced an environment conducive for exploring unresolved trauma and for healing. The eight-phase model includes (1) client history, (2) preparation, (3) assessment, (4) desensitization, (5) instillation, (6) body scan, (7) closure, and (8) re-evaluation (Marich, 2011). The therapeutic learning labs were designed to walk through the eight-phase model of EMDR. During the resource development and installation, also known as the preparation phase, more of my journey was integrated. My two therapeutic lab partners were also Christians. They adapted many of the resources or coping skills to be spiritually sensitive. For example, the Safe Place exercise which is common to EMDR included inviting in Jesus. We also used the Nurturing Figure and tapping. As I explored my own resources through the activities, I learned how to integrate spirituality into EMDR. It was during the reprocessing that I learned the most about EMDR as a student recipient.

During these learning labs, I processed the post-traumatic flashbacks of my sister's death, the car accident, and unresolved childhood trauma. Though I sought to be a student, I also received healing. During the processing of the worst memory of my childhood, I revisited the day my father did not pick me up for his scheduled weekend visit.

As I floated back, I noticed the hot sun that caused perspiration and soaked my halter top. I waited for three hours sitting on the cement steps. The neighbor children played four square on the street in front of my house. The fluorescent-pink chalk marked the A, B, C, and D blocks. I longed to play but was afraid that if I began a game, I would miss my father coming to pick me up. The day turned to dusk. As the streetlights came on, my mother yelled from the porch for me to come into the house. The tears soiled my yellow halter top. My father had not shown again.

My lab partner and the workshop instructor helped me process the past trauma of that day I waited for my father. This was illuminated in my mind. During the remaining therapeutic lab sessions, we processed the relational trauma that soiled my life. The labs were transformational. Not only did I begin the healing process of my attachment deficits but, also, the labs served as

instructional tools for me to use in my role as the Wounded Healer, the Teacher. As a Wounded Healer Teacher, I was assisted by these tools in recognizing the value of therapeutic learning labs and was influenced in the way that I set up the Trauma-Informed Practices course. As a result of this experience, I changed the course to a flipped classroom. In a flipped classroom instructional model, students learn basic subject matter knowledge prior to in-class meetings then come to the classroom for active learning experiences (Long et al., 2017); I included therapeutic learning labs.

This experience integrated the Wounded Healer Client, Teacher, and Student. Again, I found another indication that joy and sorrow can coexist. It was during these trainings that I received messages of joy instead of doom. As we began to unpeel the layers of unprocessed trauma wounds, I realized that the layers of healed wounds gave me the power to heal others.

The Wounded Healer as Therapist

Who restores to her a praising heart instead of a languid spirit? On my Wounded Healer integration journey, the opportunity to serve as a mental health therapist for a private Christ-centered counseling agency appeared as an overnight bag. Packed into this overnight bag was an answer to my hopes and prayers. Trumbull County did not have any Christian designated counseling agencies. As a Formational Counselor, the opportunities to practice my specialty were limited. Formational Counseling is a ministry of Christian caregiving that integrates pastoral care, spiritual direction, spirit-directed counseling, and mental health counseling with a view of bringing hope, healing, and spiritual well-being to broken people. The dilemma was that the excursion opportunity was showing up in the midst of my grief recovery.

I had to make the decision whether to pass up the offer or to permit it to join the integration journey. With the help of my Christian counselor, I made the decision to serve at the agency with a limited caseload. It was here that I truly practiced the ministry of Formational Counseling. At this time in my life, I did not have the strength to depend on my own wisdom. This forced me to surrender the guidance of my interactions with wounded people to the wisdom God provided me through my faith. As my clients experienced hope, healing, and health, I came to better understand what it means to be a Wounded Healer. The agony of my sufferings was transforming my life. In the darkest of nights, bright lights of hope were shining through for me, and in return, I was able to offer that light to others in the classroom, within the therapeutic alliance, and within the therapist's office. The tragedies that could have destroyed me were part of my journey to mold me into my purpose as a Wounded Healer. My initial response to my trauma was to hide it and nurture my languid spirit. The true healing response is to share it with a praising heart.

