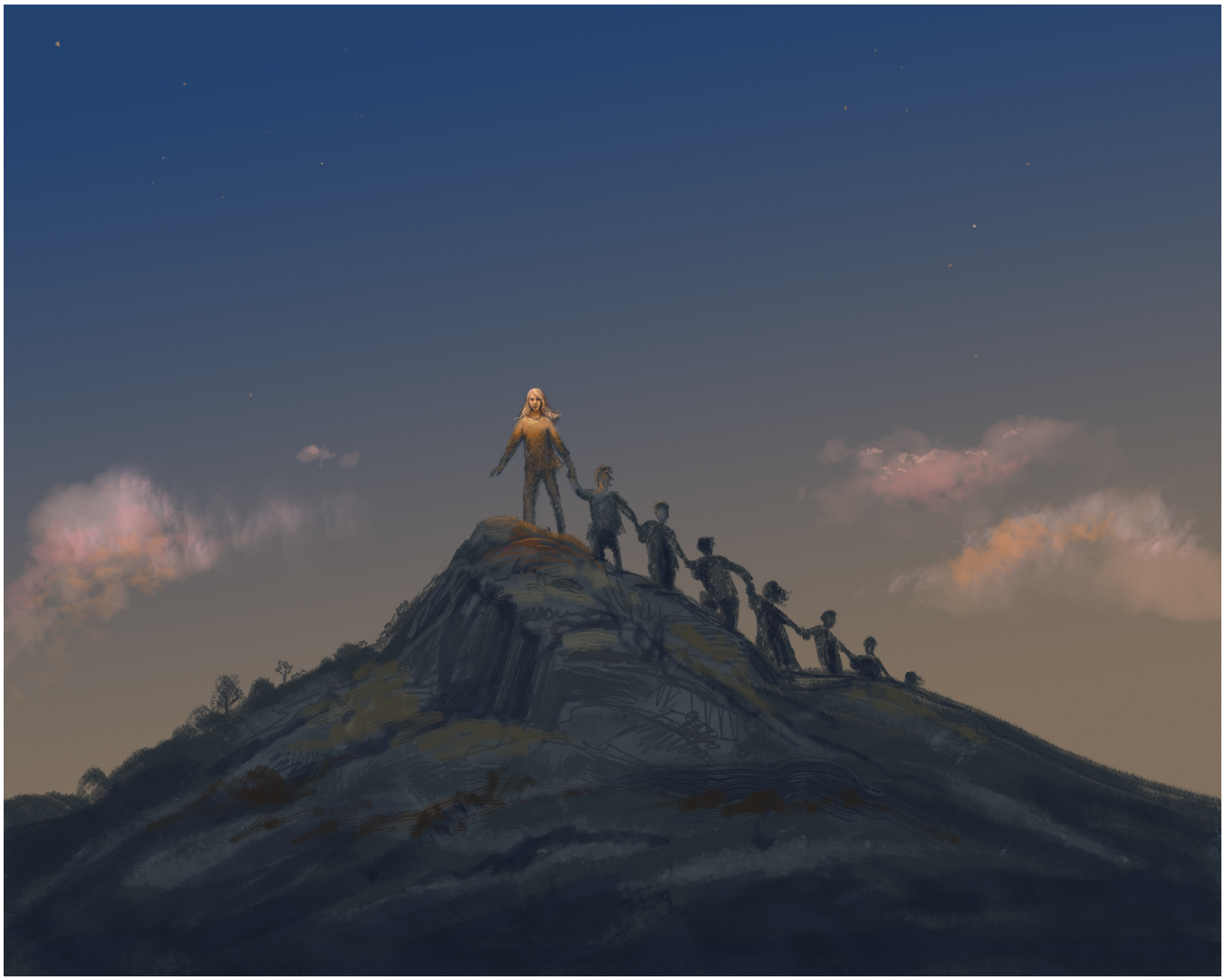
REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



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REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Deepest Appreciation to Michael A. Dover
From Editor to Publisher to Forever Friend

Recently, we received word from Michael "Mike" Dover that he is resigning as Publisher of *Reflections*, the role he has played since 2017. Michael also served as Editor from 2012–2017. We cannot thank him enough for his commitment, dedication, and leadership over the past decade to the journal and for always being available to us as we transitioned into the Editorial Leadership Team and he assumed the invaluable role of Publisher.

Earlier this year, Michael shared with Cathleen Lewandowski, Director of the Cleveland State University School of Social Work; Editor-in-Chief Darlyne Bailey; and the members of the journal's Executive Committee—and later asked us to share with you, the *Reflections* readers—that on Inauguration Day he suffered a minor but significant right-side stroke. After fully successful surgery, he is at home resting, reading, writing, and engaging in rehab. He is on leave now from his teaching and service duties.

He asked that this issue be the last with him as Publisher. His duties included working with Graduate Assistant Sarah Valek on issue publication, a process that takes place after the copyediting is overseen by Assistant Editor Kelly McNally Koney. Sarah will continue in that role this year with the assistance of the journal's work-study students.

We also asked Michael to share anything else he would like to convey to our readers. First, on a humorous note, he said, "my left-wing brain was not affected!" More seriously, he wanted to draw attention to Art Director Robin Richesson's covers from two 2012 issues: an infinity sign, accompanied by this quote about *Reflections*: "It did not start with me, it will not end with me." Finally, he wanted to share what he believes to be key to organizational survival: "once a leader, always a leader, although our roles may change" (personal communication, March 3, 2021).

Consistent with that belief, Michael has already undertaken a number of tasks to ensure a smooth transition. He has offered to remain available for the foreseeable future to answer any questions which arise. He also said he has a few stored-up ideas for submissions to the journal. Finally, he hopes readers can donate to help fund a part-time summer *Reflections* job for a student, especially given this will be his first summer without *Reflections* duties to carry out!

We know that Michael will continue to be a leader in whatever he chooses to do. We are ever so grateful that he will be a forever friend of *Reflections*.

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Who Controls the Narrative?

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

Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 27 number 1 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. In this issue we pose the question, Who controls the narrative? We share our collective thoughts about why a platform for narrative writing is more critical than ever in an era in which false narratives proliferate. We are excited to publish our first poem submission and nine remarkable narratives by authors who embrace a common theme—the life changing insights gained from their experiences working with diverse population groups and teaching the next generation of helping professionals. Exuding curiosity and imagination, these authors share counter narratives that have emerged from fully listening to and interacting with clients, colleagues, and students. Their words illuminate our understandings, raise our consciousness, and call us to embrace change.

***Keywords*:** counter narrative, insight, human relationships, learning, curiosity, transformation, change

We begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, particularly focusing on the importance of being a peer-reviewed journal for narrative writers. We then examine how the use of "narrative" as a concept has been transformed in the public discourse and offer our perspective on narrative as a force for change. Finally, we provide a brief overview of the articles in this issue and their interconnected themes.

Appreciation to the Dedicated People Who Make *Reflections* Possible

We have so many people to thank, and we are grateful every day for their dedication to *Reflections*. First and foremost, we want to express our sincerest appreciation to Michael A. Dover who has led our publishing team. He has steadfastly overseen the production process and enthusiastically supported us as an editorial team. 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 A. Pincelli (Copyeditor), and to Assistant Copyeditors Madeleine Buhrow and Karla Seese. Special appreciation goes to Sarah Valek, Michael's Graduate Assistant, whose thoughtful and high quality work reading final copy and issuing galley proofs in the production process is invaluable. For Robin Richesson we are most grateful for her creative skill in matching our cover art with the themes that emerge from each issue's narratives.

A special thanks goes to our Section Editors who continue to volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. We are indebted to Beth Lewis (Field Education), Jon Christopher Hall (Practice), and Arlene Reilly-Sandoval (Teaching and Learning). Monica Leisey continues to serve as interim editor of the Research Section, and in hopes of clarifying the types of manuscripts we are seeking we have posted a new description of this Section on our website:

> Although *Reflections* does not publish research results or literature reviews, the journal has a long history of publishing narratives of the personal and/or interpersonal aspects of the research process. Some examples of research narratives could be sharing the author's experience of collaboration during the research experience, engaging in the research project, or sharing lessons learned from the research project.

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. Theirs are gifts of dedication and commitment to *Reflections*.

Guest Editors & Special Issues

We have been thrilled to have so many guest editors who bring their passion, skills, and time to editing special issues. Much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Shakira Kennedy, Eric Levine, Lynn Levy, Amanda Saake, and Benjamin Sher who guest edited our previous issue, "The Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective." We look forward to an upcoming issue, "The Impact of COVID 19 on Preparing Future Helping Professionals and on Practicing with Individuals, Groups, and Communities," guest edited by Katherine Selber and Lynn Levy.

We are especially excited that three special issues on racial injustice and systemic racism are in process. Priscilla Gibson, Patricia Gray and Rebecca Chaisson are guest editing "Black Racial Injustice: Personal Reflections to Change Strategies." Patricia Gray is lead guest editor on "Practicing While Black" which remains open to submissions through April 15th. And as this issue goes to press, Tiffany Baffour and Shonda Lawrence's "Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism Within Social Work Programs" is soliciting manuscripts through May 15th.

The Importance of Peer Reviewers

Several months ago, we sent an "opt in" request to all our registered reviewers in order to update our reviewer list. *Reflections* would not exist were it not for our dedicated reviewers who volunteer their time and provide excellent feedback to authors, and we encourage anyone who is interested in reviewing for *Reflections* to join us. In this issue at least 19 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to authors. They are listed at the end of this editorial as a small way to recognize their important contributions.

In previous editorials we have emphasized the importance of being author-centric and that includes providing constructive feedback to prospective authors. *Reflections* is a peer reviewed professional journal in which anonymous reviewers make recommendations about the fit of each manuscript with the journal's criteria. The peer review process is a long-standing tradition of evaluating scientific, academic, or professional work by others working in the same or related fields. For the author, this process functions as a form of accountability, a credible filter through which submissions are carefully and thoughtfully assessed.

Reflections is unique, among numerous double-blind, peer-reviewed journals in which helping

professionals publish, in that it is dedicated to a narrative form of writing. The majority of peer-reviewed journals, ranked by their quality and prestige, privilege the publication of research and are viewed as avenues in which to publish if academic writers want to achieve career advancement (Hodge et al., 2020). Other journals welcome different forms of scholarship, choosing to provide a space for voices that have traditionally been marginalized in mainstream journals (Bhuyan et al., 2020). *Reflections* welcomes scholarship that is grounded in authors' experiences and provides space for highlighting those "aha" moments sparked by human interactions that transform authors' personal and professional narratives. Thus, as editors of *Reflections* we are committed to honoring a narrative tradition in which authors tell their stories as a force for change.

Narrative as a Force for Change

The subtitle of *Reflections* is *Narratives of Professional Helping*. Our review criteria indicate that a narrative is rooted in a rich and detailed portrayal of key moments, examples, and vignettes, that it conveys interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences, and is clear about the author's role. References are used to tie the narrative to the published literature, and conclusions raise issues emerging from the narrative that can be further studied. In short, the author is to place the narrative within the context of a well-told story that helps the reader to discover new ways of thinking about the personal, the professional, and the political in their lives.

It is in the raising of issues and discovering new ways of thinking that we envision *Reflections'* most important contribution to the literature. It is not enough to simply write the story or even for the reader to be emotionally flooded with tender emotions, angst, or even rage. It is in the writer's ability to move the reader to a greater understanding of the issues, to hear the voices of marginalized and oppressed people, and to be motivated to join with others in changing the narrative. Without direction for changing the dominant narrative that subjugates those voices, and using insights learned in the process, change will never come (van Ooijen et al., 2020). Thus, it is incumbent upon all of us to take what has been learned from these provocative narratives and construct counter narratives to those of the status quo.

Counter narratives arise from the vantage point of those whose voices have been marginalized or even erased; they are built upon resistance to domination. Helping professionals know what those narratives are because they advocate for the individuals, groups, and communities whose voices have been subjugated or ignored (Goodall, 2016).

Narrative writing is increasingly important if we are to learn from marginalized voices and if we are to raise consciousness about issues that are often subjugated in a cacophony of false narratives (Robinson, 2020). False narratives have always been with us, but never before have we had the capacity to so rapidly spread words of fury and vitriol, to post conspiratorial language, and to reach wider and wider audiences. Followers embrace assumptions underlying these narratives, sometimes stated but often implied, and momentum gathers. One has only to listen to "the news" to hear words like "we've never heard anything like this before," or that a particular group is "controlling the narrative" or that another group is engaged in "a counter narrative" to recognize that the term "narrative" has been hijacked by popular culture. Words

such as disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and alternative facts riddle contemporary language.

Thus, there is a critical need for compelling narratives that introduce new perspectives, experiences, and sets of assumptions that encourage others to share their stories, raise consciousness, and call for us to join in the process of social innovation and change (Wittmayer et al., 2019). Cunningham (2021) talks about developing "a shared, strength-based narrative and identity so that everyone can see themselves in the picture . . . our stories shape us" (p. 2).

The year 2020 has been filled with multiple crises, some new (COVID-19) and others that are as old as our nation itself. The most egregious of these is the systemic racism that undergirds the structures within which we live, work, and educate the next generation. Especially during the past year, many voices have begun to be heard. These voices continue to explicitly acknowledge the harm that systematic and systemic racism perpetuates. Assaults on democracy and the integrity of the republic demand we acknowledge the pain and look for new ways forward. We at *Reflections* believe that we have a responsibility to support, amplify, and further the hard work required to begin to disrupt, even dismantle, the multiple structural and processual tragedies caused by this racism. We are firmly taking an anti-racism stance. We believe that the stories we share with each other can help us learn from one other, continue to grow collectively, and better prepare the next generation of helping professionals to voice a counter narrative.

Highlights of This Issue

We are excited to begin this issue by publishing our first submission to our new Call for Poetry, Art, and Photography. Miller's narrative poem tells a composite story of insights learned from many years of being a university crisis counselor and survivor advocate for persons impacted by sexual or relationship violence. This poem sensitively reveals the transformative nature of beginning to love oneself by creating a counter narrative to shame and victimization. Miller's poem provides a fitting segue into a rich array of articles that embrace a common theme: the life changing insights gained from authors' experiences engaging with diverse population groups and teaching the next generation of helping professionals and their use of those narratives as a force for change.

Miller's poem joins two articles written by professionals who recognize that the people with whom they intervene offer the wisdom of lived experience and are the true experts of their lives. DiReda and Maroney provide a day-by-day narration of their time in Albania. Invited as experts in substance abuse they emerge as co-learners, transformed as they discover new insights and revelations about a country that has fewer resources than the United States yet provides a more humane and caring approach to intervention. Their article is followed by Carrellas' story of meeting a young boy with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome who becomes the spark that ignites a 40-year odyssey advocating for a group of children who face seemingly insurmountable challenges. Carrellas shares how much has been learned from children and families with whom the author has joined and from which has sprung an urgency to advocate with (not for) them. What is so compelling about these two narratives is the respectful way in which the authors listen to and learn from the people they are there to serve.

Just as the previous articles reveal insights learned from client populations, our next two articles focus on the transformative power of human relationships in which teachers and students engage in the educational process as co-learners. Recognizing that both instructor and student leave their encounters different than when they entered, Dougherty skillfully analyzes the development and growth that emerges through interactions and joint discoveries. Drawing from the ethics of care, in which sharing, understanding, and reflecting upon the experience of the other produces new energy, Dougherty's narrative challenges the reader to embrace a relational approach. Wang's narrative builds on Dougherty's call for engagement and collaborative learning, focusing on what was learned when an Asian social work educator encountered Orthodox Jewish students. Wang shares what was learned about a group with whom the author had no previous experience and says, "It is all about exposure." Recognizing how important it is to learn from those whom one is teaching, Wang tells an unfolding story of growth and development. Both articles offer guidance on how to reframe our assumptions and open our minds to alternative ways of thinking about human relationships.

Three articles are written about adjustments and accommodations helping professionals have had to make during the COVID-19 pandemic. If there was ever anything that challenged our capacity to sustain human relationships and forced us to reassess how we relate to one another, reading Fontenelle-Tereshchuk's narrative contextualizes COVID as a "borderless, genderless, colorless, and vicious" space (p. 80) in which "imagination and curiosity" are forced to reside (p. 71). Seizing the opportunity to rethink education as we have known it, Fontenelle-Tereshchuk explores how the multiple roles of being parent, teacher, and scholar merge within the context of home-learning in which the differentiation between separate roles disappears. Similarly, co-authors Swick, Dyson, and Webb examine how their unit faced the challenges of completely altering their approach to teaching in the face of a pandemic that accentuated and exposed racial disparities and social injustices in its wake. They describe how listening to their diverse student body provided a barometer to ensure that those persons significantly impacted also felt seen through a "call to action" that challenged ongoing racial injustices (p. 87). Silverman's introspective focus follows. In this article, our collective reaction and fortuitous learning during a crisis are seen as both an opportunity for growth and continuous learning in rethinking our own narratives and how we approach the world. All three articles engage us in reconstructing our narratives in the midst of a pandemic.

Our final two articles are written about the professional growth that occurs when the authors are forced to confront norms, values, and behaviors that support taken-for-granted organizational cultures. Fuchsel, Fletcher, and Hill provide four vignettes in which they detail the transition faced by professional educators who must balance administrative and scholarly roles. Committed to disseminating their work, yet having limited time due to administrative responsibilities, they walk us though the process of continually reframing and reconstructing their professional narratives in light of their behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional habits. Similarly, Nevarez attempts to make sense of a first practice experience post-graduation, reconstructing a process in which moral and ethical challenges cannot be ignored. In both articles, the authors work through their reconceptualization processes and leave the reader with a better understanding of how professionals are called to continually reframe their personal and professional narratives.

These contributors tell their stories, revealing the assumptions that are laid bare when they truly

listen to others and begin to gain better understandings. Since helping professionals engage and interact with individuals and groups whose voices have often been subjugated within the dominant narratives, they are faced with finding ways to speak truth to power and claim the responsibility of giving voice to counter narratives. Let the change begin...

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...

We would like to recognize and thank the reviewers who contributed their time and invaluable assistance to *Reflections* V27(1):

Priscilla Dawn Allen, Mari L. Alschuler, Millicent Jeanette Carvalho-Grevious, Monit Cheung, Matthew James Corrigan, Nancy M. DeCesare, Marinda Rivera Diaz, Sarah Emily Faubert, James Angelo Forte, Merav Moshe Grodofsky, Sarah Louise Hessenauer, Anthony J. Hill, Felicia M. Mitchell, Sarah Morton, Alma M. O. Trinidad, Johanna Slivinski, Robin Wiley

We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors.

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- $1000 or more — A THOUSAND THANKS

Please visit: https://www.csuohio.edu/class/reflections/friends-reflections. Thank You!!

A Poetic Reflection on Client Growth and Healing

Ryane A. Miller

***Keywords*:** poetry, sexual violence, relationship violence, survivors, trauma, self-reflection

FALLING & FINALLY

I did not ask this time.
I did not wish or push or pray.
I did not want or hope or long for.
I did not feel sorry for my cracked and crippled heart.
I did not pick up the wine to fill my cup,
Or another to fill my time.
Instead I walked up behind me, softly tapped my shoulder, and introduced myself.
I took my own hand, and a new heart started Beating. Beating.
Stronger. Faster. Pulsing. Racing.
I sat with myself in the dark.
I sat with my tears hot and soundless.
My insides screaming out to no one who could hear them.
I sat with myself, inside of myself.
Then taking the deepest darkest breath my lungs would let me,
I heavily exhaled and closed my eyes,
Bracing myself,
Waiting for the dam to burst.
But instead She sent me a universe,
She sent me a waterfall.
And as the cold and clean washed over my tired bones and bloodshot eyes,
I stepped out of old skin and into the twilight.
My very first steps took me back to the shoreline,
And with hands open and shaking I greeted myself,
And met the Moon again for the very first time.
She was quiet and bright, shining light so pure,
As it peeled away layers that no longer serve.
And I finally found permission there,
To fall in love with myself.
Open and alone,
Under far away stars,
The waves gently lapping over my planted, unbalanced feet.
This is the love I'd been missing.
The love I couldn't see with my blinded eyes.
The love that had always been there.
A love waiting patiently in the depths of soft stillness,
Buried under a desert of distraction and disappointment,
Beneath the shade of a tree always Almost bursting with blossoms.

Love.
She was waiting there.
She was always waiting there.
Waiting just for me.

Conclusion

As a university crisis counselor and survivor advocate, I am privileged to work with students, faculty, staff, and their loved ones who have been impacted by sexual or relationship violence. I am given permission from my clients each and every day to engage in this work with them and to bear witness to a small part of their healing journeys. I utilize self-reflection daily to assist me in processing—and with the overall experience of—being a helping professional in the field of trauma and interpersonal violence. Poetry is my creative outlet, my way to express myself and "move things through" so I can continue to approach this work with competence, compassion, and presence of mind/body/spirit. This poem was written after reflecting on my observations during trauma work over the last several years because I wanted to acknowledge and honor the raw, unbelievably resilient nature of survivors.

I hope this poem can resonate with the reader in some space. It is a reflection and threading together of countless stories, powerful moments of moving forward, and a glimpse into the bits and pieces of unique healing journeys that my clients have so bravely decided to share with me. I am grateful for the opportunity to share this piece with fellow professionals and practitioners.

***About the Author*:** Ryane Miller, MSW, LCSW, VSP is Lead Survivor Advocate, CARE Violence Response and Prevention Office, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC (millerra@uncw.edu).

Beyond the East Side of Addiction: Addressing Issues of Substance Use and Addiction in Albania

James DiReda and Jack Maroney

Abstract: This paper is an account of our recent trip to Albania, a small country in Southeastern Europe's Balkan Peninsula, to study substance use in the country. The purpose of our exploratory research was to gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence of substance use in Albania, its impact, and Albania's response to these issues. In contrast to interventional and associational styles of research, we decided to present our findings ethnographically, through immersion in the population. This paper is a narrative reflection of our trip, its qualitative method fortified by the incredible opportunity to learn up close and personal the challenges faced by the Albanian people and their culture regarding substance use and dependence. The valuable insight we gained regarding their history and traditions was made possible only by the openness and willingness of the Albanian people to share their most intimate reflections on their beloved country.

***Keywords*:** substance use disorders, dependence, ethnographic research

It is not an everyday occurrence that childhood friends make national headlines, and it is even more infrequent and unlikely for them to appear on the front page of five of the most influential newspapers in the country, even if it may be a small country called Albania. The *Gazetta Dita*, the *Gazetta Liberale*, the *Tirana Post*, *Panorama*, and the *Gazetta Tema* all featured our open letter—from recent first-time visitors Dr. James DiReda and Jack Maroney, the authors of the book *The East Side of Addiction*—which suggested a pathway for dialogue to stem the rising tide of drug use in Albania. The striking similarities between the events of the book to what was (and is) happening in Albania proved to be the spark for our invitation and subsequent popularity.

The saga began after a Worcester Public Library event, where we spoke to the library staff about stigma and the need for empathy when interacting with individuals affected by substance use and dependence. We, along with our childhood friend Hank Grosse (now deceased), had written *The East Side of Addiction* (DiReda, et al., 2016). Chronicling the drug use among a group of neighborhood friends in the city's East Side from the 1960s, this book was initially written to offer hope to families impacted by substance use. However, another purpose soon came: Worcester librarian Rezarta Rezo, who had attended the presentation, was moved by the uncanny similarity of our book to the current situation in her home country of Albania.

Rezo volunteered to translate the book into her native language in the hope of creating awareness about the dangers of early use of alcohol and drugs in her country. Thus, *Në Lojë Me Djallin* (*In the Game with the Devil*) was born.

Rezo's efforts were recognized and rewarded in Albania by the Dituria Publishing Co., who agreed to publish and promote the book. Following the translation, Rezarta presented the book at

a publisher's book fair and provided interviews to various news outlets in Tirana. This set the stage for our upcoming visit, as many people had now read *Në Lojë Me Djallin* and knew who we were. Soon, we had invitations—not only from Rezo but from a University of Tirana professor and the executive director of the Albanian Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

When presented with the opportunity to visit Albania, we did not hesitate; but our journey to a foreign country was not without trepidation. We wondered how the Albanian people would receive us, especially since we were traveling to the country to speak openly about alcohol and drug use. The language barrier, the currency, the culture, and the civil unrest, fueled by economic insecurity that resulted in fiery protests destroying a parliamentary entrance adjacent to the Airbnb where we were scheduled to stay, all added additional layers of concern and might have dissuaded less enthusiastic travelers. The French philosopher Albert Camus (1991) once said:

> What gives value to travel is fear. It is the fact that, at a certain moment, when we are so far from our own country...we are seized by a vague fear, and an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits. (pp. 33–34)

His words resonated in our psyches as we flew to our destination.

We spent a week in Albania, a country steeped in traditions and equally troubled by the rising tide of drugs and their associated ills, and tried to develop an understanding of the challenges encountered by those impacted by substance use and addiction. In our interactions with members of the YWCA, local drug coalitions, the medical staff at Mother Teresa Hospital, news reporters, police officers, university faculty, drug treatment providers, and youth workers, we learned firsthand that Albanians possessed a level of compassion and empathy toward their fellow countrymen that left a lasting impression.

The following section is a detailed account of our days in Albania: our conversations, our interviews, our impressions, documentary data, and our observations—what transpired and what we learned that academically resulted in a detailed and comprehensive account of the social phenomena regarding substance use and recovery in Albania.

Utilizing a qualitative approach, this ethnographic research uses a "cultural lens" to study people's lives within their communities (Atkinson, 2007), and it is intended to provide firsthand insight into the Albanian people's perceptions and perspectives regarding substance use disorders (SUDs). This research is characterized by our in-depth conversations and interviews with several groups of individuals; our immersion in the Albanian culture; our burgeoning interpersonal relationships; and engaging fully in the language, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants in their natural environment (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Day One

We entered Albania as complete strangers to the country, accompanied by caution and concern

for what might be in store for us. We were met at the airport by two of our gracious hosts: Dona, the executive director of the YWCA, and her husband Tony, the owner of a local bistro. Although we had several communications prior to our arrival, this was the first time we'd met in person. Tony and Dona would be instrumental in the coordination of our itinerary and provided much of the transportation for us throughout the week. Rezo, our contact in America, had connected us with Dona. Long before we arrived in Albania, we and Dona had been using a group chat to speak about her work with local drug coalitions and political leaders to address the issues of substance use, especially at the high school and college level.

We headed to Tirana, the capital of Albania, and our concerns began to fade as our conversation with Tony and Dona about their country, the issues they faced, and what we hoped to accomplish took greater precedence.

As we began our immersion into Albania, our hosts provided us with as much background information and detail about their culture and country as we could absorb on the ride from the airport to our Airbnb. Tony and Dona answered any questions we posed; their knowledge of the country's history, geography, and culture helped us immensely. Additional insight into this country—with an estimated population slightly over three million people—was provided by one of our Albanian cab drivers who sarcastically told us, "Only half of the people live in Albania at any given time. The other half are out of the country trying to make money."

Tirana, the eventual home for the family of the visibly celebrated Saint Teresa of Calcutta, was chaotic. Cars with seemingly no regard for personal safety darted about and around us with reckless abandon. Despite the apparent bedlam, the city possessed an eerie, timeless, and nostalgic past. Tirana has the feel of an old European city, quite similar to those one would see in Italy or France, with the beauty of the old world, and the deterioration of economically poor communities as well. It is busy and crowded but vibrant and active with many businesses and cultural opportunities to enjoy. It is a beautiful and charming city, surrounded by a gorgeous landscape as one heads out of the city limits and known for its pastel buildings that border Skanderbeg Square, a focal point where cosmopolitan and small-town feelings are intertwined with a rich cultural history. Skanderbeg Square included plenty of entertainment but also, at the time of our visit, a great deal of political unrest. The pain and suffering from Albania's storied history and centuries of conquests were at times very palpable, a strange dichotomy from the rising energy of a new way of thinking and living in a free society, different from the totalitarianism of communist government.

When we arrived at our living quarters, we immediately felt the true hospitality of the Albanian people. Our hosts had furnished our rooms with foods, fruits, drinks, and even a homemade cake, which reinforced our initial welcomed feelings. We would soon become fast friends with our gracious hosts. We unpacked our suitcases and settled in for a brief rest to unwind from our trans-Atlantic journey.

Before long, we found ourselves walking on the streets of Tirana accompanied by Dona and her good friend Kristina, a faculty member at the University of Tirana and the chairperson of the board of directors at the YWCA. Our stroll took us alongside Skanderbeg Square and past an

incendiary-scarred government building, the only remaining evidence of a violent protest that had taken place a few nights before. Our destination was an outdoor café in Park Rina, a small park in the heart of Tirana that features a large fountain and a pavilion with several restaurants. Over dinner, we received a two-hour crash course in the history and culture of Albania from our hosts, complete with their assessment of substance use problems in Albania and the lack of treatment and resources to address them. It was quite eye-opening for us, and highly informative for our deeper understanding of how their culture and people have been affected by substance use of all types—especially the youth. We also received a localized view on the history of political corruption in Albania and gained some insight as to why there were extremely limited resources available for research, education, and treatment regarding SUDs.

It seemed, according to our hosts, that a lot of corrupt practices still existed in Albania—an undesirable leftover from a communist political system that ended in 1990. Resources were diverted from the issues of substance use to other "more important" initiatives. To make matters worse, Albania serves as a port of entry for many of the drug imports destined for distribution to other parts of Europe, creating a perfect storm for a country in the midst of uncertain economic development. As a result, there is an underground economy that preys upon the poor communities in Albania by providing illegal drugs; this, in turn, increases the rate of crimes committed by those dependent on substances.

We were later joined by Kristina's son Marin, a young man in his late twenties who was born and raised in Albania but lived in New York and graduated from the University of Massachusetts before returning to his native country. He brought a different perspective to the conversation. He spoke of "apathy" among the Albanian people that, he said, "has blocked any progress" around the issue. He told us, "People are still experiencing the mindset they held under communism, and they lack trust in their elected government officials and leaders to make change."

"Therefore," he said, "the status quo continues."

Our friends informed us that few people in their country are willing to talk openly about the issues they face. It was against this very same tight-lipped backdrop that we had told our story of substance use and recovery within *The East Side of Addiction*.

Day Two

Our second day in Albania began with an early morning walk to the corner coffee shop—no drive-through Dunkin Donuts shops here—where we were treated to an unexpected act of kindness and hospitality. Before we had the opportunity to convert any of our American money into Albanian *Lek*, a colorful currency with an exchange rate of over one hundred to one, we were cordially offered a cup of the country's rich espresso after we promised to come back to pay.

Our newly acquainted friends Kristina and Dona were waiting outside our Airbnb at 9 a.m. to chauffeur us to Mother Teresa Hospital, where we would visit Tirana's only inpatient SUD

treatment program. The hospital had a familiar look comparable to other institutional settings one might see in the United States, but older: We saw a large maze-like campus and a conglomeration of differently sized and shaped buildings. The detoxification unit, housed in the basement of the hospital's Toxicology Services, had the aura of a program on the decline. The dusty jalousies, yellowed windows, stagnant air, and moribund smell of chemicals did little to alter the sense of despair.

We were escorted to a makeshift conference room. There was a perceptible shift in the mood as word spread about the meeting with the implied "treatment experts" from North America. Ultimately the entire staff of doctors, psychologists, nurses, and clinicians joined us in this small, cramped room to discuss the issues they faced in treating individuals with SUDs—and their hope for a miracle cure.

As we talked, it became quite evident that resources for treatment of SUDs were minimal to nonexistent. The chief medical officer, who facilitated the meeting, informed us that they run an understaffed program approximately two weeks in length where individuals are detoxed and provided with basic education around SUDs. Two major issues cited by the staff were a lack of post-discharge resources to refer to their patients for follow-up care and a lack of medication needed to treat this population. The staff cited multiple instances when they had simply run out of methadone—a medication integral to their detox protocol, without which many patients suffered undue distress and often opted to return to using illicit street drugs to alleviate the pain of withdrawal. Not having a continuum of care or follow-up treatment, including an absence of mutual aid support groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous), makes successful recovery from SUDs even more difficult for patients. Relapse is made almost inevitable.

Despite the challenges of minimal research funding and lack of needed supplies, we left the meeting with a firm conviction that the entire toxicology staff was working hard to improve the treatment of SUDs. Annual conferences and published research articles created awareness for the need to help those with SUDs. Our time with this group left us empathetic to the struggles and challenges faced by these dedicated professionals; it made us reconsider the treatment resources and understanding of SUDs that we have in the United States. We stand hopeful that this group will usher in the needed change to create a more robust and effective treatment system.

Following our time at Mother Teresa Hospital, we were met by Dituria Publishing House, who was responsible for scheduling some of the events and public relations work for our visit. The team from Dituria was young, energetic, and fun to be around—and was truly invested in helping us spread the message about SUDs and recovery. They escorted us to the next stop on our itinerary, a meeting with the students, teachers, and administrators of the Partizani High School in Tirana. It was one of the many highlights of our trip.

We were impressed by the reception we received from the students and teachers. They had all read our book and had extremely insightful and probing questions about substance use and its impact on their friends, neighborhoods, and community. They were honestly interested in

learning how to change attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors around substance use and dependence. What became unmistakably clear was their enthusiasm and appreciation for having us there, as our scheduled one-hour meeting turned into a two-hour interchange with questions, personal accounts, a photography shoot, and a personalized book signing for each student and teacher as well as their principal.

As we debriefed after the meeting, it was obvious that a fair amount of hope for the prevention and treatment of substance use problems in Albania lay with these students. They eloquently expressed their concern for the negative impact of substance use, including tobacco and gambling, on their friends, family, and country. There was an intensity to this group of students that was undeniable, which was further fueled by their frustration, fear, and lack of confidence in their elected leaders. These students wanted to change the status quo and actively pursued the knowledge they needed to do it. These precocious youth are the country's future; that alone makes it imperative we help them understand the complexity of these issues and work with them to develop initiatives and programs to bring about the change they desire and deserve.

After lunch, we met with the director of public affairs from the U.S. Embassy. We shared parallel ideas and kindred hopes for how, together, we might help the Albanian people continue their work toward change. We were united in our perspective that education and open dialogue among the people of Albania were key ingredients to success, and we agreed that avoidance and denial were not working. We further concurred that to change the issues, we would need to tackle them head-on, and that collaboration with other influential groups would help bring the issue of SUDs to the public's attention. This conversation validated our (the authors') concerns and reinforced our hope that our ideas were well received and shared. The unequivocal takeaway from this meeting was that the Embassy's Public Affairs Office was supportive of the work done by the local YWCA, as well as the drug coalitions which consisted primarily of high school and college-age students, to address the issues surrounding substance use in Albania.

Our evening itinerary included an interview with Mustafa Nano, the host of one of the most-watched news shows in Albania, *Provokacija* (Provocation). The show, which has a far-reaching audience headlined by its popular host, facilitated an informed dialogue complete with insightful questions designed to "provoke" gut-level responses to substance use and the impact it has on those affected. A well-deserved credit goes out to our wonderful translator Kalia Musha, who helped us understand the questions asked by our host and convey our responses in the spirit intended. This appearance coincided nicely with our main goal of getting the word out and conducting an open dialogue about substance use.

As this second day came to an end, we were tired and emotionally drained; but at the same time, we felt excited and thankful for the opportunity to meet such wonderful people, learn about their culture, and share ideas and hopes for the future. We felt grateful for our reception and for how amenable folks were to speak with us about the issues of substance use and dependence. We understood that progress would be slow, but it was possible, and our visit might be just a small step in that hoped-for change. We retired that evening with the words of St. Francis de Sales echoing in our heads: "What we need is a cup of understanding, a barrel of love, and an ocean of patience" (Missionaries of St. Francis De Sales Southeast India, 2020, p. 2).

Day Three

Day three of our trip was markedly different from the previous two. We traveled with Dona and Kristina to the city of Shkoder, which is about ninety minutes north of Tirana. The purpose of our trip was to attend a "kickoff" celebration of a local drug coalition comprised of students, school administrators, local police, and political officials held at the "28 Nentori" High School.

This engagement resulted in one of the five national headlines in the *Panorama:* "*Dy amerikanë nisin fushatë sensibilizuese. Përdorimi i drogës prek adoleshentët, nis fushata sensibilizuese*," a caption amateurishly translated to "Two Americans launch an awareness campaign. Teenagers launch awareness campaigns on the effects of drug use" (published after our arrival in May 2019). The headline itself illustrated the novelty and the burgeoning awareness of substance misuse in Albania.

The article went on to describe the city that had become our destination, as Shkoder was one of many cities that were back in the news as hot spots for drug users—the number of users was in the thousands. As the story reported, a youth-led drug coalition of 35 young high school students had banded together to offer a helping hand in the battle to remove drugs from their schools and invited two American authors to participate in their event. The authors of the translated book *In the Game with the Devil* were asked by the youth to talk about their book and share their professional and personal knowledge on drug abuse.

Astrit Beci, Regional Director of Public Health, was included as an interviewee. Within the article he stated that drug use was everywhere and that he wanted to make teenagers aware of the dangers of drugs. He supported the project, citing worries of more and more drug users in the region and the consequences for families. According to the Director, drug users and their families should clearly have services in the municipality where they are living. Coalitions for Communities Troubleshooting against Drug and Alcohol Abuse launched this project and is expected to create special groups and find accurate data to further understand drug use and what can be done to help people in need.

What the newspaper article failed to mention were some of the challenges we encountered along the way. As one might expect, there were some "matter of convenience" discrepancies, which, to be truthful, we had not anticipated either. The first challenge we faced was the limited internet access in the school auditorium. To be fair, while not as archaic as the once-ubiquitous delay and anticipation of AOL's "You got mail" era, the lack of high-speed connection did require us to depart from our scripted and translated presentation into a more improvisational role. In a room with an audience far greater than the 35 students reported in the *Panorama* article, we tried to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap. In Albania, we encountered many English-speaking citizens with varying degrees of fluency; Shkoder was to be no different. There was a wide range in English ability, and in this particular school there was a preponderance of English-speaking students. Despite this, the challenges for connection were further complicated by the presence of officials, administrators, and the media, which slightly inhibited a smooth and open dialogue between us and the students during our presentation and the subsequent question-and-answer segment. The conversation felt strained, and the need for translation made it even more

challenging for us. The students appeared invested in the work of the Drug Coalition and genuinely interested in our presentation, but we could detect a distance between us.

The overarching message from our presentation was to recognize the great work being done by the students' coalition—to have hope that change can happen. The most rewarding and fruitful conversation took place afterward, outside of the school and out of earshot of adults, with a small group of students who spoke English. Without the presence of school administrators, police, and political figures, students were quite open and candid about what they were experiencing with regard to substance use among their peers. It was not that different from what we had previously heard in conversations with American students. They spoke about the prevalence and availability of drugs in their community and the devastation caused by SUDs among friends, family, and peers. The hardest question for us to answer was, "What can we do about this problem?" We could hear the fear and frustration in their voices and the heartbreak of seeing their friends and others struggle and often succumb to substance use, especially while the majority of leaders of their city and country, in the students' words, "do nothing to help."

We must note that much of the frustration we heard came from students who were disproportionately affected by substance misuse among their peers or adults who were still suspicious of the sincerity of officials from a young, still-developing democracy. In fairness, there were many coalition members and officials offering their time and expertise to work toward change. Understandably, it is difficult and exasperating to watch family members and friends consumed by SUDs. It is hard to have patience for systems-wide change, which is what the coalition was and is trying to accomplish. Their work is challenging, and to be effective, the breadth needs to be wide, including multiple constituencies and time. We made sure to convey the students' sentiments and feelings to a local TV crew during an interview after the meeting—they must be heard. But for the young students of Shkoder, being patient while watching and feeling the devastation caused by substance use is painful. They are anxious for change to happen. Despite a history of inaction based on their country's lack of initiatives, they remain hopeful and eager to mobilize themselves and their community.

Nowhere was this more evident than at the local Qendra Rinore Atelie Youth Center in Shkoder, which we visited after the Coalition meeting. Housed in a renovated building, easily accessible to the young people who frequent it, the youth center occupies two entire floors of what looks like an office building in the center of town.

The director is a young man who could easily be mistaken for one of the kids attending the program. During our visit, he was incredibly sensitive to the youth's needs and challenges, as well as their gifts and talents. He moved about the center interacting with every young person there, calling them by name, knowing what they like, what they were working on, and how to connect with those struggling to help them along. He no doubt spoke the youth's language, and it was rather obvious that they appreciated and respected him and his position. Simply put, they trusted him.

The center provides opportunities that others simply talk about, including spaces for music: writing, composing, and playing it. We listened to a beautiful rendition of a Beethoven piece

played by the young folks at the center, which was quite moving to say the least. In another area, kids were preparing food in a cooking class and, of course, we had to sample the wares—which were delicious—before we could move on to see the rest of the center. Other young folks were involved in computer classes and various other skill-building activities designed to help them become employable. The energy in the room was palpable, and the members were made to adhere to the rules and policies of the center or risk not being allowed in.

Relying on students who spoke English, we were able to learn that the youth felt it was vital to have this place to go to in order to avoid being lured into drugs, gangs, and unhealthy behavior like so many of their peers. They saw the value in learning job skills, improving their academic abilities, and preparing for college. As we left this wonderfully energetic environment, we were taken by both the hope and excitement demonstrated by the youth we met and by thoughts of how to replicate this model to make it available to all young people faced with similar challenges. It felt somewhat magical, but meeting and talking with the director showed us that all it really takes is having some love, compassion, and understanding for the young people who show up there. (And, of course, resources.) It is not overly complicated, but no doubt hard to achieve. With minimal investment, however, it is hard to witness any meaningful gains. The young people of Shkoder, Tirana, and anywhere else on the globe deserve to have options in life—opportunities to develop whatever talents and skills they have—lest they risk falling victim to the temptations they are surrounded by.

After a long day in Shkoder, Kristina and Dona nurtured our bodies and spirits with a late lunch at a wonderful restaurant called *Mrizi i Zanave* in Fishte Lezha. Located somewhere between Shkoder and Tirana, this hidden little farm somehow attracted a patronage that included tour buses. Everything served there is produced on the grounds and prepared only with the farm's own ingredients. In what we would come to understand as typical Albanian style, we were treated to multiple courses of wonderfully fresh foods, including bread, various cheeses and olives, meats, and other rare (to us) meals. Thanks to the food, the scenery, and great company, we began to feel like honorary Albanians, with shared hopes and visions of a brighter future for the citizens of their beautiful country—especially their youth.