The Thriving Wounded Healer

Who would help to rebuild the old ruins of my post-traumatic stress disorder? My integrated journey was orchestrated, and other Wounded Healers were chosen to walk with me on the journey. Ultimately, I believe that the trauma recovery was not a curse but a blessing in my life. I believe that it was pre-destined to bring me closer to the promised path of hope and the bright

future that is part of my life journey. Though I mourn the loss of my sister, the loss of the use of my wrist following my car accident, my separation from my son that occurred during his move, the instability of my previous job, and so many other things that happened during the collision of the traumatic stressors in my life over a year ago, I am grateful for the journey. It has strengthened my faith, given me hope to face another day, and equipped me with a confidence to pursue my purpose as Wounded Healer in the many facets of my life.

I now understand why a therapist who survives and thrives from her own adversity becomes more suited to accompany clients on their healing journey. I agree whole-heartedly with Nouwen (1979):

> We see how loneliness [life's wounding] is the [counselor's] wound not only because he shares in the human condition, but also because of the unique predicament of his profession. It is this wound which he is called to bind with more care and attention than others usually do. For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for him to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings…. Once the pain is accepted and understood, a denial is no longer necessary, and [counseling] can become a healing service. (p. 87)

I realize it is not my education that most qualifies me to serve as a healing agent; it is the suffering, endurance, and transformation that has equipped me. A Wounded Healer emerges from persevering the pain. It is the pain, suffering, and process of recovery that gives me an intimate relationship with healing. It is this transforming, integrated recovery experience that qualifies a healer to walk beside others on their integrated journey.

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Post-PhD:
Reflections on Coming to Terms with the End of a Journey

Elisabeth Lean

Abstract: This article is a narrative of my lived experience in coming to terms with the end of completing a doctorate in social work. I detail how what are assumed to be two happy occasions—defending a dissertation and graduating with a doctorate—left me with little cause for celebration. I share how both of these events instead culminated in a sense of loss surrounding my identity.

***Keywords*:** lived experience, dissertation, doctorate, loss, closure, identity

By nature, I am a rather private person. The extent of my involvement in social media is limited to LinkedIn, and that is spotty at best. I know that Snapchat and Instagram are forms of social media; however, I am ignorant of their purposes. Similarly, while I am aware that one can find various support groups and message boards on the Internet, I have not searched into them outside of looking for tips to smoothly transition a skittish new cat into the home. Up until this point, I did not feel the need to share aspects of my experiences with others, let alone strangers whose knowledge of me is confined to my first and last names and that I have a PhD. It is my experience obtaining that PhD that has compelled me to step out of my privacy—all with the hope that my story may be relevant to even just one doctoral student/candidate in the helping professions.

Introduction

I had been anticipating the defense of my dissertation for a month. Little did I know at the time that within a couple hours of defending, my husband's happiness and pride in proclaiming "you're a doctor!" would be met with my apathetic "so what?" By the next day, I was in tears. What was wrong with me? Instead of euphoria, I felt waves of sadness. I assumed this was the result of sheer physical and mental fatigue: I had worked on my dissertation for nearly 10 months while dealing with complex, interacting autoimmune disorders (AUDs), grieving the loss of a beloved pet, and keeping my anxiety from getting the best of me. Yet, there had to be more to my sadness than all of this, because it was accompanied by a deep sense of longing. One might deduce that I was depressed. However, the symptoms of two of my AUDs and those associated with depression overlap; plus, I thought that even if I was depressed, my depression was situational, not clinical. Outside of my husband, I tried sharing my thoughts and feelings with others but, based on their responses, it appeared to me that all but a few did not or could not understand. One individual in this small circle mocked me. Thus, I drew further into myself. Two months after my defense, I realized that I rarely left our home except to run a couple times a week and do errands with my husband. I felt alone in my self-imposed isolation; yet, even more, I felt lost. Although taken out of context, I identified with Thoreau's notion that "a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost" (Thoreau, 1854/1992, pp. 152–153). In order to start to understand and unravel the potential cause(s) of

why I felt lost and how I got lost, I had to go back to re-examine why I decided to pursue a PhD in the first place and then retrace the steps I had taken throughout this journey.