Day Four

We entered the weekend not totally abandoning our expressed research methodology to capture the depth and breadth of the SUD problem in Albania, but with our pace slowed and our focus shifted. Our research turned more personal in nature as we attempted to further understand the impediments Albanians face and the struggles they experience. We endeavored to understand treatment options for those with SUDs while we engaged in more intimate and detailed conversations with a variety of individuals experiencing them. One of those people was Tony's cousin, Adi, a former drug user who stated that he became dependent on drugs to help him cope with life but found himself unable to stop when things spiraled out of control. He informed us that he'd entered a detox program, but upon completion, there was "nowhere" for him to go. His only choice was to go back to the streets and eventually back to using drugs. He informed us that there are no mutual-aid support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous in Albania, and no resources for continued care such as Sober Living or Halfway Houses, leaving

individuals to recover alone. Those with SUDs often recover best in community, not isolation; Adi reported that in his experience users trying to recover on their own are generally unsuccessful.

Without supports or professional guidance, Adi resorted to alcohol to help him cope with life, and he hung on to the hope that drinking would not lead him back to narcotics—a fine line to walk for anyone who has an SUD. We were able to provide information to Adi about how to start a 12-step support group and hoped he would follow up with our recommendations. We offered our support or guidance if needed. Seeing how the lack of supports affected Adi, we realized that we had taken for granted the vast number of resources we have in the United States until we experienced them so conspicuously missing in Albania.

To carry a message of hope and recovery in a country where extraordinarily little of these things exist required a network. Thankfully, this came in the form of the media, newspapers, and television news programs, which seemed eager to share in spreading it. Our next item on the itinerary came from *Vitrina e Librit*, a television program part of the National Library network called Top Channel. We were fittingly interviewed in the National Library about the book and the work we were doing in Albania. Within the country there was and is an escalating interest in learning about SUDs and recovery, especially among those who witness the devastation caused by alcohol and drugs personally. Within our small window of time to affect change, television and news media outlets offered a pathway to reach a much greater audience than any of the events we attended in person—and beyond that, a population largely uninformed on the social implications of their burgeoning alcohol and drug problems.

We had made some inroads with local agencies before we arrived in Albania—the YWCA, University of Tirana, and a few local high schools—which helped fill our itinerary and provide various audiences for us. One we connected with while in America was the Stephen Center, located in downtown Tirana, which works with disadvantaged Albanians. Our connection was established through a local church and its pastor, Sokol, in Massachusetts who founded the center in Albania and now lives there. We had multiple email exchanges and met with him and some church affiliates in the state before we left for Albania, so they knew of us when we arrived.

Sokol and his wife Melani could not have been more welcoming and generous with their time, showing us around the center, treating us to dinner, and spending hours in deep conversation about the challenges their country has experienced throughout history, including current times, which they are deeply familiar with. Much of Sokol and Melani's work through the Stephen Center is to help families struggling with poverty and substance use, especially in those cases where the parent or parents are incarcerated. They work with the children, helping them stay in school and function amid the turmoil, and they do so on extremely limited funding. Their work is truly honorable, and they are humble individuals whose only mission is to help those less fortunate. Sokol and Melani toured us around Tirana, giving us an in-depth education of the history and politics of the country they love. It was a lesson in humility, and spending time with them felt like a very spiritual experience for us.

Day Five

Our lessons in the culture and history of Albania continued as we joined our friends and hosts Sunday morning for a trip out of Tirana for a day of leisure and sightseeing. Kristina and Marin, our "tour guides," picked us up at our apartment and drove us out to the seaside, where we stopped to see Durres, a seaside town many Albanians spend summers in. We had coffee and conversation at a scenic café on the beach behind Kristina's summer apartment and learned more about the beauty of the area.

We traveled on to Berat, an ancient United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage city that offered a unique opportunity to step back in time through the preservation of its buildings complete with its storied history. As planned, we met up with our other friends Dona and Tony and their son Kester, and with the help of a hired tour guide and input from our hosts, we learned not only about the history of the city but about our friends. Our connection to each other became deeper and our conversations more personal. The rides to and from Berat allowed us to learn more about their personal experiences and what it was like to live through their country's tumultuous history. These hours of togetherness gave our ethnographic research methods a richness and color that can only be accomplished by total immersion in a culture and native population.

As we concluded our tour of Berat, we could not leave without meeting and having coffee with friends of our hosts who owned a café and wanted to meet us and talk. On our return trip back to Tirana, our hosts insisted we stop for a dinner of incredibly wonderful food and conversation at another hidden gem of a restaurant off the main road. We talked here for several hours before we headed back to the city, much richer in our knowledge of the country.

Day Six

As the days blended into one another, it was difficult to recall all the people we had met, the conversations we had engaged in, and of all we had learned. Propitiously, we debriefed and processed each day and wrote notes about the experience. Our journal notes allowed for memory-saving documentation of each day before we retired to bed. It was difficult to quantify the impact or result of our work. Qualitatively, however, the comments and questions we recorded from people we met gave us the confidence to know that we were on the right track. One of those interchanges came from the café owner next to our apartment, Tim. Through a heavy accent and strained English, he asked, "Do you think we have a problem with drugs in our country?" He motioned to the newspaper on the table, the familiar *Panorama*. There on the front page of the paper was the story and the unmistakable visages of two Americans. We responded in the affirmative and thanked him for the cappuccino before heading out the door, on our way to speak to another group of students at the University of Tirana's Faculty of Social Sciences.

The meeting was arranged by the publishing staff and, as we entered the school, there was a buzz in the halls about having "visitors from America" coming to speak. Soon the classroom filled and, before long, there was standing room only. Outside the classroom, the whirring continued, and students kept coming until there was no room left. The welcome response was

heartwarming, but the interest and interaction from the students was even more impressive as it further emphasized their eagerness for open discussion around substance use and for accurate information about the issues. Their questions were thoughtful and relevant, and their desire to learn about SUDs felt genuine. They, too, spoke of the losses they had experienced of friends and family due to substance use and dependence, and of their frustration with the lack of resources to help. Any differences between high school and college students were bridged by their fear and fatigue of losing loved ones and peers to substance use—and the desire for change. As we processed our visit afterward, following another visit to Tony and Dona's son Kester's high school, it became clear as ever to us that if change is to come regarding substance use, it will be driven by the youth of Albania.

The day ended with more touring of Tirana and dinner with our friend Marin, who was raised in Tirana and knows the city, including the great dining spots. We talk about Albania, the people, and the problems, but also share personal stories of life experiences, allowing our relationships to deepen even more—another benefit of spending lots of time together. Our evening ended with us feeling tired and having some mixed feelings about nearing the end of our visit. We had one more day before we were scheduled to return to America and, for many reasons, did not want our trip to end.

Day Seven

Our last day began with a brief meeting over coffee with the staff from Dituria Publishing House before heading to the University of Tirana again, this time to speak with a group of students from the Faculty of Foreign Languages about substance use and dependence. This presentation took place in a large amphitheater-shaped room; it was markedly different from our previous appearance at the University. Perhaps the success of our first presentation prompted school officials to take an active role as we were invited to take seats on a panel consisting of university faculty and department heads. The room was already packed with students and continued to fill as we were formally introduced. Our PowerPoint presentation made translation a bit cumbersome, but we managed to get our message across to this group of curious students and exchange ideas during a question-and-answer session moderated by the panel leader at the end of the talk.

In the beginning, there was a bit of reluctance or shyness on the part of students, possibly because the dean and other college administrators were in the room. The students were genuinely interested, showed utmost respect, asked thoughtful questions—they wanted to know more about us and our story. We shared a few humorous experiences as we reminisced about our crazy behavior and that of the other characters described in the book. We wrapped up our formal presentation but remained in the amphitheater to talk and sign books for students. Not only were they extremely appreciative of the more intimate interchange, but they were also more open about what they were experiencing regarding substance use and dependence. The concerns they shared with us were similar to the ones shared by fellow college and high school peers: the fear and frustration of watching friends and family suffer from using drugs and alcohol, and not knowing what to do to help them.

Their willingness to engage with us underscored the need for a safe place to talk openly about their concerns and fears with people who will listen and understand them. It was frustrating not having "the answer" for them, and we tried to encourage them to keep the momentum created that day alive and to educate others about the seriousness of the problems facing the Albanian community and its youth.

We left feeling energized and hopeful that they would continue to speak out to address the issues and not turn their heads while friends, family, and fellow Albanians die by the hand of substance use and dependence.

Our last scheduled stop was to the only methadone treatment clinic in Tirana. Upon our arrival, we immediately noticed a stark contrast in their philosophy and design, which turned out to be one of the biggest surprises for us on this trip. We were familiar with many of the methadone clinics in America—how they operate, their philosophy, and the public perception of methadone clinics and the people who frequent them. Generally, they are sited in less-than-desirable areas in an attempt to shield the community or surrounding "nice" neighborhoods from the consumers of these services. The phenomenon is a strange one where the clientele is often treated with disdain and contempt due to their diagnosis and associated lifestyle. The use of shame or punitive measures as a way of managing the population still exists to some degree today. Support is minimal, and the system often functions from a base of dishonesty and distrust.

However, the clinic we visited was nothing like what we were accustomed to. From the time we arrived, there was a different feel to the environment. The clinic was located directly across the street from a row of embassy houses, frequented by diplomats and visitors from all over the world. We were impressed by the bright aesthetic appeal of the building as we entered the grounds: its cleanliness and the warm, welcoming feel that did not stop with the structural design. We were greeted by the director who, from the moment we met him, was also warm and welcoming and more than happy to show us around the facility and enthusiastically talk about the work done there. During the tour, our conversation turned to the philosophy and guiding principles of the clinic. The staff approaches the work with a positive, trusting, and supportive mindset rather than a punitive, distrusting, and negative one. Although staff members have limited resources that reduce the amount of help they can offer clients, they do their best to accommodate families in times of distress; for example, the staff allows parents or spouses to pick up medications for loved ones if they are unable to come to the clinic.

Rather than simply dispensing methadone to those who show up daily, the clinic provides wrap-around services to support and encourage recovery using a holistic approach. The demand is often too great on this only methadone clinic in Tirana—but even when the staff run out of methadone, services are provided with genuine care and in an environment that welcomes clients and respects their dignity. We learned a lot from that experience. We began to understand what Ian McEwan meant when he said, "Cruelty is a failure of imagination" (Kellaway, 2001, para. 11) —that it is possible to provide this necessary service in a humane way where clients feel less ashamed and stigmatized, where help is easily accessible and quite possibly even more effective. It was a great way to close out our visit to Albania, reinforcing our belief that the fundamentals of effective treatment require love, compassion, empathy, and understanding as the cornerstones

upon which to build effective programs. Before leaving the clinic, Jack took a picture of a poster on the wall that sums up the clinic's approach to treatment: "Support, Don't Shame."

As one could probably surmise by now, our method of decompressing from the intense and emotional week in Albania involved food. We were treated to lunch by our fabulous new friends Kristina and Dona at a beautiful restaurant, Artiste. We recapped many of the important and hopeful things we had heard and seen, and we talked about all the dedicated and caring people we met, especially our lunchmates. We discussed our ideas for continuing this work together—how to collaborate on initiatives to educate others, raise awareness of SUDs, and hopefully host them on a visit to America in the future.

It was the end of a long, full week we had spent doing things we never imagined. We initially thought we would meet some folks, talk about *The East Side of Addiction*, and learn some things about the Albanian culture and experience. We never imagined that we would do and learn so much and meet such wonderfully warm and welcoming friends. The connections we developed felt real, and we hoped the people of Albania would continue the work we started.

Between the heritage and the natural beauty of Albania, it was hard to leave, but it was the hospitable nature of the people that really made us want to return to continue to help. We feel the brightest hope lies within the youth of the country who exhibited a level of curiosity, understanding, and engagement around the topic of substance use that would be the envy of our local community health workers back home.

Lessons Learned

Substance use and dependence presents itself as an equal opportunity condition, wreaking havoc, fear, devastation, destruction, and death on those who fall victim to it—regardless of ethnicity, social standing, or geography. It imposes the same damage to all who stand in its path. As a result of our research, we learned some remarkably interesting and hopeful lessons regarding the implications of substance use, its impact, and the appetite for change driven by the youth of Albania. Although we still face many problems related to substance use in the United States, we have increased our understanding of SUDs and have the resources to develop and implement innovative treatment programs and intervention techniques that may help the people of Albania. However, one of the most important bits of knowledge gained from our research is the compassionate approach with which the Tirana clinic treated individuals and families affected by substance use. Although their resources were scarce and drained, they taught us a lesson in providing services rooted in compassion and respect for human dignity, regardless of the diagnosis or condition. Even though we share the same fears and frustration around substance use as anyone, we learned from our Albanian counterparts that treatment for substance use disorders can be provided in a kinder and more respectful manner—which, in the long run, helps minimize the shame and stigma that often scares people away from treatment. It also drives the way substance use is understood and how treatment is designed and delivered. It was definitely a model in humility for us to see how treatment providers in a poor country like Albania subscribe to a mindset of "Support, Don't Shame." This was probably the greatest lesson we learned from our research and time in Albania, but it was not the only one for sure. We also gained a deeper

understanding of the Albanian people's experience of substance use in their country and the challenges they face in trying to curtail or mitigate its devastating impact on their country, especially among their youth—and it is precisely with the young people of Albania where the greatest hope for change lies.

We also saw and felt how badly youth want to see change when it comes to substance use disorders education and treatment. Maybe the greatest lesson we learned from these young, courageous Albanians is that the change they are demanding and working toward will more than likely not come from the top down. They have impatiently waited to no avail. What seems to be the natural course of change in Albania with regard to substance use issues will unquestionably come from the bottom up, driven by the youth of Albania who are fed up with the status quo. It might not come today, or even this year, but the youth are organizing and getting educated about what they can do and how to do it. The young people are accustomed to a hardline approach: Either they tolerate problems, ignoring them and letting them fester, or they voice concerns to only have their worry dismissed, often through violence. We learned that the tide is turning with respect to that approach to their public health and social issues, leaning further toward a non-punitive, kinder, more open, and more respectful approach to treating their fellow citizens victimized by substance use. And this is an especially important lesson for all of us to learn, regardless of country. Armed with the lessons learned from our trip to Albania and the research we conducted, we have returned to the U.S. with a new perspective regarding treatment for SUDs. As designers and providers of treatment services, we are grateful that the insights from our Albanian friends have helped us design our own day treatment program for those struggling with substance use. We have incorporated many of the learned lessons into our treatment philosophy and delivery. Mostly, though, those lessons have helped us to approach those who seek treatment services for addiction in a much more humane and compassionate manner. We have come to believe, with the help of our Albanian friends, that our treatment should reflect how we ourselves would want to be treated if we were seeking help.

Conclusions and Implications

From the start, the purpose of our research was guided and driven by our interest in the following areas of exploration: How much of a problem is substance use in Albania; what impact does it have; and how is Albania responding to it?

Studies reviewed during our trip revealed some startling statistics for us to use as a baseline, reporting that Albania is one of the largest providers of cannabis to the European Union and since the 1990s has been viewed as a center of drug trade (Daragahi, 2019). According to both U.S. and European law enforcement officials, it is also known as a "transit point" for heroin and cocaine, as well as the narcotics trafficking headquarters of the continent (Daragahi, 2019). *Newsweek* reports Albania was the "world's highest per-capita cocaine consumer" from 2016 to 2017 (Nicoll & Triest, 2017, para. 4). Data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) lists Albania as first in the world for cocaine consumption in 2017, with 2.5 percent of the population using the drug (Smith, 2017). This is reported alongside data naming Albanian gangs the world's number one heroin and cannabis smugglers—and number three in cocaine trafficking—in the UNODC 2017 World Drug Report. Many individuals and organization

representatives we met and spoke with support the above claims and data; they state that poverty and corruption are what drive the prevalence of drug use and distribution in Albania, making the fast money and lifestyle very appealing to the youth of the country.

Throughout our stay in Albania, and in nearly every conversation we had, especially with the youth, a common fear expressed by the people was the rapid erosion of their values, where money and the aforementioned fast lifestyle become more important than honest work and family. The Albanian people we spoke with also regularly mentioned the fear of watching friends and family members fall prey to a lifestyle of drug dependence and often death, with extraordinarily little or no resources to help.

Eager to be instrumental in raising awareness—and having the ability to see what is happening around them with an unfiltered view—Albanian youth clearly recognize the impact substance use has on their friends, family, and community, and want to be a part of making it better. The young Albanian people we met and spoke with are bright and determined, insightful, and proud of their heritage. They do not want to see it damaged any further than it has already been at the hands of Albania's history. They are the hope for change and the hope for the future, but they alone cannot carry the entire burden of change. They need our help. As foreigners with little or no influence on the government, we are not exactly sure how to help them other than to continue to express our own experiences, strength, and hope. We want to show them that it is okay to talk about the issues they face, and that change takes time. To quote the famous American author James Baldwin (1962), "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced" (p. 148). Issues like substance use and dependence must be faced, and understood, if we ever hope to change them.

Once upon a time, a similar environment existed here in America, and to some extent it still does. We are faced with the sad truth that our country and culture are often called the "Addicted Society," dedicated almost entirely to the celebration of the ego with all its sad fantasies about success and power. It celebrates those very forces of greed and ignorance which are not only destroying our planet but contributing to the endless suffering endured by our most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Complex social determinants such as these—coupled with the denial, shame, and stigma that accompany alcohol or drug dependence—perpetuate confusion and make it difficult to engage in meaningful solutions. Against this backdrop the situation only worsens, and more individuals, especially the youth, and their families, struggle in silence. We are quite familiar with this phenomenon, a situation remarkably similar to the U.S. many years ago. The "War on Drugs"—or, more accurately, the persecution of people who use drugs—is nothing new. Issues around drug and alcohol use filled the nation's headlines in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, when most people were afraid or reluctant to talk about substance use and the options for seeking help were minimal. It has taken a long time, and we have paid an enormous price, for treatment and support resources to be available to those afflicted. It is difficult to gauge whether we made an impact on the folks we met and spoke to, or if what we did made sense to them. If our experience back home is any indication, there is much more work that needs to be done and we know that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. We believe that we made that first step.

A subject worthy of additional study is that Albania, with its notorious worst in the world per-capita drug consumption, was not the target of a pharmaceutical conspiracy nor the avarice of capitalism but the victim of economic disparities as suggested in research done by the Nobel Prize winner James Heckman, the Director of the Center for the Economics of Human Development (RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America, 2009). One of this article's authors, Maroney, writes after Heckman:

> We find that in today's world one's zip code rather than one's genetic code is a more reliable determinant for having a safe healthy life. Trauma and its antecedent social ills such as poverty, discrimination, violence, poor housing, community disruption and lack of opportunity are seen to be the major contributors of the epidemic. (2018)

Our feedback loop during this trip was composed of only anecdotes, making it difficult to get unbiased opinions from those we met. Parsing out the signals required a great deal of qualified interpretations—but in the end, we were confident the messages we received clearly indicated the results of our efforts. The best example of this came on our last day in Albania. While waiting for our ride to the airport, we stopped in to see Tim for a last cappuccino at the little café on the corner. In a parting gesture, as unlikely as the two kids from Shrewsbury St. making their way to one of Europe's smallest nations, the stoic proprietor's farewell was this: "Thank you for helping my country."

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Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: One Minute to Midnight

Ann Carrellas

Abstract: This reflection focuses on my experiences as a social worker working with individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) and their families for almost 40 years. The first child I met with fetal alcohol syndrome was a three-year-old who stole my heart with his boundless energy and big smile. Ever since I met "Darren" and a group of advocates who shared my interest in this disorder, we have sought to raise awareness about the leading preventable cause of intellectual and developmental disabilities in the United States. I feel an urgency to share what I have learned from individuals with FASDs and family members about what it's like to live with an FASD with helping professionals who are encountering children and adults who have FASDs but who are going unrecognized. As a nation, it is time to address the impact of prenatal exposure to alcohol on individuals, families, and communities.

***Keywords*:** fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, social work practice, advocacy, policy

Introduction

I was once referred to as a "rogue advocate" by a program director: She did not appreciate that I represented a mutual client who'd been denied needed accommodations. That label became my personal badge of honor. I have tried to set a high bar when it comes to campaigning for the civil and human rights of the people I have been so honored to partner with as an advocate. One of my greatest frustrations has been that in almost 40 years of advocacy work alongside individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs), families, and colleagues, there remains minimal recognition of the leading preventable cause of intellectual and neurodevelopmental disability: prenatal alcohol exposure (Williams & Smith, 2015). When I think about these years, I often think of "Darren."

The first memory I have of Darren is the joy with which he flew across the room: arms stretched out in the air, glasses with thick lenses askew and frames too big for his small face and head as he carried his thin three-year-old body across the office. He was constantly in motion, laughing, flitting, and whirling. Darren had fetal alcohol syndrome, the only category of the spectrum that can be medically diagnosed (Hoyme et al., 2016). I was in my first few weeks of my social work internship at a large urban child welfare agency in one of the poorest cities in the United States and had been assigned to follow up with Darren and his placement with a family member. I soon found there were no support services specifically for FASDs I could recommend.

In my early career years, I became simultaneously aware of the *prevalence* of FASDs and the *lack* of recognition and support services for families and individuals with them. FASDs describe a range of conditions that impact learning, behavior, and physical health due to prenatal exposure to alcohol (Warren & Foudin, 2001). FASDs include fetal alcohol syndrome, partial fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder, and alcohol-related birth defects. In spite of the most recent prevalence studies that find up to 1 in 20 elementary school-aged children have been prenatally exposed to alcohol and consequently have an FASD

(May et al., 2018), we have no national policies or funding to facilitate much-needed coordination and collaboration between the multiple systems that would provide services to them. Children with FASDs grow into adults who will have co-existing developmental and mental health needs for their lifetimes—but too often they end up in jails and prisons. This is because we do not recognize that their crimes are directly related to the poor decision-making skills, lack of executive functioning abilities, and vulnerability to peer pressure caused by prenatal exposure (Brintell et al., 2019; Fast & Conry, 2009).

Understanding FASDs

According to May et al. (2018), FASDs affect elementary school-age children in the United States at rates of 1 in 100 (1.1%) to 1 in 20 (5%) using conservative estimating and 1 in 31 (3.1%) to 1 in 9 (9.9%) using a weighted approach. These rates are higher overall than children at age 8 years diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), which currently have an overall prevalence rate of 1 in 54 (1.85%) (Maenner et al., 2020). Despite the higher prevalence of FASDs, there is a much larger support and advocacy network for those living with ASDs, resulting in more awareness, screening, and support services as outlined in the Combatting Autism Act of 2006, known today as the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education and Support (CARES) Act of 2019 (2019). Conversely, individuals with FASDs are rarely evaluated for the disorder even when part of a high-risk group such as child welfare where between 6% and 16.9% of children and youth were found to have an FASD based on a meta-analysis of international, active ascertainment studies that pooled prevalence rates (Lange et al., 2017). The under-recognition of FASDs is illustrated by a study of 156 foster care and adopted children where 80.1% had missed being diagnosed with the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure and another 6.4% had been misdiagnosed (Chasnoff et al., 2015).

Adoptive parents report a persistent lack of knowledge of FASDs throughout systems that are supposed to support children and adults with disabilities, including education and developmental disabilities services systems (Petrenko et al., 2014). Only fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and partial fetal alcohol syndrome (PFAS) are diagnosable because of the unique facial features (small eye opening, flat philtrum, thin upper lip) solely associated with prenatal alcohol exposure (Astley et al., 2002). A diagnosis of FAS requires all three of the facial features as well as growth delays and central nervous system impairments. PFAS requires two of the three facial features and growth delays or brain morphogenesis or neuro-developmental problems (Warren & Foudin, 2001). However, for those who do not have the facial features that cinch a clinical diagnosis, neurodevelopmental and behavioral disabilities associated with FAS may be present (Mattson, et al., 2019). The two other categories of FASDs, alcohol-related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND) and alcohol-related birth defects (ARBD), require confirmation of maternal alcohol use during pregnancy, which is often difficult to ascertain (Hoyme et al., 2016). ARND is a term used to delineate the impact of prenatal alcohol exposure on neurological development and the consequent impairments in cognitive and behavioral functioning, motor skills, executive function, memory, emotional regulation, and adaptive skills (Flak et al., 2014; Kable et al., 2016; Mattson et al., 2019). ARBD describes the physical conditions, including problems with the heart, kidneys, bones, sight, and hearing, along with immune system disorders that arise with prenatal alcohol exposure (Bodnar et al., 2016; Warren & Foudin, 2001). The DSM-5 has added

a category named neurodevelopmental disability associated with prenatal alcohol exposure (ND-PAE) which requires confirmation of prenatal exposure to alcohol with impaired cognitive functioning, self-regulation, and adaptive functioning which cause significant distress or impairment in social, academic, occupational, and other areas of functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This will provide an avenue for diagnosis of ARND if criteria are blended between ARND and ND-PAE and it moves from "proposed" to "accepted" as a clinical category in the DSM-5 (Hoyme et al., 2016).

In my experience, individuals who have no diagnosis or a misdiagnosis are most at risk because they are not recognized as having a developmental disability, which can lead to greater trouble with the law, being labeled as mentally ill, receiving no or inappropriate services, or ending up homeless or trafficked as they enter adolescence and young adulthood (Reid, 2018; Streissguth et al., 2004). However, we do not have solid research that says how many people with FASDs make up the population of people who are homeless, who are being trafficked, who are incarcerated, or who end up dead—as did one of the youth with FAS I knew, in a drug deal gone bad. Children and young people who are involved in child welfare services or juvenile justice systems and who are homeless should always receive screening and diagnostic services for FASDs, but this rarely happens. Consequently, we have a difficult time putting numbers to these populations who are more at risk for prenatal exposure to alcohol and the consequent cognitive, behavioral, social, physical, and emotional disabilities.

FASDs and Youth in the Child Welfare System: A Hidden Population

At the time I met Darren, FAS had been identified only 15 years earlier by French physicians who noticed a similarity in the facial features and behaviors of children born to alcoholic mothers (Lemoine et al., 1968). It was then written about by a group of American doctors (Jones et al., 1973), some of whom are still researching FASDs almost 50 years later. Their work continues to focus on the impact of prenatal exposure to alcohol on neurological and behavioral development and raise public awareness of this disorder that touches everyone's lives—even if we as a society largely remain uneducated about and unaware of those among us who have been prenatally exposed to alcohol. Other than a federal advisory (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2005), there is still no national effort to prevent FASD and support affected individuals and their families as we do with other recognized developmental disabilities.

Darren was assigned to me during my internship because I had volunteer and work experience with children and adults with developmental disabilities. Darren had been taken from his mother because of neglect due to her use of drugs and alcohol. Darren did have a diagnosis of FAS, which was clear from his small head, facial features, tiny body, and neurodevelopmental issues that included ADHD, cognitive impairment, and problems with language. He had been placed in several foster care homes, but he never stayed long partly due to his need for constant supervision. At one point when there was no foster home available, I had to take him to a large children's home with his clothes and a couple of toys in a garbage bag. He cried and clung to me as if his heart would break!

Even if you can get a diagnosis, which is rare, and while services and supports do exist for

children and adults with developmental disabilities across the United States, FASDs are often not seen as disorders that confer automatic eligibility for those services (Petrenko et al., 2014). The prevalence of FASDs in our population is higher than the rate of ASDs; yet, few states and organizations have implemented programs to consistently identify and support children, youth, and adults who are living with a developmental disability that so heavily impacts their daily lives (Kodituwakku, 2007, 2009, 2010). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) once funded a Center for Excellence on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders which gathered state FASDs coordinators and worked towards prevention and intervention, but the Center was dissolved several years ago with no single agency to replace it (National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, 2020).

One thing Darren taught me was that having FAS did not mean all learning and growing stopped, even though ARND is also referred to as *static encephalopathy*—having an impaired brain that doesn't change. There were no known interventions or informed services at this time in the mid-1980s, so treatment focused on individual areas of concern such as increasing attention or improving fine motor control. One day I went to pick up Darren from one of his multiple foster care placements for an appointment. He was staying with a long-time foster mother who had taken care of many children. Frankly, I was a bit intimidated by her years of experience. I carefully held Darren's hand as we walked across the street to my small car and put Darren in the front seat, fastened his seatbelt (no car seats back in those days), and locked and shut the door. I looked up and thought I saw his foster mother in the window and gave a cheery wave good-bye—then at that moment I realized I had locked my keys in the car with Darren! I told Darren to lift up the button for the car lock. He tried, straining against the seatbelt, to grab the slim button and pull it up. Finally, I told him to slip under the seatbelt, and success! He was able to grab the button and pull it up! I looked up and saw the curtains fluttering a bit in the window and thought to myself how fortunate I was that Darren was able to follow directions and was so persistent in his good-natured way. Darren had quite a severe cognitive impairment, but his willingness to keep trying and to listen would serve him well. I am fortunate to have had such good teachers in the children, youth, and adults who have shared themselves and their experiences with me over the years. Darren was one of my great teachers and this experience with him was one of many reminders that continue to this day: to never assume that someone labeled with a disability is unable.

Alcohol use and abuse is a huge social and health problem, and it is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States (Mokdad et al., 2004), with alcohol-impaired driving accidents accounting for almost a third of driving fatalities (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2015). Over 26 percent of adults reported at least one episode of binge drinking in the past month—drinking more than five drinks within two hours for males and four for females (SAMHSA, 2018). Data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System indicates that 11.5 percent of pregnant women (1 in 8) drink during pregnancy, with 3.9 percent reporting binge drinking during the past 30 days (Denny et al., 2019).

Children, youth, and adults with FASD are in all arenas where social workers and other helping professionals provide services, but for the most part we are ignorant of a major reason for the memory problems, out-of-control behavior, and what we label as oppositional defiant disorder

until 18 (when these new adults are now viewed as purposely obstinate, aggressive, and manipulative). Behaviors that are difficult for parents and child welfare workers to understand will often land these children in long-term residential placements to be raised by three shifts of people paid minimum wage. While I am sure for the most part these workers do their best, numbers of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse endured by children and youths in these situations are high—and often, after 18, they are set free to experience more of the same (Fong & Cardoso, 2010; Williams & Frederick, 2009). From my own experiences with transitioning adolescents from child welfare systems and looking at the research literature, these older adolescents who are involved in child welfare systems—and homeless youth—are very vulnerable to human and sex trafficking; yet, there is little research that identifies the levels of intellectual, developmental, and learning disabilities in these populations (Lightfoot et al., 2011; O'Brien et al., 2017; Reid, 2018). The U.S. Department of State in the Trafficking in Persons Report (2019) finds that children and adults with disabilities are consistently used in labor and sex trafficking across the globe.

At the time of placement, Darren's older sister had just turned 18 and was newly married. She wanted to care for Darren and to keep him in their family. It was clear she loved him very much. They were approved as a foster placement with the intention that, if things went well, the young couple would adopt Darren. Darren, his sister, and her new husband lived in an apartment above her husband's grandmother's place.

Between 2005 and 2008, as a social worker for a local advocacy agency, I was allowed to define my role in partnership with youth in transition from child welfare services, their families, caseworkers, teachers, and community organizations to try to prevent these young people, most who had unidentified FASDs and other developmental disabilities, from falling off the proverbial cliff and landing in jail or prison or experiencing sex trafficking, violence, or homelessness as they aged out of child welfare care. Our agency had been helping youth aging out all along, but too often we were approached within a few months of a young person exiting care, too late to help get needed benefits such as Social Security or adult developmental disability and employment services, too late to find that "one adult who [was] crazy about [them]" (Greeson et al., 2010, p. 576) and get safe housing in place. These emerging adults between the ages of 16 and 21 allowed me into their lives and shared the difficulties they encountered in trying to stay housed, finish school, maintain employment, keep out of trouble with the law, and be in supportive relationships on a day-to-day basis.

One older teen I worked with, "Thomas," had turned 19 recently and had a history of educational and mental health labels (ADHD, learning disabilities, oppositional defiant disorder, and depression). Thomas had been bounced between relative homes and foster care since the age of eight. He had spent time in residential treatment because of aggressive behavior; after he told me about his background, I was convinced he was reacting out of his traumatic history and because of being prenatally exposed to alcohol, which we soon confirmed with a diagnostic assessment and a statement from a family member that his mother had episodes of binge drinking during her pregnancy with him. Thomas's history of being uncooperative reached me before I met him. However, the young man I met was not at all like his reputation. He wanted to do the right thing for his girlfriend who was living with her parents, get a job, get married, and find them their own

home. He knew he had a disability and told me that he "must just be stupid" as his last teacher had said he could only read at a first-grade level. We talked a lot about why he might have difficulty learning to read and that it didn't make him stupid, but he might need to learn differently and figure out what he did well that could lead him to a job.

Our local child welfare office understood that in order to stop transitioning adolescents from falling off that proverbial cliff, we needed to identify those at most risk and connect them to the supports, services, and relationships available in the community before exiting the child welfare system. Our community had a monthly wrap-around meeting where social workers and service providers from across the county gathered to discuss the needs of transitioning adolescents to identify and secure those connections. Volunteers from our local FASDs diagnostic clinic were willing to meet me anywhere to do the evaluation, especially one nurse practitioner who would go to a home, office, or local neutral place depending on the adolescent's need to feel safe and bring her equipment to do the facial feature measurements for the FASDs diagnostic evaluations. Our local homeless shelter for youth worked with the local housing authority to get priority for a couple of subsidized apartments for aging-out youth. I handled the Social Security disability benefits applications and represented them in their appeals and stepped into the role of social worker if they aged out of child welfare before qualifying for adult developmental disabilities services. Child welfare workers helped youth apply for Medicaid, food stamps, and employment services and identified adults who would act as mentors.

As the fill-in social worker, if one of these emerging adults called and said they needed a ride to get to a doctor's appointment or a job interview, I was there—knowing that having the skills to figure out which bus at what time would arrive by the right hour might be too many things to consider at once. It was a waste of time to assume that this young person was being lazy (as I heard a few times) or was perfectly capable of getting there themselves. Maybe so, but individuals with FASDs struggle with short-term memory and executive functioning, which means they can have the skills but still be incapable of following through without support.

I started meeting with Thomas and he couch-surfed for some months while we worked on getting his FASD diagnosis, getting his application in for Social Security disability benefits, finding housing, and applying for adult developmental disability services based on his FASD through our local community mental health agency. Unfortunately, while he was still without services or a home, he stole a car with an underage teen and 30 seconds later pulled out in front of a police car. I had lost touch with Thomas for a couple of weeks and it finally dawned on me to contact the local jail. When I called and described him, the officer told me they had to put him in solitary because he wouldn't stop crying and the police were afraid of what other inmates might do to him. His theft of the auto at the suggestion of a 15-year-old and pulling out in front of a police car to try to get away was classic FASD behavior, as executive functioning and consequential thinking are two areas that are typically affected and lead to involvement in the criminal justice system.

Darren's family placement didn't work out with his sister. I think she was just too young to handle this very impulsive and energetic child—she clearly loved him, but he was going to need a lot of support throughout his life. She had difficulties organizing Darren's appointments and

getting him to scheduled visits. I wondered if she too had been prenatally exposed to alcohol, as memory issues are a major component of ARND. I knew she wanted the best for Darren but was struggling to be his mother when she was still emerging from adolescence and in a new marriage. One day she told me something that she knew would get him removed from her care: She had spanked him with a belt. Darren didn't have any marks, and the way his sister said it—almost in a whisper—made me think she may not have hit him but could not think of another way to let him go. She still needed an adult in her life to guide her, and while she and her husband had his grandmother, there was no adult willing to step forward and co-parent this young child with her.

It's hard to absorb that all the work over the 40 years since prenatal alcohol exposure was understood to be harmful has moved us what seems like only an inch in a mile. Most of the parents I have known involved in advocacy work are adoptive parents of children from the U.S. and Indian child welfare systems or Eastern Europe. Some of these parents who mentored me have died, and the rest are in their 70s and 80s still fighting and worrying what will become of their now-adult child with an FASD. These parents fought so long and hard for the services their children have needed and still need as adults; FASDs are life-long, and many of those affected need some support, more or less, to stay on track with paying the bills, showing up to work, and taking medications. Education, community mental health, and child welfare systems have been reluctant to systematically identify children with FASDs. Stigma is real, and women and men get mixed messages from health professionals and everyone else about drinking and pregnancy. Alcohol consumption is interwoven into our culture. We drink to celebrate and to mourn the dead, to relax, to deal with bad and good news, to come down from a stressful day, and to self-medicate anxiety and depression. What we do know, however, is that FASDs are 100 percent preventable if a woman abstains from drinking alcohol during pregnancy (CDC, n.d.).

While Thomas was on probation for the auto theft, he had to appear in court regularly, do community service, and follow up with his application for adult developmental disabilities services as part of his jail diversion plan. He had been fortunate to get in front of a judge who understood the many obstacles that adolescents transitioning out of foster care face. However, Thomas could not keep all his appointments straight. We tried a calendar, which worked until he lost it. So, for a while I called him the day before and the morning of his appointments to make sure he remembered. When Thomas was accepted for adult developmental disabilities services, his new social worker took over with the reminder calls. This social worker understood that this young man had a developmental disability and needed person-centered, individualized supports and services in order to get done what needed to be done.

Looking Forward: Prevention, Intervention, and Supports

In all my years of practice, I have never met a mother who wanted to harm her baby by drinking alcohol. I met Darren's mom once. According to the file, she had severe drug and alcohol addiction issues. She thanked me for tracking her down to tell her the date of the termination hearing. I still hear of pregnant women being told it is okay to have a drink occasionally by their physicians. When I do trainings with social workers and other professionals I stress we cannot blame nor shame women who take the brunt of the stigma of having "damaged" their children.

When I have talked to mothers who drank during pregnancy, I have found multiple points of concern: Many women were not educated about the impact of drinking on a developing fetus, others did not know they were pregnant for months (and so did not know to stop drinking), some were given vague advice (told it was okay to drink "once in a while," to "just not over-do it," or to only have "one drink a week" without discussing size), or were in abusive relationships (where drinking is expected). Women who drink during pregnancy come from all racial, ethnic, and age groups and socioeconomic classes (Caetano et al., 2006). As noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics (n.d.-b) in their guide on screening for prenatal alcohol exposure, most children who have been alcohol exposed go unrecognized and undiagnosed despite having severe disabilities in cognitive, social, behavioral, and adaptive functioning. If you have financial and other resources, you probably do not come to the attention of child welfare services as you can pay for private therapists and schools for your child. Many women and children are not coming to our attention if one in eight women drink during pregnancy (Denny et al., 2019) and one in 20 to one in 50 children have an FASD (May et al., 2018).

When I worked with adolescents transitioning out of foster care, I interviewed a few mothers who were still in touch with their older children in order to find out about the youths' prenatal exposure to alcohol. I remember two mothers who wanted to talk to me because they knew their children had disabilities and wanted to get them help. As we chatted, I asked them if they remembered drinking when pregnant. One mother told me she had not known she was pregnant with her son until she was about five months along and up to that point would "go out with [her] girls on Friday nights for a few drinks." Another woman told me she was so stressed by her abusive relationship and trying to figure out what she was going to do she didn't realize she was pregnant for months. No woman I have ever met decided they were going to drink to hurt their baby. Many struggle with addiction and have little access to intervention and supportive services. Because we tend to be reactive and not proactive about prevention of prenatally exposed pregnancies, we are not preparing women and men to understand how to plan for pregnancy where drinking is knowingly and intentionally stopped before attempting reproduction.

It was infrequent that I was able to meet with biological mothers when I worked with teens; most were not involved because they'd had their rights terminated, died, or had broken relationships with their families. All the mothers I assisted where an FASD was diagnosed had adopted their children, were kin providing care, or were foster parents. That is quite telling but supports what we know anecdotally: Because of the stigma and blame these women experience, we do not often identify children with FASDs in biological families. Instead, diagnoses are made when a child is already removed.

Given the seriousness of the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure, we need an intensive education program that is universal throughout our education, public health, and alcohol sales systems so that everyone knows about the dangers of prenatal alcohol exposure from an early age. There are many avenues to educate the public, but what is needed is a coordinated, intentional effort to get the word out and to ensure that health professionals are leading the campaign. The CDC funds the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Prevention program through a funded initiative of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which trains physicians to talk to their

patients about avoiding alcohol during pregnancy (ACOG, n.d.). An effective evidence-based prevention model for pregnant women struggling with alcohol use is the Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) which is cost-effective and efficient to provide (Shogren et al., 2017). However, almost half of all pregnancies (45%) in the United States are unplanned (Finer & Zolna, 2016). We don't talk about alcohol use and we certainly don't discuss having sex in the United States as part of any national conversation in our educational and health systems. Meanwhile, people are drinking and having sex, often at the same time, as they do tend to go together! Is it any wonder that we have so many alcohol-exposed babies being born? We need a full-fledged national campaign such as was done with smoking led by a national health care center with regular public messaging.

Individuals with FASDs who have solid support from families, friends, and services can live full and productive lives (Streissguth et al., 1996). Prenatal exposure to alcohol affects each person differently depending on the timing and frequency of exposure as well as other environmental and maternal factors (Mattson, et al., 2019). We know that there are several factors that can support children and adults to avoid the secondary disabilities associated with FASDs. In a groundbreaking study of 415 children and adults with FASDs, Streissguth and colleagues (2004) identified the primary and secondary disabilities and the risk and protective factors. The primary disabilities identified in this study were a lower IQ and a lower level of adaptive behavior skills functioning. Secondary disabilities are defined as conditions and situations that could be avoided or lessened with awareness and appropriate supports and services (Streissguth et al., 2004). In this study the following secondary disabilities were found:

- Disrupted school experience (61%)
- Trouble with the law (60%)
- Confinement (50%, for mental health or substance use problems or incarceration for a crime)
- Inappropriate sexual behavior (49%)
- Alcohol/drug problems (35%)

Protective factors for the secondary disabilities included:

- Living in a stable home
- Being diagnosed before age six years
- Not having experienced violence against oneself
- Being eligible for developmental disabilities services
- Having basic needs met
  (Streissguth et al., 2004)

There are several evidence-based interventions being researched and implemented such as Families Moving Forward, which now has a solid base of evidence behind it for families with children who have FASDs (Olson et al., 2009). Social skills programs have been shown to benefit children by increasing relationship-building skills and decreasing behavior problems (O'Connor et al., 2006). An interactive learning program to increase math skills has been found to raise math scores significantly by over one standard deviation in four math outcome areas

(Kable et al., 2007). Another program that uses a neurocognitive therapeutic intervention has been shown to improve executive functioning and emotional problem-solving in children with FAS and ARND (Wells et al., 2012). We need more of these kinds of evidence-based programs that can be used by families and their children; those issues (executive functioning and emotional dysregulation) can, in particular, cause families to exist in a state of chaos trying to support their children's needs but lacking the information and services to do so. Also lacking are specific FASDs-informed, evidence-based programs for older adolescents in transition from child welfare and other systems and from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Given the high rate of FASDs in child welfare systems, we must develop specific and person-centered transition processes that include a "hand-off" of adolescents to a family or adult mentor and the appropriate developmental disabilities system for continued social work and other interventions.