The Impetus

At the age of 10, I knew I wanted a PhD. My desire was rooted in the notion that a doctorate was a sign of a well-educated person. This point leads me to my father. Literally, he was a genius. To say that my father was well-read is an understatement. The overflowing, wraparound built-in bookshelves in our basement rivaled the collection of a small local library. However, due to tragic and unforeseen circumstances, he did not complete his post-secondary education. When I entered college, I did so with the intent of earning straight A's. After all, I had a doctorate in mind and deemed, naïvely, that A's denoted intelligence. My father and I became very close during this time, and we talked in earnest about my desire to obtain a PhD. Unfortunately, as the end of my undergraduate career approached, he passed away. Consequently, my purpose for wanting to pursue a doctorate morphed into attaining a goal for the love of my father. He should have been a professor. He was brilliant. Twelve years later, I embarked on this journey to fulfill both of our dreams. Several factors contributed to my decision to pursue a PhD in social work, one of which was to prove to myself that not only could I do it, I would do it successfully.

Part I of the Journey: Doctoral Student to Doctoral Candidate

I remember, quite vividly, my first day as a doctoral student. After my classes had ended that evening, I sat outside of the library and reflected upon the past couple of hours. I loved every single minute of that first day. There was a budding sense of belonging and community that continued to grow and develop throughout the three-and-a-half years of coursework. My classmates were accomplished, and my professors were intellectually stimulating. I looked forward to being with them every week. The program was challenging—I was pushed out of my comfort zone. As expected, there were many papers to write. Yet, each paper presented a unique opportunity to further explore, expand, and hone my interests. Eighteen months into the program, I decided to leave my full-time position. I enjoyed my work, but I had an insatiable appetite for my studies. On several occasions, I lugged around a tote bag (or two) of books I had checked out of the library right before class that were filled with works by Bandura, Erikson, Etzioni, Goffman, Habermas, Heidegger, Horkheimer, Kant, Lévinas, and Rawls. I was drawn to the relevance of theory and philosophy in social work and devoured these materials with intensity. This is not to suggest that I understood and agreed with every aspect of what I read; rather, I considered myself fortunate to have multiple occasions to ponder how each of these individuals' assumptions and conclusions related to whatever topic I was writing about at any given moment. In turn, I realized that somewhere early on in my journey, I had fallen in love with the doctoral program. However, this recognition was accompanied simultaneously by a glimpse of angst in knowing that this relationship would come to an end eventually. As such, I made a conscious effort to remind myself of that and to appreciate my time as a doctoral student and then later as a PhD candidate. Yet, this neither lessened nor helped to prepare me for the pain I felt in completing my degree. In reflecting upon the end of this relationship, I initially equated it to a break-up. This is a work in progress as I continue to negotiate my way toward achieving some semblance not just of closure, but of inner peace. Thus, I have come to realize

that the end of this relationship is more like dealing with the death of a loved one, as the gravity of the loss and finality associated with death more accurately reflects how I have experienced and tried to make sense of my thoughts and feelings.

At the start of my third year in the program, I began teaching in my university's BSW program. The uncertainty and nervousness I experienced during a few initial class periods that first semester was quickly replaced with confidence and enthusiasm. As with my doctoral classmates, I looked forward to being with my BSW students. I immersed myself in assuming a new role. It was through these early experiences that I came to view teaching as my social work practice. As such, I spent countless hours researching and reading about pedagogy in general and with respect to social work education. I had a responsibility to them as future BSWs, as well as a responsibility to the social work profession, to ensure that I had done my part in preparing them. Working with these students on a collective and individual basis was a privilege, and I learned a lot from them not just in terms of learning about each student, but also myself. Teaching was not merely a job; it became a calling. A side effect of engaging with these vibrant, eager young people was that doing so provided me with a sense of purpose and bolstered my optimism regarding both their futures and mine. I continued to teach in the BSW program for a couple of years after passing the doctoral comprehensive exam while fumbling along in nailing down a dissertation topic. After having my original dissertation fall apart more times than I care to remember because I was not able to secure an agency from which to collect data, I put the dissertation on the backburner. This was my first experience in the doctoral program with failure, or what I considered to be a failure. I was embarrassed, but I masked it as disappointment. However, I was not a failure when it came to teaching, so I increased my load from one class to three, two of which I co-taught. I threw myself into my work that semester and began to work on a new dissertation proposal, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Yet, the culmination of years and years of choosing to work seven days a week on either or both my coursework and teaching caught up with me, and I paid a price. By the middle of what would be the second-to-last semester that I would teach in the BSW program, I did not feel well. I thought I knew what I was dealing with—the one AUD I had lived with since 2000. Although I was exhausted, I did not share that with anyone but my husband, and I continued to teach that semester and the next. I had planned to keep teaching, but it became obvious, with the addition of a laundry list of new symptoms that surfaced every so often, that I had to put myself first and figure out what was wrong. Thus, I took a leave of absence from the BSW program for what was to be one semester. To this day, I regret doing so as I never returned to teach BSW students at my university. I interpreted this as another failure. In hindsight, it was also a loss. While I had been an instructor in my university's online MSW program for nearly two years at this point, I missed my BSW students and our face-to-face, twice-a-week interactions.

Part II of the Journey: The Dissertation and Graduation

After being misdiagnosed and consequently mistreated, I learned that I had two additional AUDs, one of which led to the manifestation of the other. Having lived with one AUD for years was humbling; dealing with another two was taxing. I was told by my doctor that it would take

up to, if not longer than, a year until I felt better. I spent a couple of months resting, as that was all I could manage. Once again, I perceived this as a failure. I considered myself to be lazy, because I did not teach and did not work on my dissertation. Every day was akin to reliving the same 24 hours repeatedly. I could not tell where one day ended and another began. By late spring, a year after the IRB approved my dissertation proposal, I began to write while returning to teach online MSW students for 16 weeks. I felt somewhat better, but knew that recovery would continue to be slow, and that I needed to be mindful to not jeopardize any of the progress I had made thus far. Hence, I devised a detailed schedule as to how I was going to complete my dissertation within the next 10 to 11 months, with a lot of extra time built in to account for possible relapses. Also, I knew that at the end of August I would have more time to work on my dissertation as I opted to not teach until January. Writing that first page was a significant milestone that I celebrated along with the third, 10th, and 15th pages. By the end of July, I had written a chapter, and then my 18-year-old cat, Peep, who had been by my side as I wrote every single paper for my doctoral classes, suddenly became very ill and had to be euthanized within less than a week. To say that making that decision and living through the sheer anguish of it was gut-wrenching is putting it mildly. I dreaded that this might happen because I knew my reaction would be intense. For 21 consecutive days, I sobbed and did not write. I could not function, period. Peep was more than a member of my family; my best friend, Amanda, concluded that the pain I experienced in losing her was exacerbated by the fact that Peep was an integral part of my identity. She was also a source of my optimism. I attribute Amanda's remark as to how I came to deduce, after I had defended my dissertation, that while I had achieved a change in status, I had lost myself and my positive outlook. The irony of this is that the two dependent variables in my dissertation pertained to optimism and the development of a stable sense of identity. Yet, how I made further sense of my doctoral experience became even more complicated and connected to my dissertation—and this would not become apparent until after I graduated.

I navigated my way through writing two more chapters, all the while reminding myself to savor the moment—"remember, this is temporary." By November, I was ready to send my first three chapters off to the chair of my dissertation committee. Once I had attached my document to the email, I had a difficult time clicking the "send" button. I opened and closed that email several times over the next few days. Obviously, these chapters needed to be sent for review, but it felt like I was giving a part of myself away in doing so. Throughout my journey in the doctoral program, I had heard comments to the effect of "the dissertation is not your life's work." Fair enough; however, this comment did not sit well with me each time I heard it. It irked me, and I interpreted these sentiments to mean "hurry up and finish it; just get it over with." For some, I assume the dissertation is a means to an end. However, for me, the dissertation was an end in itself—it had become a labor of love. I poured all my energy, both physically and mentally, into crafting those three chapters. I looked forward to writing, and although I knew at some point there would be an ending, I pushed those thoughts to the back of my mind and soon completed my fourth chapter. Knowing that I had one more chapter to write brought a mix of thoughts and emotions. The whole experience of completing a dissertation seemed surreal, and even though I had written over 100 pages by this point, I still had thoughts of "I cannot believe I am doing this." I managed my AUDs quite well during the entire process and allowed myself to rest when needed. I started teaching online again in January, and on days when I had to grade, I found that I missed my dissertation. All I wanted to do was get back to it. Writing had been cathartic,

invigorating, and immensely gratifying. Nonetheless, halfway through the last chapter, those feelings started to dissipate. I was frustrated that the final chapter was taking me longer than I had anticipated. I kept on writing, but I could not see the end of this chapter. It was like I had stalled in a tight S-curve. Yet, once I negotiated the second part of the turn, there was the end—brief and abrupt. I texted my husband and sister to let them know I had finished, and then I sat at my desk in stunned silence, contemplating the gravity of this event. It was over. It was done. Yes, my committee members still had to review my dissertation, and I had to defend it, but in those moments I started to feel as if something bad had happened. When my husband came home from work and asked if I was okay, I quietly replied, "No." It would take until three weeks later, right after I had defended my dissertation, for me to begin to figure out how and why I was not okay.