To those of you in the field wondering why this child, teenager, young adult is acting so weird and not responding to applied behavior analysis therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, reasoning, guilt, ADHD meds, etc., here is what I have learned from individuals with FASDs, their families, colleagues, and researchers over the past near-40 years since I met Darren. These actions can be taken in your daily professional practice and can make a profound difference in the lives of individuals with FASDs and their families. We can and must immediately weave being FASDs-informed into our professional lens when we encounter children and adults who just don't seem to "fit" the typical behavioral and developmental matrix we use. We can and must, then, do the following:

- *Find out if there was prenatal alcohol exposure*. Search for children, youth, and adults who have a history of involvement in child welfare services, juvenile justice, or criminal justice systems; have ever been homeless; or have been trafficked. If the mother is unavailable because the child is in foster care or adopted, ask someone who knew the mother during her pregnancy about her alcohol consumption in terms of amounts and frequency. Check the child's birth records and medical records. Note that as the children get older, mothers will relay their drinking history more accurately (Hannigan et al., 2010).

- *Consider screening and diagnosis*. Refer the child, youth, or adult to their physician or neurodevelopmental specialist who can use the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines to complete the Flow Diagram for Evaluation, a screening tool to identify potential FASDs (AAP, n.d.-a) and then find a resource to do the actual diagnostic evaluation if the screen is positive. Go to the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome for a list of state resources (www.nofas.org). Follow up with the family, youth, or adult to make sure they were able to make the connection.

- *Use your information*. If you do not have access to a diagnostic evaluation but know that the child was exposed prenatally to alcohol, treat the family and the child as if they have an FASD. Become informed about FASDs and share your knowledge with the family.

- *Match mentors*. Relationship building is so important. If you are working with youth and young adults who are detached from adult support, work with them to identify someone who might step into the role of a mentor and help them connect with that person. Explain to the mentor what the young person may need help with given their disability.

- *Be aware of transition times*. Pay attention to the big life moments of youth with FASDs and put into place needed supports and services as they transition into young adulthood at age 18, such as Social Security disability benefits, Medicaid, adult developmental disabilities services, relationships with at least one or two adults who can act as mentors, and a go-to person for talking out problems and celebrating the successes.

- *Stay educated*. Educate yourself and your colleagues on FASDs, evidence-based treatments, and brain-based supports for families living with a child who has an FASD. SAMSHA (2014) has a Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP 58): Addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders guide which can be ordered for free. Advocate for your agency to use the evidence-based practices described above.

- *Join NOFAS*. Consider joining the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and your local affiliate. Advocate in your state with your local NOFAS affiliate for increased awareness, education, diagnostic services, prevention programs, and supports and services for individuals with FASDs and their families across the lifespan. Visit their website for lots of great information.

- *Search locally*. Find out what your state and local area provides in terms of diagnostic evaluations, services, supports, and education. There are national speakers who will come to your state for a reasonable rate who have extensive experience and education in working with children and adults with FASDs. Contact me and I will send you their information.

- *Get involved*. The Advancing FASD Research, Prevention and Services Act was introduced in November 2019 by Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) to amend the Public Health Service Act to include $42 million for research and services grants. Get your senators to sign on to this much-needed legislation and the beginning of a national program that addresses FASDs.

Eventually, a new adoption agency stepped up to find a home for Darren; they seemed to understand that he was going to need a family who would be there for the long haul and remain in his life even with his multiple health and support needs. The adoption agency found such a family and Darren joined them as a third sibling with a mother, father, brother, and sister, all of whom had a very calm and soothing presence. And just as Streissguth and colleagues (2004) find that a stable home is one of the most protective factors against poor outcomes, Darren became calm—still energetic, but learning to control some of those impulses that as he grew older would

not be seen as *cute* but instead *criminal*.

As for Thomas, he and his girlfriend moved in together and went through several different temporary living situations until they landed in a small trailer home. They both received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) based on their disabilities. They had a baby who was soon taken into care by Child Protective Services who felt the trailer home was unsafe for a newborn. Eventually a family friend adopted the baby. Thomas and his girlfriend soon broke up and, the last I heard, he was struggling to maintain a part-time job. I think we failed Thomas and his family in that for all the services they received, none could cross over and help a couple with developmental disabilities be the parents they wanted to be while living in poverty.

We need to sound the alarm about this disorder and the costs to our communities, families, and individual lives. The patchwork of prevention and intervention services is not adequate. We all can play a role in ensuring that families and children with FASDs get what is needed to ensure maximum quality of life, including early diagnosis, evidence-based interventions, supports and services identified by families such as respite care, and supportive connections with other families. We can step up to ensure that young adults who are transitioning from child welfare services and school programs are assisted with moving to adult services. We can connect them with adults for supportive and mentoring relationships before they are left on their own to try and navigate being an adult at age 18, 19, or 20. What is needed is a national effort to focus our attention on a disorder that, despite its prevalence, is not recognized for its drastic consequences for individuals, families, and communities in financial and human costs.

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Reflections: The Relational Practice of Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: In this essay, I reflect upon how research I conducted on social service workers' transition from post-secondary education to work has influenced my approach to teaching and learning. Drawing parallels to my own transition experiences, I examine how key findings from the research—including transition being a continual process, "not knowing" being an asset, and the importance of truly "being with" others—have important implications for relational practice and pedagogy. Reflecting on my developing approach to teaching and learning, I encourage educators to rethink the importance of relational processes in educational encounters. Critically questioning our role as educators generates possibilities for social change; we can disrupt ideas about education which are taken for granted and transgress dominant ways of "being" in the classroom.

***Keywords*:** relational pedagogy, social service workers, school-to-work transition, ethics of care

I am a post-secondary educator working in a comprehensive college in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, Canada. I worked in social services before transitioning into the classroom. In this paper, I explore how my approach to teaching and learning has developed through my transitions from social service work to teaching to doctoral research and beyond. I draw primarily on key ideas that arose from social service workers' narratives on their transition from school to work that catalyzed critical examination and rethinking of the importance of relational processes in educational encounters. Relational encounters can shape social change for students, institutions, and education. Below, I discuss my research and my connection to the participants' narratives. Then I reflect on relational pedagogical processes and explore what may be made possible when educational encounters generate the potential for social change.

Researching: Exploring the Experiences of Social Service Workers

Before I began my doctoral program, I started teaching in an applied diploma program for students interested in working in social services. During this time, I was teaching and overseeing a portfolio of youth programs at a not-for-profit social service agency. Generally, social service positions—like those my students would be working toward—involve working, primarily on the front line, with children, youth, adults, and families who face multiple vulnerabilities. Distinct from social work, social service work is more explicitly multidisciplinary and less professionalized. Social service positions are often vulnerable due to government underfunding and, as they involve close relational work with individuals with complex needs, can lead to vicarious trauma, toxic stress, and burnout (Cohen & Collens, 2013). Despite my familiarity with the challenges of the work, my belief in my early days of teaching (arguably commonplace in the college environment) was that I knew what these students needed to know by virtue of my time spent working in social services. I thought that my expertise came from my professional experience and I could relay the necessary content to ensure the students had the requisite skills and competencies to be effective social service workers upon graduation. I thought the relationship between curricular content and practice skills was very straightforward.

Despite my own experience in the field, I approached my role as educator with little consideration of the importance of *relationship*; I had lost touch with the relational aspect of social service work and its importance in facilitating meaningful change. Relational practice recognizes that interactions (and interventions) occur in the spaces between us (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). That is, potential for growth exists in relationship—in the connections we create with others. Engaging in relational practice means co-constructing safe and respectful space and creating mutual relationships where we can connect, engage, and be with others (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). Relational practice involves intentionally and actively participating in the lives of others, meeting people where they are at, and "doing *with*" rather than "doing *to*" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2012). It is through this safe, mutual relationship that change occurs. While I discussed the importance of connection and relationship in my courses, my approach to teaching and learning revealed that I wasn't considering its integral role in developing social service workers. It was through my doctoral studies and dissertation research that the importance of relational practice came back into focus for me—not only for social service workers, but also for me as an educator.

Throughout my doctoral studies in education, I reflected on the purpose of education and my role as an educator. Is post-secondary education a training ground for future employment? Or is it a place to investigate and critique ideas, assumptions, and beliefs and open oneself to growth and development? Some elusive combination of the two? Am I presenting information to be internalized and applied in practice, or am I creating space where students can explore who they are and what they are bringing to their relational work with clients? Although I had been teaching in post-secondary, my examination of my role as an educator and my pedagogical approach was theoretical; learning to teach was not a part of my doctoral training (Chen et al., 2020). Instead, I experimented with various instructional techniques, collaborated with colleagues, and tried to apply my theoretical learning to practice (Oktay et al., 2013). I reflected on my role within the post-secondary system and the tensions and contradictions involved in a system with multiple and conflicting aims. I was guided by an ethic to promote student learning and, ultimately, more effective practice. I wanted to improve the experience of social service workers in their time as students, throughout their transition to work, and into their professional roles. I assumed better support would allow them to effectively care for their clients, promoting consistent relationships to provide foundation from which clients could make change. I hoped that these connections, built on respect and dignity, could culminate to promote social justice. I sought to improve employability for students but also to help them develop into self-aware, genuine practitioners.

Understanding the complexity of the educational system, the social service system, and the relationship between them seemed to bring more questions than answers. I became curious about how students experienced the neoliberal institutions of school and work and how they navigated their transition between the two. In neoliberal contexts, social functions, like education, are reduced to market transactions (Ball, 2012a) and commodified, so they can be purchased and sold for profit, like all other commodities (Ball, 2012b). Given the apparent tension between social service work (emphasizing empathy and social welfare) and neoliberal institutions (emphasizing competition, efficiency, and maximizing profit), I was interested in how social service workers navigate these systems and make sense of these tensions.

Engaged in these tensions and daunting questions about post-secondary education and work, I recognized that I wanted to find out more from students who, like mine, had transitioned into social service work. Social service workers participate in an increasingly marketized educational system that emphasizes employability and individual financial success—yet they transition into an increasingly precarious labor market (Livingstone, 2019) with high risk of burnout (Cohen & Collens, 2013). Social service work involves relational engagement with clients shaped by and situated in significant social conditions, yet this work is constrained by technocratic managerialist expectations. That is, the complex clients of social service workers are constituted in and constrained by intersecting social systems of poverty, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression that increase their risk for trauma and violence. Social service workers provide support within these oppressive systems *and* advocate for systemic change while also demonstrating (through performance measures and funding reports) how they are minimizing cost and maximizing output. Real tensions exist between the lived realities of the clients and the performance measures used to assess and evaluate the work being done with the clients. Given these tensions, how do social service workers, whose role emphasizes empathy and social welfare, navigate systems based on competition and efficiency? What do they bump up against in their transition from school to work? How do they see, know, and describe themselves as "students" and "workers," and how do they enact various identities across social, political, and institutional contexts?

To explore their experience, I engaged in a series of interviews with five social service workers who identified themselves as new to the field. The five participants—whom I have called Elizabeth, Carolyn, Hannah, Alison, and Matthew—worked in various not-for-profit social service agencies across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia with distinct mandates and different client groups. The agencies differed in size, funding, organizational culture, and approach, and the participants held various positions within these agencies. These positions involved relief/on-call, contract, and part- and full-time positions working with school-age children, youth, and adults facing various challenges, including substance use, mental health concerns, homelessness, trauma, learning challenges, cognitive delays, and criminal justice involvement.

In my interviews with these participants, I positioned my work within critical narrative inquiry, where I saw the narrative and the narrator as co-constituted and dynamic and recognized the power of the stories to disrupt hegemonic narratives (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2013). At the initial interview, we discussed the participant's current employment, educational trajectory, and their transition experiences. Then, drawing from the audio recording of our interview, my field notes, and my written reflections on the interview, I created a written narrative account that I shared with the participant at our next meeting. The narrative account was a re-storied version of our conversation, including my responses after the fact. The narrative account provided the basis for the next interview, allowing the participant to discuss in more detail any areas they felt were pertinent; this discussion then became the next co-created narrative account, and so on.

In repeated listenings of the audio recordings and in the co-creation of the series of narrative accounts, I connected affectively with the participants' commitment and passion for improving the lives and conditions of those they work with. I listened as each participant described

situations where their clients were discarded, ignored, or mistreated and how they intervened to advocate for the clients' needs. I was moved and inspired by participants' descriptions of their work and their approach to building therapeutic relationships. For example, Carolyn discussed finding strength in the hard moments with the young people she worked with. She described sitting with a youth who was distraught and had nowhere to go, listening to and honoring his experience. In that moment, "being *with*" took precedence over problem-solving. I found myself relating to the participants. Hannah discussed feeling frustrated by what she perceived to be a lack of respect from colleagues because she was young and new to the field; as she spoke, that same feeling of frustration bubbled within me as I remembered very similar experiences when I began working in social services. I could feel the tensions the participants described navigating as they attempted to balance relational work with the technocratic expectations of the agencies they work within. For example, both Hannah and Alison discussed feeling the need to justify their work through formalized paperwork—and reported that it did not capture the relational nature of their practice. Ironically, Matthew stated that completing paperwork *detracted* from time with clients.

Despite the challenges, I felt the participants' strength in maintaining hope and celebrating incremental progress while feeling defeated by the enormity of social injustice. Alison articulated the tension she felt in celebrating youth's safety when they were at her center while also recognizing that the rest of their days were marked with the risk of violence and trauma. She felt like no matter what she did, it was never enough. I felt, in the participants' stories, how power worked both on and through them as they performed their roles, toward the ideal of a social service worker, while also resisting and resignifying what their roles meant (for complete analysis, see Dougherty, 2019). I also found myself caught up in the affective intensities of their experiences of transition and of relational practice; their stories stuck with me and I found myself thinking about and thinking through some of their ideas that had both surprised and inspired me.

The key ideas from the narratives that I want to highlight for the purposes of this essay have important implications for relational practice and pedagogy and are interrelated: Transition is not a distinct event but a continual process, "not knowing" is an asset in relational work, and relational work involves truly "being with" others.

First, the participants discussed transition as ongoing. Transition was not a distinct stage (Ashton & Ashton, 2016) between school and work: School, work, and transition existed together in dynamic arrangements. For the social service workers, their relational work is continual transition—their clients, their material conditions, the agency, the social environment, frameworks for addressing client needs, and the social service workers themselves are in a process of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Becoming is an ongoing transition. It is an unfinalizable process, involving the "replacement of static conceptions of things through the creation of dynamic conceptions of processes in continual transition" (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). The social service workers discuss this ongoing navigation as feeling "in-between" (Carolyn) and being a state of "still figuring it out" (Hannah), recognizing that they themselves and the expectations of their role are continually developing. For example, Carolyn articulates transition as ongoing questions about her self, her role, and her future:

> My story seems to show some ambivalence about what my future will hold and shows that I still have a lot of questions—what will my future hold? What does it mean to be a professional? I think it shows that transition can be a struggle but if you work hard, eventually you will be going through it.

It is interesting that in her reflection, Carolyn noted transition not as something that is completed (you get through it) but ongoing (you will be going through it).

Second, given this context of ongoing transition, the social service workers highlighted the importance of uncertainty, recognizing that they are not in an expert role, and embracing "not knowing." As their clients, themselves, their role, the expectations of the role, knowledge about therapeutic relationships, and the social environment are continually developing, the social service workers are always learning. They are not entering their role as experts who impose their agenda on their clients; they embrace "not knowing" and seek to understand by building and nurturing relationships with others. For Hannah, although she recognizes she likes to have all the answers, it is not necessary for her role:

> Expertise may be a personal thing for me. That may be me searching to be really good at something. Or wanting to have all the answers because I'm new. It is important to me but isn't really important to the job. It is important to just be present and give it your all.

Hannah highlights that she doesn't need to pressure herself to be the expert; instead, she emphasizes the importance of being present in relational practice, something that *is* needed to foster deep relationships.

Lastly, coming into their working relationships with clients from this place of "not knowing" allowed social service workers to truly "be with" their clients, to meet them where they were at, seek to understand their experience, and be awake and alert to emergent possibilities. To truly "be with" another involves bringing one's genuine self to the relationship, recognizing the dignity and humanity of the other, and attending to the other with empathy. Alison articulately explained her approach with her youth clients who struggle with addiction, mental health, and homelessness:

> That mindset of "not knowing" takes the pressure off needing to have answers to huge structural and social problems that don't currently have answers. I work through the problem on a case-by-case basis, in terms of "where can I get a meal?" and it makes it more tangible. School has a very grand focus on social justice and it is humbling to recognize that making tea and checking in with someone while they watch cartoons is an act of social justice because no one else is checking in with them to see if they're okay. Recognizing that each youth is worthy of respect and dignity. I think it does make a difference. It is really just about seeing people and attending to them. (Alison)

Alison highlights the humility involved in "not knowing" and embracing uncertainty. Alison does not enter relationships with her clients as an expert or move into interventions that may or

may not be helpful; she meets the client where they are and treats them with respect and dignity. She attends to them and ensures, in tangible ways in that moment, that they are okay. Alison's approach allows her to really see her clients and attend to them, allowing opportunities to emerge from their encounter. These ideas of continual becoming, embracing "not knowing," and truly "being with" others and the emergent opportunities that arise from those encounters stuck with me as a way of being.

In the following sections, I reflect on how these relate to who I am—as a person and as an educator—and how I understand teaching and learning. I think these reflections may catalyze other educators to reflect on their own relational practice in the classroom, and beyond. I also explore how a relational pedagogy may catalyze broader social change.

Connecting: Seeing Myself in the Participant Narratives

I learned a great deal in researching the experiences of social service workers, and I found parallels between my participants' experiences and in my own. Recognizing these parallels helped me translate my learning into my approach to teaching and learning, which I discuss after exploring these parallels.

First, I recognized that, like my participants, I was (and still am) in a process of continual transformation. I did not experience distinct stages of post-secondary education, transition, and work; instead, my doctoral studies and my work in social services and in teaching in post-secondary existed together, co-constituting, intertwined, and informing one another. I recognized that I experienced and performed a multiplicity of roles, and that I, too, bumped up against tensions between these roles. I had to navigate the relational needs of my students in their learning with the technocratic requirements of the institution. I had to work within educational policies that didn't adequately account for the lived experiences of the students. I had to find ways to creatively account for these realities within narrow assessment and reporting requirements. I had to perform toward what was expected of me in my roles—both as doctoral student and as post-secondary educator—while determining how I could resignify those roles to do meaningful, intentional work with students. That is, how could I work both within and against the dominant roles of doctoral student and educator to truly "be with" students? As a becoming-researcher, my understandings of knowledge and what is *possible* to know transformed. I was studying transition while in transition—exploring the participants' becomings while I was "becoming with the data" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 265). My understanding of transition was thus informed by my own ongoing transition, and my becoming was shaped by my involvement in the research and my participants' narratives of becoming. I was made different by my interactions with the participants; our conversations and co-constructed narratives continued to help me think differently, long after the interviews themselves had ended.

Second, within this process of becoming, I found I had much to grasp. Paradoxically, the more I learned about education, pedagogy, social service work, relational practice, and research, the more I realized how little I knew. My process of becoming involved embracing "not knowing," deconstructing my own assumptions about what was right and true, and allowing myself to

engage in an ongoing process of seeking to understand. I could focus on critically questioning what I thought I knew and open myself to other perspectives, experiences, and ideas. I reassessed my ideas of expertise. Rather than seeing "not knowing" as a deficit or detriment, I found it offered a generative way of approaching the world. Knowledge itself is undergoing continual transition, so, while I can keep learning and growing, I will never be finished. I can never truly "know." Becoming involves ongoing development; I learned—and continue to learn—through my interactions with (among others) teachers, doctoral students, colleagues, scholars, friends, and my students. As a becoming-researcher, I critiqued my initial idea of researching gaps in competencies and adjusting curriculum to fill those gaps. This deficit-focused intervention approach failed to account for the complexity of learning, becoming, and relational practice involved in social service work. As a becoming-educator, I questioned my original focus on content and curriculum and presenting information as an expert. I thought I could fill students with the information needed to be effective practitioners; once they had the necessary knowledge and competencies, they would be ready. I failed to account for the dynamism of these individuals, their clients, the agencies they work within, the knowledge they use, and the relationships they build as the foundation of their work. After hearing from the social service workers, I recognized how my approach to knowing did not honor the importance of relationship in our encounters. Their emphasis on truly being with their clients, in a genuine and meaningful way, made me stop and consider how I was coming into educational encounters.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what really stuck with me from the participants' narratives was the importance of being present and "being with" others. As Hannah and Alison highlight in the discussion above, it is important that we truly see people and attend to them; for Alison, this was integral to treating clients with respect and dignity. The participants' discussions of relational practice—bringing their genuine self into relationship with others and meeting people where they are at—awakened me to the fact that, although I discussed the importance of relational practice with students, my approach to research and my approach to teaching revealed that I was not practicing it. I focused my teaching on content acquisition (assessed through traditional measures) without considering the individual integration of the material. I expected students to enter the classroom motivated and engaged, academically and digitally literate; I wasn't aware of the complex interaction of factors that could affect a student's approach to learning. I didn't attend to the relationality of myself and my students or the learning process. The participant narratives highlighted to me that the assumptions embedded in my transactional approach to teaching and learning, my approach as the expert, and my attempts to fill student deficits with knowledge and skills were antithetical to relational work. Instead, as I would do in social service work, I needed to come into encounters with others with humility, vulnerability, and an openness to what may emerge. This requires the strength to embrace unknowability and to enter relationships (with students and others) with a willingness to learn. I had to recognize the power involved in assuming an expert role and attempt to mediate that power by creating genuine relationships with my students. I had to go in as learner, working alongside my students, with creativity and curiosity. Most importantly, I had to recognize that my students were not all in the same place in terms of their own becoming—that I had to try to meet each one where they were at for learning to be meaningful.

As seen, my encounters with my participants and the narratives we co-constructed had

significant impacts on how I saw myself, my roles, and my way of approaching the world. I then reflected on how what I had learned from my participants altered my understanding of teaching and learning.

Reflecting: Rethinking Relational Processes of Teaching and Learning

The ideas that resonated for me from the participants' narratives led me to reflect on teaching and learning as a relational process. To me, recognizing we (students and educators alike, as well as the arrangements we are constituted within) are in a process of ongoing transformation alters the way I approach my role in the classroom. In this process of becoming with my students, I try to embrace "not knowing" and the vulnerability involved in taking risks and come into teaching and learning encounters in a genuine way—to be with others, to truly see them and attend to them. I believe this creates the potential for the learning encounter to emerge in unexpected ways. This is relational pedagogy: Relational pedagogy recognizes that we exist in relationship. Relation, not the individual, is the basis of our existence.

Recognizing the importance of relation and our connections to one another, being ethical involves caring (Noddings, 2013). Ethics of care is rooted in feminist traditions, examining the role of biological sex in moral development and caregiving behaviors (Gilligan, 1982) and reconceptualising notions of the public and private spheres (Held, 2006). An ethics of care emphasizes caring encounters—interactions where we are open to sharing, understanding, and reflecting upon the experience of the other and putting our energy towards their needs (Noddings, 2013). Caring encounters involve connection and reciprocity; although each encounter may involve one "caring-for" and one "cared-for," the one caring-for derives recognition from the cared-for (Noddings, 2013). The one caring-for doesn't enter the encounter for their own benefit yet still derives something from the encounter. Both the cared-for and the caring-for leave the encounter different than they were before. As well, roles of caring and being cared for are fluid and relational; in some encounters we are the carer and others the one receiving care (Noddings, 2013). Caring in relationships is the foundation of teaching and learning.

Examining the ethics of care in an educational environment means creating open dialogue with students, communicating with an intent to understand, and building a connection that promotes reciprocal learning and growth. Drawing on Freire's emancipatory education, relational pedagogy involves *being with*, not *doing to* (Pearce & Down, 2011). This involves starting where the students are—meeting them where they are at—and building "relational trust" (Pearce & Down, 2011, p. 491). Caring relationships influence teaching, learning, engagement, and success. Students have positive relationships with educators who are approachable, who make time, and who are there for their students, in essence, those educators who make students feel cared for. Having positive relations with professors and staff in educational environments helps students feel like they belong (Pearce & Down, 2011), promoting engagement and student success.

As a teacher, I now go into each teaching/learning encounter cognizant that the classroom experience, and the enacted curriculum, emerges through interactions. Material agents—such as

our physical space, chairs, tables, and the smell of whiteboard markers—contribute to how the encounter emerges. I attend to our affective connection and the learning process as it emerges. I recognize the potential of our caring encounter and I explicitly challenge the idea (with my students) that I am in charge of what happens within the class. Rather than only working towards institutionally defined learning outcomes for each course, I try to find new, thoughtful ways to explore learning. For me, this exploration might involve being open to learning in the moment (both by me and by my students), examining learning that happened in the past and which can only be recognized retrospectively, and forecasting learning as it may happen in the future. I work within (and against) the structures and constraints of the institution to attend to the relational processes that are emerging.

From the beginning of our time together, I articulate to my students how I see my role as educator, my beliefs about teaching and learning, and my intended goals for our shared time. That is, in my initial class with students (and on the course syllabus), I share these foundational, yet often hidden, aspects of my approach to our time together. I explain to students that I enter my role as a learner, not expert, and I highlight the need for risk, vulnerability, and "not knowing" for all of us in the learning encounter. We discuss that openness, flexibility, and courage are necessary in breaking down our assumptions and expanding our perspectives. Embracing uncertainty allows me to truly be with my students—the essence of relational work. While I have a lesson plan for each class, I meet the students where they are at and allow the lesson to develop based on our interactions. I am intentional in being genuine and humble in entering the classroom as a learner; I recognize and articulate to the students how sharing their experiences, history, culture, beliefs, and values offers rich learning for us all. I seek to understand students' perspectives and experiences and to create an affective connection that facilitates growth. I show my students care as they need to experience being cared for before they can care about others (Noddings, 2013).

Rather than encouraging students to be vulnerable and take risks that promote learning, I attempt to embody vulnerability and risk-taking as a learner. This could be as simple as recognizing when I don't know the answer to a student's question and suggesting we figure it out together as a class. Or it could involve critically examining some of the educational policies that shape our time together. While this does not alter power differentials in the classroom (which I believe are inherent, given the grading expectations and neoliberal adherence to competition in post-secondary institutions), it can provide an opportunity to talk about how power flows in the classroom and how people are differentially affected. Parallels can then be drawn with how power flows in social service work.

Building on our affective connection, I discuss my goals for our learning encounter. While I am constrained by content-related course objectives, I primarily emphasize developing creative and critical thinking rather than the memorization of course content or the accumulation of specific marketable skills. I want students to learn to evaluate information, problem-solve novel situations, and demonstrate creativity and imagination in innovating new approaches and interventions. I want students to be able to uncover why things are the way they are and offer new possibilities for the future. I can explore concepts and ideas, opening up new ways of thinking and new questions that can be asked rather than presenting content as fact. This may

involve critically deconstructing the social, historical, economic, and cultural contexts within which the information we are discussing has taken shape. For example, in various courses we may critically examine the diagnostic criteria for mental disorders or the patriarchal, Eurocentric underpinnings of developmental theories. We explore these concepts and ideas together so students can then apply these tools and theories intentionally in their practice, thoughtfully using them in helpful ways while being aware of their potential to reproduce inequity and injustice. Critically engaging with material leads me to attend to how learning is emerging throughout our encounter and to finding creative and varied ways for students to demonstrate their learning.

Awareness of continual transition and transformation leads me, in my work with students, to focus on the learning process. As a new educator, I focused primarily on content, delivering curriculum, and using various assessment techniques to determine student understanding of the required content. With greater reflection upon relational pedagogy, I now attend to the dynamic process of our learning encounter and try to see it from students' eyes. I use regular verbal and written check-ins, elicit formative and summative feedback individually and in groups, and ask students to share their experiences of their learning in various ways. These techniques vary in the time and energy required and the depth of information they elicit. Very brief check-ins with students can offer a climate check on what is happening in the classroom. For example, at the end of class, I may ask students to write one word to represent their experience for that class. This provides me with valuable information on how the students are experiencing the environment, learning process, and content, and it allows me to address obstacles as they arise. For more in-depth information, I ask students for written anonymous feedback on instructional approaches and coursework, as well as meet with students individually to invite them to share their experiences. Engaging with students throughout the learning process allows for the sharing of experiences that promote positive relationships. In addition, I can gather meaningful and helpful feedback to shape my approach to the course. This information helps me recognize the complexity of the students in their varied relationships and how they experience them, especially within the classroom, which influences their becoming; in short, I can better meet them where they are.

With my focus on emergent learning processes and meeting students where they are, I have changed my approach to assessment. When I approached my class as "expert," I regularly used quizzes, tests, and term papers as means to assess how the students had understood, synthesized, and connected the curriculum. Now, I find myself seeking out creative and varied ways for the students to demonstrate their learning. I recognize that the skills traditionally required to demonstrate learning (i.e., academic literacy and now, during the global pandemic, digital literacy) through quizzes and papers are not similarly developed in all of my students. While my students may have achieved significant learning, they may not be able to express this learning as well as other students through traditional means of assessment. I have experimented with allowing students to choose how to demonstrate their learning and have been inspired by their creativity and hard work—I have received excellent podcasts, multimedia art pieces, and presentations. I have received a screenplay, in which one of the scholars we studied became a major character. Another student choreographed and presented a dance piece demonstrating her changing understanding of the research process. The demonstration of learning through these non-traditional means is amazing and rewarding to witness.

Reflecting: Lessons Learned, Risks, and Challenges

I reflected on my learning from my research with social service workers to develop meaningful teaching and learning practices, including building affective, caring connections with students; attending to the emergent learning process; and seeking out creative means of assessment. For me, these elements are intertwined and co-constitute one another. By attending to the learning process, I am also able to build better relationships with students; these relationships enable students to take risks and engage in creative forms of assessment. Being creative with assessment promotes the development of learning encounters in unforeseen ways. Together, these integral elements allow the learning encounter to take on a life of its own. Not knowing how things will develop may make educators nervous and allowing encounters to emerge is not without risk. Educators may be concerned that the encounter will go off topic or, worse, move into sensitive areas that may be harmful for some students. We need to be aware and prepared for our learning to move in unexpected directions and to be okay with reining things in to get back on track. I argue that we also need to recognize that avoiding sensitive areas is unhelpful for learning and, while risky, exploring sensitive topics in a way that recognizes the need for safety allows students to critically examine their own assumptions and promotes greater understanding and empathy. In my experience, sometimes differences of opinion, insensitivities, and miscommunication can rupture relationships in the classroom. This is an opportunity to work collaboratively with students to model the importance of repair and to connect this process of rupture and repair to their relationships as social service workers.

As educators, we have likely experienced learning encounters. However, we cannot predict when together we will share, discuss, or debate ideas in a way that makes us, as co-learners in the classroom, recognize our assumptions, wrestle with new ideas, and think differently than we had before. We cannot predict when new connections are made, illuminating new understandings of how things are and how they could be. For me, I often recognize after class that things went in an unexpected and highly generative direction and I find myself trying to replay what catalyzed the encounter. These encounters emerge out of the dynamic arrangements of the classroom—human and material—and while they cannot be forced or predicted, we, as becoming-educators, can work from an ethics of care, attend to the class, and be open to what may emerge.

Generating: What May Be Possible in Educational Encounters?

I recognize that in my becoming from social service work to post-secondary educator to doctoral student and onward, my work was grounded in a desire to make things better. As stated, I wanted to better prepare students to practice as social service workers so they would be more effective in supporting positive change in their clients, their communities, and the wider world. Through my engagement with my participants, and finding parallels in their narratives and mine, I recognized that making things better does not mean transmitting practice competencies to social service workers as they move through the assembly line of their educational trajectory. Making things better means, through relationship, providing space for students to critically examine themselves, their knowledge, and their approach to working with others. Relational pedagogy allows students to experience what it means to be cared for and to care for others.

Relational pedagogy and working from an ethics of care is more important than ever, as we face a global pandemic that is disproportionately killing vulnerable people (the elderly, the poor, people of color who have been denied the basic social determinants of health). In addition to anxiety regarding the virus itself, the impacts of the virus—mental health concerns, unemployment, homelessness, increasing divisiveness over how to respond to the pandemic—include isolation and hopelessness. We are increasingly disconnected and devalued. Like many others, I have started to explore and experiment with relational pedagogy in virtual spaces. How can we, as educators and as social service workers, engage the virtual spaces between us to do meaningful work?

Further work is necessary in the investigation of transition from school to work as a process of becoming. A new conceptualization of transition promotes different questions and approaches in research on students, educators, and institutions and how transition experiences fit within broader frameworks of education, work, and what it means to live a good life. It would be generative to explore students' experiences of school/work as connected and ongoing aspects of their lives. What motivations and intentions shape these school/work experiences? What alternate discourses—transgressing dominant discourses—do students draw on to make sense of their school/work experience? Research could also examine educators and how, in their institutionalized role, they may unwittingly reproduce neoliberal discourses and promote deficit-focused concepts of students that reproduce inequality. How are educators constituted and constrained within their role and what tensions do they experience working within their post-secondary institution? How are neoliberal discourses filtered down through institutions and how do educators experience these discourses? How are educators disrupting expectations of competition and traditional notions of "success"? How might educators critically examine the complexity of relationships between school and work with students? How might educators explore ideas of meaningful or democratized work? How are educators' implicit conceptualizations of "success" shaping their teaching/learning approaches? Are there tensions between student and educator ideals of success?

While it may be unrealistic to think teaching and learning could be completely transformed by building affective connections with students and attending to the emergent learning process, there may be hegemonic practices that can be altered or disrupted. Hegemonic practices—those dominant ways of thinking, being, and doing in the classroom that largely go unexamined—include viewing teachers as experts who transmit knowledge to be internalized by students, who are then assessed, graded, and ranked. Other dominant views include assuming students should be adequately prepared (as readers, writers, digital learners, etc.) and that lack of ability equates to laziness or lack of motivation. Another hegemonic practice is following a structured or pre-designed course framework (without allowing influence from the students involved) or believing that learning outcomes can be set before a course begins. While being aware of and attending to my approach to teaching and learning will not transform education and facilitate significant social change, I believe it can disrupt dominant practices and the status quo; questioning values, discourses, beliefs, and practices which are taken for granted provides a spark of potential. Although this rupture may quickly be subsumed within the way things have always been, these moments produce the possibility for change. Strom and Martin (2013) describe the power of disrupting dominant thought in their project, where they engage with their

own reproduction of neoliberal ideology in the classroom. They explain that "in that moment of escape, that line of flight, the world changes infinitesimally—in some small way, from that 'deviant' interaction/moment, our brains have changed, *we* have changed" (Strom & Martin, 2013, p. 229). That is, when we experience a learning encounter that disrupts hegemonic ideals of teaching and learning and allows us to escape from dominant practices, we are changed. We leave that encounter different than we were before. As these disruptions and escapes will always be subsumed within the status quo, Strom and Martin (2013) recommend actively seeking daily disruptions in dominant thinking, being, and doing. It is through the repeated escape that infinitesimal changes to ourselves, our students, and the world create the momentum for significant social change. Barad (2007) argues that "the world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting" (p. x). As teacher, educators, and students, we have an important role in contributing to the remaking of the world, within our classrooms, in each moment.

If the "possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting," there is great opportunity in educational encounters (Barad, 2007, p. x). These encounters can change us, our students, our institutions, and the world more broadly. It is through our connections and the space between us that the potential for change exists. As always becoming-educators, we can attend to these connections and the potentiality for change in hopes of facilitating encounters that disrupt hegemonic practices. These ongoing disruptions change us and allow us to enter future encounters differently. Through reflections on the experiences of new social service workers, I was inspired to re-examine my own relational approach to teaching and learning. I take this learning forward to seek connections and disruptions, and to remake the world, in every encounter (Barad, 2007).

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Reflections on Teaching Orthodox Jewish Social Work Students from an Asian Educator

Donna S. Wang

Abstract: Many fundamental religious beliefs are often posited to be contrary to social work values and ethics. Although work has been done to develop acceptable balance and boundaries, mostly within the Christian faith, less conceptualization has been done with Orthodox Jewish social workers. My reflection describes both experiences and cognitive processes faced by me as an Asian social work educator teaching Orthodox Jews. Internal conflicts—as well as strategies for trust-building and honoring diversity—are discussed, with implications for social work education and practice offered.

***Keywords*:** diversity, inclusion, religion, social work education, values

My first full-time academic appointment was with a Jewish-sponsored institution in New York City. Although the college was quite diverse, it largely served individuals who were Orthodox Jewish. Being from the Philadelphia area, I grew up with many people that were Jewish. I had several friends that were Jewish, I had been to synagogue and Jewish holiday celebrations and, at the time, I was in a seven-year-long relationship with a person who was Jewish. However, I had absolutely no exposure to or knowledge of Orthodox Judaism (not even in the movies!). It was a whole other "ball of wax" for me. When I took this job, many of my Jewish friends took time to explain aspects of Orthodox Judaism to me. I remember learning at that time that married women wore wigs or had their hair otherwise covered. I was quickly educated about the importance of certain Jewish holidays, the community, and the multifaceted role of the rabbi. For example, some people requested permission from their rabbis to attend college. I was very unfamiliar with many traditions, customs, and practices, but I found that I quickly adapted to working with them.

One thing I didn't foresee was that I often found myself educating other people about my work. When friends and family found out that a large majority of my social work students were Orthodox Jewish, they were immediately intrigued. They asked several questions about my experiences: How do you handle (x)? What have you learned? How does this differ from teaching other students? Do they consider you an outsider? How do you earn their trust? These questions—and how often I was asked them by both non-observant Jews and others—are what prompted me to write this reflection, so that I may share my experiences with a larger audience. I hope that it is helpful to those working with individuals that are Orthodox or with other groups that may be culturally different from one's self.

When I say "different," I suppose I should describe where I come from first. I am second-generation American, with immigrant parents from Taiwan. I would categorize myself as liberal, both politically and personally. And although I strongly believe in universal interconnectedness, I highly value self-determination and individualization in terms of expression and choice. Some of these values and characteristics can highly conflict with Jewish

law. Abortion and homosexuality are not allowed within Orthodox communities. There are highly defined gender roles, norms, and expectations within Orthodox Jewish communities that may be perceived as limiting self-determination and free will. For example, generally, women and men are expected to marry at a very young age and immediately produce large families. And while legal, divorce can be frowned upon and difficult to obtain, especially if the husband does not approve.

It should be noted that some of these tenets are certainly not exclusive to Orthodox Jews and there are many other groups that also hold common values. Working with students with conservative views is not uncommon in social work, but perhaps more magnified with a population such as Orthodox Jews, especially since practitioners can be visibly identified.

Something guided me whenever I felt unsure or nervous about approaching a situation: a statement from a dear friend and colleague of mine, who happens to be an Orthodox Jew. He stated, "As humans, there are more commonalities that bind us than make us different." The depth of the human experience is rich. We all inherently want to be happy, be loved, and do the right thing. With that as a basic foundation and understanding of human behavior, we can find various ways to relate to those we perceive as "different" and "separate" from us, recognizing that nothing is further from the truth.

Going In...

With any culture you are unfamiliar with, you want to get as much information as you can and try to prepare ahead of time. I asked numerous questions of my incoming colleagues regarding what was acceptable and what wasn't. I was receptive to any tips and suggestions that would help build trusting relationships. I was advised to not send emails on Friday night or Saturday due to the Sabbath. Though not required, I always wore clothing that covered my shoulders and my knees. Interestingly, this did not go unnoticed. I remember a parent of a student coming up to me after graduation to thank me, and to acknowledge that I always dressed in a way that was respectful to their culture (and I always earned points whenever they found out I make matzo ball soup on a regular basis!!).

Teaching has similarities with social work practice. It has been noted that some Orthodox women have expressed distrust of non-Orthodox social workers, while others have stated they would be willing to see one if that social worker was knowledgeable and sensitive to their lifestyles and values (Ringel, 2007). Thinking back, maybe they were accepting of me because I made many attempts to show that I respected and cared about their beliefs. Although I think I was successful in creating a trust that I respected their customs and values, I don't think I was (nor did I expect to be) fully "accepted."

I recall one time I brought in pastries for the end of the semester. Although I could have just gone with some packaged baked goods from the grocery store with the Parve or Kosher symbols, I went out of my way to a special kosher bakery within the Orthodox community. (This, of course, cost more money and more time—even more so considering I didn't have a car then.) On the bakery package was a sticker indicating approval from certain rabbis. When I brought in the

pastries, many students just happily took from the box. There was one student, however, who wanted to check the sticker. In total honesty, I had several immediate internal reactions to this, most notably to take it personally that she did not trust me—*Does she think I'm stupid? Does she know how much work I went through to get these this morning?* This, of course, was most likely not the reality: She just felt the need to be reassured. From a social work standpoint, it was actually a way of building trust and, as a social worker, I should be relieved that I was able to meet her needs. This was my final assessment of the situation. The truth is, I would never fully understand Orthodox Jewish culture without growing up in it or being immersed in it. And although I respected their values and beliefs, I wouldn't choose some of them for myself (more on this later). So, I tried to be realistic about—and satisfied with—this semi-acceptance that would be sufficient to achieve our teaching and learning goals.

Getting Used to Culture

"There are some things you don't know, but you don't know it." This is how I felt when I was working with an Orthodox student on her topic of "at-risk youth." With my background as a juvenile probation officer, to me this meant youth who may be truant, abused, using substances, or involved in criminal activity. In conversing with this student, I approached her and her topic from this definition in mind. She kept looking at me strangely. After several minutes of a conversation that neither one of us was following, she finally stated: "When we say at-risk, we mean at-risk for leaving the community, which may include some of those behaviors, but not always." I would call this a lightbulb moment for me, and it is one experience that really made me question my assumptions. I bit my tongue to not explain to her what the social work definition and literature was around at-risk youth, but instead silently agreed to share this term with her.

I was constantly surprised by some behaviors and hoped that I did not show it. For example, on a very hot day, I walked into the classroom to find one of the students standing on a windowsill trying to open a window. I laughed and said, "It certainly is a hot one today." This student, who seemed to be on the less-conservative side, responded, "Oh, yes, it makes you want to make sure you are wearing as little clothes as possible." I was somewhat intrigued to hear this, as Orthodox women wear long sleeves and pantyhose all year round and have their hair covered. My gut reaction was that her wish would be granted if she wasn't Orthodox, and I then read into it slightly: *Is she trying to tell me that she wishes that she wasn't Orthodox?* Reflecting on this, I realize that these were all my biases, and just an example of what I mentioned earlier: Some of their customs and traditions would not be what I would choose for myself.