Months before the defense, I had bought a new dress for the occasion. Every now and then, I would take it off the hanger and try it on, much like a bride-to-be does for her wedding gown fittings. The defense shares a similarity to a wedding in that the next day is like every other day for your guests, but not for you. My defense was scheduled for a Tuesday. Once the last individual on the panel asked her questions, I stepped outside while they deliberated. As I walked down the hallway to the end of the corridor to wait, each one of my steps was deafening and accompanied by a slew of very fast-moving snapshots of memories I had of my time in the program—getting a heel caught on one of the steps of the stairways in the library stacks, causing the 18-inch pile of books I was carrying to go flying in every direction; trying to figure out how to use a qualitative coding software with Angie and Ash in the doctoral lounge; taking statistics and being relegated to a classroom in which the thermostat was controlled by a penguin—it hit me hard that this experience was about to come to its inevitable end, and I was not ready. In a matter of minutes, I would no longer be a doctoral candidate, but a doctor. I wanted to flee. I briefly contemplated running down the stairs and out of the building, yet that would not change the outcome. It felt like a huge part of me had died in that hallway and again upon hearing the news that I had passed my defense. I had been to finishing school. I was a lobbyist on the Hill. I lived with AUDs. Hence, I was well-versed in how to plaster a genuine-looking, thousand-watt smile on my face as this occasion demanded, even though I had no sense of happiness, but rather an impending and swelling sense of despair.

The time in between my defense and graduation was unsettling and uncomfortable. I threw myself into my online class and worked on the design for another; I did not want to think about what had just happened. I had not planned on going to graduation and not merely because I loathe "Pomp and Circumstance." The last graduation of mine that I had attended was high school. Without my father, I did not see the point in going to my undergraduate and MSW graduations. Moreover, while I am happy to share others' joy and celebrate their accomplishments, I am reticent to even acknowledge mine. Nonetheless, I went to graduation because I felt obligated to do so. In addition, I tried to convince myself that I owed it to my father and 10-year-old self. Besides, what if I woke up years from now and regretted that I had not gone? I also thought that maybe this would bring some semblance of closure. I was wrong. *Commencement* is an ironic word as graduation, for me, was not a beginning, but an ending. This was all coming to a close, and I felt like an actor on a stage who had forgotten every single line. I got through the ceremony uneventfully, likely because I encountered it as an out-of-body

experience. Someone who looked like me had just graduated, but she certainly did not feel like me. Hours later, as the host at the restaurant seated us for dinner, he remarked that notes in the reservation book indicated that we were celebrating a momentous occasion—my graduating with a PhD. I replied, "It is overwhelming," and I took comfort in his response—"I bet it is." In that moment, this man's brief reply was validating. I had a tiny sense of relief, not in reference to my sadness and despair, but with regard to my nascent understanding that there was nothing wrong with how I was processing that a big part of my life had come to a close.

Post-PhD

During the summer, I had an epiphany. In addition to losing my identity and overall sense of optimism, I was proverbially homeless. Although I continued to teach at my university on an adjunct basis, I had no institution to call home. This was yet another paradox associated with my dissertation—my population of interest pertains to individuals who are experiencing homelessness during the transition to adulthood. Looking back, I wish I would have had the wherewithal to realize that I was in transition. Instead, I felt stuck, as if my life had just stopped. This was accompanied by a sense of paralysis. I could not turn the page and start a new chapter. Rather, I wanted to burn the book and erase all evidence of my journey. I likened the idea of carving out articles from my dissertation to submit to peer-reviewed journals to being eviscerated. I gave birth to an idea, nurtured it, and raised it, and was not ready to chop it into pieces. It is only recently that I submitted my first article from my dissertation for review. I needed time. I needed time to grieve. I needed time to heal. I needed time to find me. I needed time to just be. I am blessed to have an incredibly supportive partner who not only knew I needed time, but repeatedly encouraged me to take my time.