As we know, it is all about exposure. Those growing up in New York City are quite familiar with Orthodox Jews. For me growing up outside of Philadelphia, seeing Amish people was common. I was very used to their dress and seeing their horse and buggies. I recall a few years ago a person newly exposed to the Amish commented, "They really dress differently, don't they?" Because I was so used to it, I never thought about it that way. I realized that this is also how it was for me with Orthodox Jews. At first, to me it was very "foreign," however if I had been exposed to their way of dress at a younger age as I was the Amish, it would have been more in my frame of reference. I know this sounds simplistic, but for some reason this was a

profound realization for me.

Dealing with Sensitive Topics

When addressing sensitive topics, it is important to incorporate a value-sensitive approach. For example, I reassured students that I was not there to change their minds about certain issues, such as homosexuality. There were always signs of relief in the room when they realized that there was not going to be a philosophical debate or challenge. It was not about personal beliefs, but rather the profession's stance on the issues and how the students were required to suspend personal beliefs in order to show up for the client. Like all social workers, we must all check ourselves at the door and suspend any of our biases to work effectively with clients. This is the goal, and the competency that we need to work towards. Competency is also a core value of the profession's code of ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 2017), and we need to ensure not that the students align with certain beliefs, but have skills to competently work with clients. This idea has been reinforced working with other conservative perspectives, such as the message to Christians to "love the sinner, hate the sin" (Chonody et al., 2013). Now, these value conflicts between personal and professional self are not exclusive to religious social workers. I can imagine, for example, that there are doctors who may experience some conflict between the medical code of ethics and their own values when treating a terminal patient. We must continue to teach students how to make ethical decisions based on ethical decision-making models.

With clients engaged in behaviors I might not necessarily agree with, one of my jobs is to educate the client, outlining the pros and cons and the consequences of said behaviors. However, ultimately, it is up to them to make the choice (remember, I value self-determination) and face any possible repercussions. For example, as social workers, it is our job to educate parents about the laws and norms of this country regarding corporal punishment and to provide alternate ways of parenting and parent education. We also try to work with the children to ensure a safety plan and coping mechanisms. However, if the parent does not accept this, barring any immediate harm, it is not the social worker's responsibility. Using ethno-cultural-religious factors as part of the therapeutic process is a value-sensitive approach (Sweifach & Heft-LaPorte, 2007). We need to acknowledge cultural norms. We need to respect that everyone around the client may have certain values or act in a certain way, and that going contrary to that way may result in challenges. From an ethical standpoint, we examine relevant personal, societal, agency, client, and professional values (Congress, 2000). For example, if a person was in a domestic violence situation, but did not want to disclose it because of expected shame from the community—like encouragement to stay in the relationship at all costs—the social worker would need to weigh the competing interests to determine the course of action. In a situation where domestic violence is disclosed by a client who is Orthodox, the social worker may consider the community's strong desire to keep the family together, but also must incorporate social work values and ethics to ensure safety and confidentiality. The social worker might need to address different issues than if the client was not Orthodox. When considering all dimensions involved, there may or may not be an ethical dilemma. I don't think that ethical dilemmas differ for this group, but there are different contexts and cultural factors to weigh.

As tough as this kind of realization is sometimes for social workers, this value-sensitive

approach ensures that the social worker does not attempt to promote change that is contrary to the client's beliefs, values, and community (Grodner & Sweifach, 2004). Further, it may actually help to strengthen their identity and belonging to their community (Grodner & Sweifach, 2004) in a way that is empowering. A person's values, religion, and beliefs can be a strength that social workers need to embrace and enhance.

Although value-sensitive approaches are necessary, we still want all social workers to engage in critical thinking and anti-oppressive practices. This presents a challenge for educators. Our goal of consciousness-raising, necessary for anti-oppressive practice, often comes into conflict with fundamentalist beliefs and values which demand adherence to strict guidelines that do not invite critical thinking (Todd & Coholic, 2007). This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges for all involved. I believe that this is why extreme Orthodox need permission from their rabbis to pursue a secular education: The rabbi wants to ensure that a person is strongly rooted enough in their faith to not possibly be swayed by alternative ways of thinking or processing information. To balance this, my approach has always been to leave the thinking to the student. I may introduce them to a concept or a topic—but I never personalize it. I made it external to them: "What if a client…?" Within these approaches and ways of thinking, the students were able to view the situations objectively. The critical thinking was left to them. If we engage students/clients in a process of reflection and questioning instead of telling them what to think, they are more likely to integrate anti-oppressive theory with their lives and practice (Todd & Coholic, 2007). For example, as a field liaison, I remember talking with a student who was placed in a school setting. She couldn't get past the idea that "children should be with their mothers." I asked her, "What if this wasn't the safest place for them?" I believe she understood my point; I could see her struggle with the answer and I let her do so. I explored with her what it meant for her that families stay together at all costs. I didn't ask her for her final answer, but rather let it all germinate. I don't think she changed her mind that "children need their mothers," but I do believe she was at least aware that there are other options. To me, this was progress. I believe the seed was planted; although she may not fully believe alternative solutions were acceptable, she learned that, at times, these solutions were at least an option.

So, this is where I leave it. I no longer live in New York City nor directly work with students that are Orthodox Jewish, but I am so grateful that I had this opportunity. I know there is so much more to do and so much more for me to develop in terms of my own teaching and cultural competence, and so these valuable experiences and lessons will serve me for the rest of my career. It ultimately made me a better educator with a deeper understanding of inclusion and more awareness and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity. But my ultimate lesson and realization from this experience is different than what I thought going in, which was that *this group is so different from me.* I learned my first day of my Human Behavior in the Social Environment course during my own MSW program that there is no difference between us and our clients. There are no "others." I'd like to believe that the students I taught also learned more about who they might consider an "outsider" or an "other" through our classroom experience.

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The COVID-19 Crisis and Homeschooling: A Reflection of a Parent, a Teacher, and a Scholar

Daniela Fontenelle-Tereshchuk

Abstract: This article reflects my perceived experiences as a female parent, teacher, and scholar in the province of Alberta during the COVID-19 crisis. Such a crisis has impacted education worldwide, and "homeschooling" has become forcibly popular to prevent the community spread of the coronavirus. Overnight, homes became the new school environment. Classroom teachers had to adjust their teaching approaches to accommodate the new reality of working from home, often relying on technology. Parents suddenly became teacher aides, and students were required to take on a new level of responsivity towards becoming distant learners, a more independent role. This article offers an insight into the emerging branching of the concept "homeschooling" into "home-learning," seeking to conceptualize it and instigate further conversations around teaching and learning. Ultimately, I hope to encourage more studies, perhaps using what we know about homeschooling as a baseline to further investigate this new, COVID-19-ignited educational approach.

***Keywords*:** remote learning, COVID-19 crisis, mental health, education

As a teacher, a scholar, and a mother of an elementary school-age child in the Canadian province of Alberta, I assumed that I had a fair understanding of a variety of teaching delivery methods. After all, I have often used technology to expand the classroom context while teaching many elementary and high school students, as well as post-secondary students, over the years. As the mother of a Grade 2 child, I often help my son with his homework and to improve his French reading and math skills. Besides, I have a few friends who, for various reasons, chose to fully educate their children at home—something I had never considered.

I initially thought that all these experiences were enough to understand what "homeschooling" was until the COVID-19 pandemic became widespread, schools closed down, and classes moved online. I had to quickly adapt to a new reality where the physical school space was no longer an option.

The word "homeschooling" instantly became popular among students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The questions that came to my mind were these: Is what we are doing now homeschooling? If not, then what is it? Is this a new teaching model, where the physical space in which we teach and learn becomes virtual for both teachers and students? What can we learn from the homeschool practices currently being implemented in many Canadian households?

This paper is contextualized in a third space where my imagination and curiosity reside. It is the journey of a parent, a teacher, and a scholar exploring what we know about homeschooling in Canada. The article articulates a reflection of the present understanding of homeschooling and the spread of what I would call *home-learning* in the current COVID-19 crisis context.

Reflection of the Literature

It is important to acknowledge that I am an avid reader and what I read is often added to my experiences to make sense of a broader world. This aspect of my personality is reflected throughout my writing as I am telling you my story during this pandemic.

I will start by explaining the two main terms that I will be using in this paper: homeschooling and home-learning. Homeschooling, also known as home education, is an educational choice available to parents in Canada which gives them the option to teach their children at home. These parents are responsible for designing lesson plans and implementing the curriculum outside of the school setting under different degrees of governmental and educational supervision and support (Van Pelt, 2015). I believe parents have a deep understanding of their children and can be instrumental in supporting their children's learning. In this sense, developing collaborative relationships between parents and schools is key to the success of education (Chen & Harris, 2009).

In the context of the global COVID-19 crisis, a new conceptualization of homeschooling has emerged which I will refer to as home-learning. The term home-learning is used in this article to address the phenomenon of learning (commonly associated with the learning taking place in school buildings) that was abruptly transferred to students' homes while still being mainly supported by teachers in a type of partnership with parents.

The overall literature on homeschooling in Canada is scarce (Arai, 2000; Davies & Aurini, 2003; Eaton, 2018), and literature on this newly conceptualized term of home-learning derived by the COVID-19 crisis is in its early stages, or is a novelty, especially in the context of education. I will be focusing on providing the reader with an insight into what happened in one specific household of an educator and a parent, hoping that this paper will instigate further attention to the home-learning phenomenon taking place during the COVD-19 crisis.

The history of homeschooling in Canada is often associated with the beginning of formal education. However, the general understanding of education can be amplified beyond the boundaries of the school's physical spaces and its formal organization. As Dewey (1938) suggests, learning is often constructed and amplified through experiences, and perhaps mutual active exchanges between teachers and students. One way in which such interactions take place is storytelling. Throughout history, many different civilizations have taught youngsters through storytelling.

In this sense, the beginning of homeschooling in Canada could be traced to the transmission of knowledge taking place among the diverse indigenous groups living in Canada before the arrival of the Europeans. Knowledge of the land, culture, and traditions, and everyday life was passed down from elders to youngsters from generation to generation (Bruchac, 2014; Semali, 1999). Different from formal curriculum models, which often prioritize a more structured plan, indigenous teaching is guided by problem-solving daily needs; relying on the wisdom, experiences, and resources of the elderly and the community; and finding creative and intuitive ways to prioritize what needs to be learned (George, 1999).

It is important to note that the pedagogical perspectives of indigenous knowledge have played a vital role in the lives of indigenous peoples, strongly contributing to their survival (Semali, 1999). Indigenous knowledge is vital to process and cope with present changes, informed by the past while looking forward. Such knowledge points to community-effective practices to problem-solving developed over time by our ancestors through trials, fails, and successes (Semali, 1999). As we address the challenges of this pandemic and the damage it has inflicted on global communities, I think about how valuable this sense of "coming together" is as a community to address the challenges imposed by these rapid changes in the way we live, the respect and appreciation for interconnected lives, and the notion of a global tribe, where the well-being of one is the well-being of all.

Currently, indigenous knowledge does not always find its validation in the formal school curriculum, but this does not discredit its pedagogical worth (Semali, 1999). As indigenous communities strive to maintain the practice of "homeschooling" their youngsters on matters that will impact their lives, valuable lessons of knowledge and wisdom are passed on to future generations.

The indigenous perspective on homeschooling is an important one. It is one that opens other possibilities on how we, as parents, decide what education our children should receive, which brings us to the birth of formal homeschooling education in Canada.

Homeschooling has been a practice in Canada prior to its foundation, but it was only in the late 1970s that homeschooling started to establish itself as an educational option for parents dissatisfied with the school-based public education available (Van Pelt, 2015). The reasons why some parents choose to homeschool their children are broad—for instance, parents' religious convictions; concerns about the quality of the education being offered to gifted children; as well as a damaging negative environment often found in schools, where children may be teased and/or excluded by other peers during unsupervised times, have all been listed as factors in the decision to homeschool (Arai, 2000).

It is estimated that between 47,500 to 95,000 children out of 4.86 million students in K-12 public schools are homeschooled in the different provinces and territories in Canada (CHBL, 2020; Statista, 2020). Homeschooling is legal in all provinces and territories in Canada, but each province and territory has its own rules and regulations (Fletcher, 2020).

According to the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents (OFTP, 2020), school boards were in charge of overseeing homeschooling in the past, but since 2002, a new policy stated that school boards were no longer allowed to make curriculum-related demands on parents without "reasonable grounds" to open an investigation into the education students are receiving at home (OFTP, 2020).

In Alberta, parents do not require permission to homeschool, but they have to register by submitting a notification form to the school authority. Parents or legal guardians are required to engage in a "supervised partnership" with the school board of their choice to support teaching and learning at home (Fletcher, 2020).

The province of Alberta may provide funding to parents who choose to homeschool their children, but it will assign a school board "facilitator" to oversee the homeschooling education being offered at home (Fletcher, 2020). Similar approaches to homeschooling are implemented in other provinces, such as British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Homeschool funding is also available to all three territories in Canada.

Other provinces in Canada have different regulations regarding funding and oversight of educational requirements when it comes to homeschooling. Some local provincial governments such as Manitoba, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Labrador, do not support homeschooling through funding (Fletcher, 2020).

Homeschooling in Canada

The acknowledgment of what homeschooling is and how it is implemented throughout the country was very important in this reflection. Homeschooling was the closest connection I have found to what happened when I received that e-mail from the school board stating that schools were to be closed starting the following Monday—that learning would continue at home.

Despite the fact that recent homeschooling research has shown some progress, there are not nearly enough studies on homeschooling in a Canadian context (Van Pelt, 2015). Further studies are vital to evaluate homeschooling's long-term outcomes, to address challenges and gains, and to inform and develop effective practices (Van Pelt, 2015).

Homeschool approaches often depend on the educational rules and regulations in place in each province and territory in Canada. Each province offers a different set of options for parents. The following are some of the examples of homeschooling programs and approaches in Canada.

In Alberta, for example, the Calgary Board of Education also known as CBE (CBE, 2020a) offers some funded programs, such as the Blended Program. In this approach, parents may decide to take part in a shared responsibility partnership with a school. The school will provide the learning plan and parents will support the student's learning from home. The teaching delivery of project-based learning is supervised by a school facilitator, and students are subjected to formative and summative assessments (CBE, 2020b).

Another program offered by the CBE is the Parent-Directed Program in which parents have the freedom to make decisions on how to teach their children and also evaluate their progress; however, their teaching plan is still aligned to the school board learning plan and approved by the school board (CBE, 2020b).

In other parts of Canada, such as the Yukon, homeschooling is also supported and funded. The homeschooling process is overseen by educational authorities and the educational plan is subject to approval by the Ministry of Education. Parents may choose from three different programs: "100% home education, cross-enrollment with a local public school, or cross-enrolled through the AVS," the Aurora Virtual School (Yukon Education, 2015, p. 5).

However, in other provinces such as Manitoba and Québec, homeschooling options are more limited, and parents are responsible for financing their children's educational resources and other costs related to homeschooling.

The following Arai (2000) and Eaton (2018) studies provide a glimpse of homeschooling in Canada.

In the Arai (2000) study with a total of 23 homeschooling parents in Ontario and British Columbia focusing on the reasons why parents choose to homeschool, he notes that parents in the study were not practicing teachers, and only four of them had a degree in education. Arai (2000) argues the parental demographic on homeschooling is comprised of diverse parents from a wide range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. He did not find strong evidence for religion as a primary reason for these parents choosing to homeschool their children, even though parents embraced religion.

According to Arai (2000), a key reason pointed to by the interviewed parents was dissatisfaction with the public education being offered in schools. Interestingly, some of these parents suggested they were not initially aware of homeschooling as an educational alternative to public schools. Parents in this study also argue that choosing to homeschool their children was a well-thought-out process.

The Eaton (2018) multiple case study investigated the experiences of four post-secondary students who were homeschooled. The study points to some important findings regarding the progress of homeschooled students as they transition into higher education.

The students benefited from an acute developed degree of learning independence acquired during their homeschool years as they learned how to balance their educational time and daily life activities. Another positive aspect suggested by this study is that homeschooled students, who were not necessarily educated in an environment that stressed high grades, did well academically as they transitioned into university.

Eaton (2018) also listed some of the challenges that homeschooled students may face, such as the fact that these students often work alone may affect the development of their collaborative learning skills. They could also be more prone to academic anxiety as they might not be accustomed to having their progress compared to their peers attending university.

Overall, I noticed that curriculum design was a recurring theme in the homeschool narrative as in most provinces, parents are asked to provide public school authorities with an educational plan aligned with the official provincial curriculum implemented in schools. The development of such home education lesson plans is often supported and/or supervised and subject to approval by the provincial educational body.

When starting homeschooling, parents may count on some available formal and informal resources, as well as skill support throughout the process to develop and implement lesson plans. In contrast, the same cannot be said about what happened during the COVID-19 crisis where

often-unprepared parents were asked to implement rapidly designed lesson plans without much support. In another article, I explain that

> what happened in many households during the March-June school lockdown cannot be characterized as "traditional homeschooling" as parents did not choose to teach their children at home. This new "homeschooling" process or model was created by the unexpected and urgent circumstances during this period. (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021a, p. 2)

As for teachers, the abrupt changes "forced" them to promptly adapt their approaches to the unfamiliarity of teaching online exclusively, while everyone else in the educational setting was also naive as to what was about to unfold as we all adjusted to a new teaching and learning environment. This is not to say that online education was unfamiliar to educators, parents, and students, but that the conceptualization of teaching and learning in an imaginary virtual space that would replace school buildings during this pandemic is not "simply" online education.

What follows is my reflection divided into three spaces linearly organized where my experiences during this crisis reside, even if these experiences are intricately connected and often interwoven with each other.

A Teacher: The Mental Health of the Most Vulnerable Students

Over the last few years, I have worked mainly with English Language Learners (ELL), many of whom are recent arrivals. I have a strong connection with my students and to the classroom. My teacher and scholar identities are intrinsically connected, and I have a deep appreciation for how my experience as a researcher allows me to improve my teaching practice and vice-versa.

When I reflect on my experience as a teacher, my mind is on the many ELL students I have taught over the years. Their struggle indirectly partakes in the experiences of their parents, who seek socioeconomic advancement while trying to make sense of and sometimes fit into the new culture they experience daily, learning a new language, and attending school.

Language is a serious issue among ELL students, especially recent immigrants, as some research suggests that often ELL students are academically disadvantaged compared to their mainstream Canadian peers in the same age-grade group due to language deficiencies (Khan, 2020; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Watt et al., 1996).

Most ELL parents are adjusting to work-life with often limited understanding of the English language needed to function in mainstream Canadian society, as well as adjusting to laws and regulations to navigate areas such as education and the healthcare system. There is a noticeable reliance on community among ELL students, who are usually in constant communication with their heritage community (Chen & Harris, 2009; Khan, 2020; Shvidko et al., 2015).

I believe the biggest impact that the COVID-19 crisis had on these families was the possible break in communication and the survival of community reliance to develop socioeconomic and

cultural navigation skills, including the frequent need for language translation. These factors might deprive these parents and students of the extra support they need to integrate into a new country. For many ELL students, this may have added to the pressure of going to school and carrying the responsibility of academic success to meet their parents' expectations.

Parental academic expectations may also add to the stress of these new Canadian students (Kaplan et al., 2001). Parents' hopes for the future are sometimes geared towards the academic expectations they have for their children to succeed in this new environment as children and young adults seem to adapt to spoken English more easily than their parents.

There is an expectation that as students' English skills improve, academic adequacy follows. In my experience as a teacher, I can say that it will take time for most ELL students to catch up academically with their peers at the same grade level, even if they become more fluent in the spoken language (Watt et al., 1996).

The mental health of these ELL students struggling in school was already concerning, and now it is even more challenging as this new style of homeschooling is demanding on both parents and students, especially the most vulnerable. Not only ELL students, but also those with learning disabilities who need highly differentiated teaching approaches, are the focus of my concern.

Parental involvement is important in children's academic success (Chen & Harris, 2009). In these daring times, how will these ELL parents be able to follow the teachers' plans and deliver the support students will need at home? What will be the impact of this crisis on the most socioeconomically destitute student communities? These are valid questions that I do not have answers for.

Overall, I am of the opinion that there is an underlying struggle and resilience in the school community. Schools are trying their best to support the learning taking place at home. Teachers are reinventing themselves, adapting their teaching to this new classroom reality by appealing to all sorts of online resources that may support their teaching. School administrators are striving to support teachers, parents, and students, while everyone is coping with this stressful time on a personal level as well. My concerns are specially focused on the well-being of students who

> went through rapid changes in which they had to develop coping mechanisms to make sense of this new social reality. This greatly impacted their routine and social interactions potentially prompting emotional distress and changes in behaviors. (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021b, p. 2)

The outcomes of the online home-learning approach adopted during the COVID-19 crisis are hard to predict, and I look forward to research initiatives in the field of education and psychology to inform teacher education on how we can move forward more safely in the aftermath of this crisis.