April 10, 2019, marked the one-year anniversary of my defense. In the time that has transpired, I have come to accept that there will be no euphoria associated with completing my doctorate. Yet, there is a sense of accomplishment which I did not feel until a few months ago. While my sadness and despair have dissipated, I still have a sense of longing. However, it does not stem from pining to return to and relive the past. As I floundered about months after I graduated with no sense of direction, my husband, knowing that I thrive in having a project to work on, provided me with a lifelong assignment—attaining inner peace—that he broke up into smaller tasks, the first of which was to focus not on what would make me happy, but what would make me fulfilled. The implication was not that happiness is unimportant; it was that happiness can be fickle and fleeting whereas fulfillment may be more sustainable by comparison. I came to realize that being a doctoral student and candidate made me happy, while teaching BSW students fulfilled me. Thus, my sense of longing is rooted in getting back to the classroom, which I will do in a few months. Come this August, I will begin a new adventure as Assistant Professor of Social Work at a small public university. Yet, I already feel at home there based on the limited interactions I have had with my soon-to-be colleagues and students. Little by little, I have been cultivating a renewed sense of optimism that is different from its prior form. That is, it is more refined and reflective and less raw and reflexive. With respect to my identity, I am in transition. As Thoreau eloquently stated:

> Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from

> sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost . . . do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are, and the infinite extent of our relations. (Thoreau, 1854/1992, p. 153)

Thus, I continue to learn about and contemplate who I have been, who I am, and who I aspire to be, while being mindful that my sense of identity is separate from my roles and responsibilities. I lost sight of that and ended up bobbing around like a buoy in a vast ocean. Instead of swimming to shore, I dived deeper into the water. I had to, as in order to find myself, I needed to explore what was beneath the surface. Writing about my experience was unpleasant at times. After writing a few paragraphs, in which I relived what I was relaying, I stepped away from this project for six to seven months, knowing that I would return to it at some point. I was determined to complete this article because although this is an account of my lived experience, I assume that there are at least a handful of doctoral students and candidates who, like me, will struggle, are struggling, or have struggled in coming to terms with the end of a journey that was so very rewarding in and of itself.

Concluding Thoughts

In a discussion among faculty members, a professor in my department mentioned that she did not want to know her students. At the time this comment was made, I was in the process of preparing to take my doctoral comprehensive exams and transition from being a doctoral student to a doctoral candidate. I admired this individual. Yet, her comment had such a profound impact on me. I interpreted it as she, and by default most or all of her colleagues, did not want to know any students regardless if they were in the BSW, MSW, or doctoral program. Outside of my being an introvert, I feel this comment is a large part of why I kept my thoughts and feelings to myself. It was not until after graduation that I confided in a former colleague about what I had gone through and the challenges associated with coming to terms with the end of my doctoral journey. I am grateful that she suggested that I write about my experience. Notwithstanding, I regret that I had not felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings throughout this process. That being said, doctoral program faculty should pay close attention to students who are introverted as well as fiercely independent because these individuals are likely reticent to ask for help even though they might be the most in need of validation and support. As such, it would be astute of doctoral program chairs to help students identify and develop a solid mentor-mentee relationship with at least one faculty member. This should be accomplished well before one makes the transition from doctoral student to doctoral candidate, in order to allow sufficient time and opportunities to establish a meaningful relationship. Moreover, doctoral program faculty should help current and prospective doctoral students and candidates to prepare, as well as plan, for the end of their doctoral journeys. In particular, doctoral students and candidates should be mindful to consider how they anticipate they will feel upon attaining a PhD and recognize that these expectations may not align with how they experience the ending.

While my doctoral experience may be relevant to both men and women, I wrote my account with the latter in mind, given that data from the National Science Foundation et al. (2018) indicates that women accounted for 46.7% of all doctorates awarded in 2017. Despite that no differences were detected between men and women with respect to factors such as median completion time and median age at matriculation, this does not represent parity in regard to their

experiences. Indeed, research has documented the distinct challenges and needs associated with being a woman and doctoral student/candidate (e.g., Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Brown & Watson, 2010; Carter, Blumenstein, & Cook, 2013; Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Haynes et al., 2012; Schmidt & Umans, 2014; Webber, 2017). To this end, it would be beneficial for future research to explore how women come to terms with completing a doctorate, as well as the emotional toll the experience may have on their overall psychosocial well-being. Results from such studies could be used to inform the development of doctoral program interventions that are designed to address and support the intrapersonal and interpersonal needs of doctoral students and candidates.

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