A Parent: My Experience as a Working Parent of a School-Age Child

As a parent of an elementary school child, I have been puzzled by the "homeschooling" that is taking place in my home and the homes of many other parents I know. Writing this article was a way of coping and moving forward, hoping to open a window of understanding to what was going on with parents during this crisis. I would like to start by sharing the wisdom of my science-loving seven-year-old son on the COVID-19 crisis:

> Mom, some things are so complicated that not even science can explain, like "us," humans. We might not even understand ourselves. The hardest part of this Corona thing is that we are all stuck together on this big flying rock in space, that we have no way to get off of! (A. Fontanelle-Tereshchuk, personal communication, April 5, 2020)

I felt fortunate that the week that I started working online coincided with the week off for planning at my son's school. He had a week off to think of Pokémon and watch his favorite science shows. It felt like summer break for him, even though we could still see snow on the ground.

This home-learning process felt as if there was a piece missing. One thing I could not provide my child with was the same experiences he was accustomed to having in a real school environment. He missed the collaboration with friends during class assignments, the science "discoveries" he made in the schoolyard, all the meaningful experiences he had playing with his friends in the playground, and all the other little things, some positive and others negative, that may help build his character. He missed "the school" dearly.

I suggested to my parent-friends with no teaching experience, who were feeling overwhelmed by home-teaching and venting their frustration on social media channels, to "plan a lot, do their best, and call it a day!" I believe that it is essential for parents to nurture beneficial mental health habits and attitudes in order to build a positive home-learning environment, and feelings of guilt and desperation do not contribute to that.

The frustration at the beginning of the process was very evident as my child and I, along with the rest of the school community, were adjusting to this new reality. It was clear that teachers were also struggling with sudden changes while working very hard and trying their best to meet their students' needs. It felt like a constant learning process as "the plan" was often subject to change based on the online resources available. Teachers seemed to be trying to evaluate which resources would work best and bring the best results—which would, somehow, bear even slight resemblance to their envisioned learning plans prior to the crisis—based on the students' progress (John, 2006).

While I have an appreciation for ready-made online resources, as they can be useful and sometimes inspiring, each classroom context is unique (Martin, 2015). In my experience as a teacher, I have found that over-reliance on online premade teaching materials, including lesson plans, is often ineffective to deliver adequate curriculum results that provide parents and students

with clear expectations and learning outcomes. I strongly agree with researchers who point to the importance of effective lesson planning in student academic achievement (Borich, 2007; Cicek & Tok, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

These researchers suggest that effective curriculum design requires a contextualized reflective plan, which is aligned with curriculum standards; contains clear objectives, modeling, and expected learning outcomes; and at the same time is flexible enough to allow changes during the plan implementation guided by a careful and responsive examination of the pace of learning framed around a classroom growth mindset. Finally, the plan must report constructive gains and enduring challenges to be addressed as students continue to learn. Teachers also greatly benefit from investigating their own pedagogical growth while facilitating learning during this period (Cicek & Tok, 2014).

In terms of curriculum design, I agree with John (2006) that many experienced teachers, who have been teaching the same subject to different grades and think they know their students well, may feel comfortable teaching without a written step-by-step lesson plan. They instead often rely on the flow of class dynamics and lessons to create learning opportunities, at times improvising to respond to emerging learning needs (John, 2006). Interestingly, John (2006) adds that often experienced teachers "consider the nature of the content and activities before they consider other curricular elements, even though pupils might seem to be their central concern" (p. 488). This practice may impact the alignment among the different parts comprising the curriculum design, such as assessment. I believe that teaching experience does provide these seasoned teachers with an accumulative understanding and knowledge of content and classroom best practices, but it may also interfere with the need for ongoing professional reflective growth, especially as Canadian classrooms are becoming increasingly more diverse and complex. For some teachers, this crisis drastically altered their routines and curriculum approach preferences, potentially stretching and reshaping their lesson planning skills developed over the years.

As a teacher myself, I also find it complicated to reflect on what I know when I do not have a well-thought-out plan. I prefer to have clear expectations and pedagogical tools for implementing the curriculum and assessing learning outcomes from the beginning, which helps to further make sense of my teaching and learning successes and struggles. However, I also sympathize with the pressure of having to write a detailed daily step-by-step lesson plan at short notice to share with parents and the school community when this style of planning might not be preferred and/or habitual. In my experience, it is often hard to find the time to reflect and develop detailed daily lesson plans when designated "prep time" is insufficient, and professional development initiatives do not always address this issue. I would speculate that this might have significantly added to the stress level of practicing teachers during this pandemic.

As this crisis continues to unfold—and teachers continue to provide students with the tools to develop the skills required to work independently and collaboratively—perhaps more attention to the needs of these teachers is necessary. This attention could come in the form of professional development initiatives to promote teacher growth.

The role of parents in their children's education has also been highlighted as they might also

reflect to the best of their abilities on the relationships they develop with their children and their educators to better support learning at home. However, this can be a complex issue, as socioeconomic and cultural challenges impact the lives of so many families, especially struggling working parents from minority groups.

This home-learning experience may also signal to teacher preparation programs the importance of curriculum design training and avoiding an over-reliance on "practicums" as a vehicle for learning, especially for novice teachers. I concur with John (2006) when he argues that "the lesson plan should not be viewed as a blueprint for action but should also be a record of interaction" (p. 495). That is to say, there is no sure recipe for lesson plan design, and unforeseen circumstances such as the one created by this crisis put us all in the position of humble learners. It may also highlight the importance of teachers, parents, and students working together and sharing responsibilities for learning.

A Scholar: The Literature on Homeschooling and its Intersection with Home-Learning

Reflecting on the COVID-19 crisis as an educator, and inspired by the indigenous way of coming together as a community to address challenges that affect us all, I thought about the human diversity found in our schools and the need for what I have defined as

> a human-centered approach to diversity, which is an acknowledgment of the relevance of human differences in an increasingly global world, independent of race, culture and social-economic backgrounds as well as beliefs found in all teachers, students and other members that also contribute to the learning environment in the educational community. (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2020, p. 430)

Schools became the focus of despair narratives in the educational community. The cruelty of the COVID-19 virus was borderless, genderless, colorless, and vicious enough to force us to rethink education as we knew it and immerse ourselves as scholars, teachers, parents, and students into the unknown. The closest approach available to school was homeschooling as we, the school community, started addressing what happens next as we rapidly transitioned to relying on parents to support the mostly online home education.

In a sense, we have reimagined the physical school spaces as we expanded and transformed this new understanding of school into our households. As a parent, as a teacher, and as a scholar, I embarked on this mission knowing very little about homeschooling and much less about this novel home-learning ignited by the unfolding COVID-19 crisis.

This adaptation process affected everyone in schools, including teachers who might have felt pressured to adapt quickly to these unexpected changes in teaching practices caused by this global pandemic. It is important to further research and examine these experiences, especially with reference to mental health, as some teachers might have sustained substantial professional and personal stress as parents as well as educators.

After reading the literature on homeschooling in Canada, one realizes that the kind of

homeschooling taking place in the context of the COVID-19 crisis has some similarities with traditional homeschooling; the teaching and learning are contextualized outside of schools, and parents and students often rely on available technology such as online literacy programs as well as online library materials to support learning (Fletcher, 2020; Van Pelt, 2015).

A key difference between homeschooling and home-learning is the contextualized set of choices parents have available. Homeschooling is a choice made by parents for various reasons to have their children educated at home under their pedagogical care (Arai, 2000; Fletcher, 2020; Van Pelt, 2015). The home-learning phenomenon due to the COVID-19 crisis that took place in Canadian schools differs, generally speaking, as it was a government-mandated decision for students attending schools to be integrated into a partnership system where students learn from home and are often supported by their parents, but where the main responsibility to provide content and assess learning still lies on their assigned teachers.

Another contrasting point between homeschooling and home-learning may be noticed in this new understanding of homeschooling emerging from the need for continuity in educating students when school buildings are no longer an option; this new understanding has created an entirely new concept with roots in the traditional conceptualization of homeschooling. This new concept has evolved into a more complex term that I have previously mentioned: home-learning, which can be described as a coexisting partnership between schools and parents to support learning outside of school buildings. Home-learning expands the descriptive understanding of the school-based education learning space.

In the home-learning process, the content is provided by teachers, while parents are expected to play the vital role of "teacher-aids" to support students as they learn from assignments provided by teachers. This system offers little freedom for parents' pedagogical choices, most likely adding to the stress of family lockdown adjustments and challenging dynamics. The concept of the physical workplace for many parents has also shifted, and juggling working from home and homeschooling may lead to an unhealthy mental environment for learning.

In conclusion, this article is intended as a reflection of an educator and a parent's insights into the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on school-based education. I believe that the school community was brought together to overcome the challenges caused by this pandemic. The learning routine of students around the world has changed drastically, and especially as a parent in Alberta, I felt the weight of being an educator working from home and home-teaching my child.

This duality of roles inspired me to examine research papers to find a possible explanation for what was happening in my household, only to realize that we still have a long way to turn these challenging experiences into learning opportunities for teachers, students, and parents—in other words, the whole school community—to grow our understanding of the needs of human-centered diverse schools in learning, teaching, and well-being (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2019; 2020).

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Navigating a Pandemic, Racial Disparities, and Social Work Education through the Lens of the NASW Code of Ethics

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic introduced several challenges for social work education. Beyond the blanket effects, the pandemic made clearer the racial health disparities that impact Black Americans—a stress further exacerbated as the United States was rocked by the brutal killings of multiple Black individuals. In the social work profession, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics underlies the delivery of both social work practice and social work education. In this paper, we describe how we used three ethical principles from the NASW Code of Ethics (social justice, dignity and worth, and human relationships) to guide us in altering our department's approach to social work education during the pandemic in the spirit of social justice, equity, and inclusivity.

***Keywords*:** racism, COVID-19, social justice, dignity and worth, human relationships

We are three female professors teaching in an undergraduate- and master's-level social work program located in the Southeast region of the United States. During the spring of 2020, we were not only shifting our professional work virtually, but also actively parenting and transitioning our school-age children to a remote learning platform. Balancing professional and familial responsibilities further equipped us to approach our work with a student-centered view as we experienced firsthand the complexities of balancing multiple roles during the early months of the global pandemic. Danielle identifies as a white, Jewish female who is a tenured associate professor and associate department chair and has been teaching for 10 years. Yarneccia identifies as a Black female; she is on the tenure track, has been teaching over eight years, and was a first-generation college student. Beth identifies as a white female and is a non-tenure track professor who has been teaching for five years.

Our focus lies specifically on three ethical principles because they align with our desire to remain student-centered (reflecting the principles of "dignity and worth" and "human relationships") and responsive to the impacts of racial injustice and the global pandemic on our students (reflecting the principle of "social justice"). While the other ethical principles described in the NASW Code of Ethics are centrally important to social work, they are more applicable to social work practice with clients and the larger community. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on the three ethical principles we see as central to working with students and preparing them to become equity-minded and culturally responsive practitioners.

Ethical Principle: "Social Workers Challenge Social Injustice" (NASW, 2017)

The rise of COVID-19 during the spring of 2020 exposed the disproportionate morbidity and mortality rates of the disease on Black people in the United States. Several factors, including the persistence of chronic health disorders such as hypertension and diabetes, as well as structural factors such as access and utilization of medical services, are directly linked to years of racism

and implicit bias in the healthcare system among this population (Killerby et al., 2020; Millett et al., 2020; Price-Haywood et al., 2020; Stokes et al., 2020). Milam together with a group of Black physicians and public health professionals (2020) published an article after the onset of the pandemic that highlighted the impact of racial implicit bias in the healthcare system and the need for a health equity lens when working with Black people and others from populations who are at risk of biased treatment. A leading theme of Milam et al.'s article addresses the existence of these biases in medical personnel—biases which have been extensively documented, such as in the published work "Unequal Treatment: Report of the Institute of Medicine on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare," where it is discussed how they may result (and have resulted) in racial and ethnic disparities within the healthcare system (Nelson, 2003, p. 12).

As the pandemic began to devastate the United States and Black communities became overwhelmed with grief due to the disproportionate rates of infection and death, the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, and others occurred as a direct result of the police brutality and anti-Black racism that has been long tolerated in today's society. Social injustices make clearer the need for social work educators to ensure students matriculating in programs fully understand the ethical principles of our profession challenging social injustice—so as not to be in violation of them (NASW, 2017).

Challenging social injustices that vulnerable or oppressed people experience is an ethical principle from the NASW Code of Ethics designed to empower social work practitioners for positive change (NASW, 2017). Challenging social injustices includes addressing sociopolitical and historical practices of structural and systemic racism which have resulted in Black people experiencing extreme health disparities (Bailey et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). These injustices subsequently increase their risk of becoming infected with and dying from COVID-19 (Killerby et al., 2020; Millett et al., 2020; Price-Haywood et al., 2020; Stokes et al., 2020).

Further, that increased risk of death is linked to underlying health conditions as a result of social determinants of health: lack of employment, education, or housing and the influence of racism and racialized negative perceptions of Black people (Egede & Walker, 2020). In addition, the existence of medical biases within the healthcare system, which have existed for many years, (Hall et al., 2015) has resulted in the exploitation and exacerbation of common health issues in Black people and has had a direct impact on this population having the highest rates of chronic disease and pre-existing health conditions (Paradies et al., 2015).

For the 27 percent of students at the University of North Carolina Greensboro who identify as Black or African American, navigating the social work program has largely looked much different recently due to these tragedies, all while they are trying to satisfactorily complete program requirements towards degrees in social work. Exacerbating this, in our program, over 50 percent of our students had to maintain their employment on the front lines of society as "essential workers"—within gas stations, grocery stores, and medical settings, among others. This increased their risk for disease acquisition as a result of exposure. The need for supports feels clear.

Our Response to "Challenge Social Injustice": A Call to Action

As a department of social work located in the South and grounded in an empowerment-based framework, we were strategic as well as intentional in ensuring that flexible due dates were provided for outstanding assignments—and that communication was enhanced so that students and professors were always in touch. We realized that in the spirit of challenging social injustices, we had to consider the lived experiences of students and examine how they were managing the threats of COVID-19, racial injustice, and police brutality, all while successfully completing their coursework.

We also explored how the current political climate—being in an election cycle, along with being geographically located in a conservative state that still struggles with race relations—impacted the ways in which we addressed sociopolitical factors and the subsequent effects related to racism. We understood the heaviness of carrying courses while also experiencing ambiguity about being the next potential victim for fraud or COVID-19. As a department, we also decided to allow students to choose whether or not they wanted a letter grade or a "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory" mark, in the spirit of fairness and outwardly challenging the traditional Western ideology of determining learning mastery through tier-system assigned grading. Although offered, many students decided not to opt in for this opportunity, as it did not increase their grade point averages.

Students also received financial resources and support from the University as a result of the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act in order to offset any challenges that derived from COVID-19. As a strategy, we suggest that programs consider how a student's social identity may impact the way in which they experience and process social injustices, especially when circumstances hit home for them, such as Black students viewing police brutality. We also suggest that programs provide spaces and resources for students to use in managing any stress brought on by directly or indirectly experiencing social injustices. We believe that considering these things proactively will ensure programs are able to appropriately respond to student needs through outwardly acknowledging the social injustice that has occurred. We also suggest that programs consider adjusting course assignments, evaluations, and other forms of assessment as needed in order to exhibit flexibility, grace, and compassion for students who may experience anxiety related to their successful matriculation and meeting requirements for graduation.

Our Commitment to Anti-Racist Education & Creating Safe Spaces

The systemic murders of multiple Black people within six months rocked society as well as institutions of higher learning as a whole. As a Black faculty member, it has been extremely challenging for me (Yarneccia) to navigate the world while seemingly appearing unfazed, given the slaughter of Black people by law enforcement and high rates of death due to COVID-19 among friends and associates. Our Department of Social Work was the first program out of six different disciplines within a School of Health and Human Sciences to furnish a statement of solidarity written by white faculty members speaking out against racial injustice and demonstrating support to Black faculty, staff, and students. The statement of solidarity resonated for me, as well as for Black students, who represent less than 40% of those matriculating in our

social work program, as it demonstrated a programmatic action of implementing the NASW ethical principle of challenging social injustice.

At the university level, the Chancellor sent out an email to students, staff, and faculty about the current state of racial injustices, inequity, and COVID-19 (University of North Carolina Greensboro, n.d.). Upper administration also held several town hall meetings to discuss how the impact of COVID-19 was being addressed at the university level. These actions all subsequently mobilized a focus on racial equity for the University, along with the establishment of several taskforces designed to interrogate curriculums for the goals of anti-racist education and practices.

The Department of Social Work's statement of support was followed by a sigh of relief from Black students who had begun to grow concerned about the Department's possible lack of desire to challenge injustices such as racism. In addition, Black students frankly voiced expectations of advocacy and actions from their white counterparts and cautioned against performative allyship.

To this end, two forums—one for Black graduate students and one for all graduate students—were held so that students could have a space to process and share their feelings and responses while also gaining faculty support and feedback. I (Danielle) assisted in coordinating the forum for all graduate students. A Black faculty member, two Black graduate students, and two other white faculty members also assisted in coordinating the forum. During the forum, we addressed a variety of topics, including anti-Blackness, murder, trauma, white supremacy, white fragility, and solidarity versus allyship. For me, personally, the forum was a powerful experience. I was initially nervous about whether the timing of the forum was appropriate—were emotions too raw at that point to have meaningful conversations? In fact, I brought this concern up with my fellow coordinators, and they responded, "If not now, when? Why should we keep putting this off?" And that was so true. I came to realize that one of the worst things we could do in this situation was to be silent. The forum was a very small first step in a pathway to solidarity.

Our program is committed to anti-racist education (Blakeney, 2005; Kishimoto, 2018) and understands the necessity for Black students to have their own space in processing the deaths of people who looked like them—*with* people who look like them. As a Black faculty member, I (Yarneccia) more than understood the importance of this space especially as it relates to discussing racism (both overt and covert) and how racism perpetuated the effects of the pandemic and racial unrest that had far exceeded its proverbial boiling point. For some Black people, discussing racism, or even saying the word "racist," is a painful experience avoided at all costs. So, knowing this, I made sure to convey to Black students that I understood what wasn't spoken because of our shared realities of being Black in America and what experiencing systematic oppression, silencing, and erasure entails. I also realized that there is a lot of work to be done with regard to decolonizing social work education as a whole in order to advance anti-racist education, which requires critiquing policies and procedures that were developed and implemented from a white supremacist lens. The students felt comfortable and relieved to begin discussions and process the recent deaths, yet expressed their frustrations regarding the silence of their white classmates. For them, the silence equated to imposed invisibility, and it caused them to question if, in fact, their lives *did* matter to their classmates.

Professors also observed the students' responses to the racial injustice and communicated with students individually and collectively. In the classroom, professors explicitly acknowledged and discussed racial injustices. This provided students with class time to discuss what was happening in our local and broader community, and it created an environment for students to support one another. A number of students reached out to professors for guidance on how to get involved locally in community organizing efforts to protest racial injustice. The safe space in the classroom ultimately gave birth to increased advocacy and educational actions by these students, who went on to peacefully protest in speaking out against the carnage of Black lives.

I (Beth), as a white faculty member, knew it was important to explicitly address the current incidences of racial injustice and acknowledge that what was occurring outside the classroom had a direct impact on the students' lives and interactions in the classroom space. It would be harmful to students if current events were not acknowledged in the classroom setting. As social workers, we have a responsibility to challenge injustice, and our classrooms should not be exempt from this ethical principle. The week following the murder of George Floyd, one class session was spent exploring how graduate-level social work (MSW) students can incorporate anti-racist approaches into their professional work and exploring, also, a call on white MSW students to commit to learning how to address oppression and racism in their clinical work with future clients. Later, a white student shared that this classroom dialogue was timely and that providing practical ways to start their journey of incorporating an anti-racist approach in their clinical social work practice was needed. As a white social work professor, I must not just teach about anti-racism, but I must regularly and actively implement and model anti-racist approaches in the classroom and commit to lifelong personal and professional anti-racist learning even when it feels uncomfortable.

Ethical Principle: "Social Workers Respect the Inherent Dignity and Worth of the Person" (NASW, 2017)

As social workers and social work educators, for us the NASW ethical principle of respecting the inherent dignity and worth of the person is central to both how we train future social workers and how we guide our own educational practice. When responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and recent events of racial injustice, we made decisions that were student-centered, taking into consideration the needs of students as individuals and as a collective. Even before the university made their university-wide decisions on safety precautions, our chair, field directors, and departmental directors proactively set into motion guidelines and supports for the students. The decisions by our leadership team were calculated and thoughtful but also swift to ensure that the most immediate and pressing physical and emotional needs of the students were identified and met.

Student Needs Identified

Through communication with students, we identified several physical challenges that students encountered in response to both COVID-19 and recent events of racial injustice. To begin, students had to navigate several housing challenges. On-campus students were given notice to leave campus, and some had to quickly relocate several hours away or to other states.

Off-campus students reported possible evictions and having to navigate the housing system to potentially avoid homelessness. In addition, students' employment was impacted as many students shifted from working part-time to full-time hours in essential jobs such as nursing homes, grocery stores, and restaurants. Students also experienced immediate shifts in their home lives as they navigated continuing their education with the increased burden of balancing homeschooling their school-aged children, caring for infants or young toddlers, and other family responsibilities. In addition, access to reliable internet was a barrier for some students, and others were only accessing the coursework on a phone with limited or no access to a laptop or tablet.

As students navigated these physical challenges related to COVID-19, they were also responding to the most recent killings of Black people across the United States by locally organizing and participating in racial justice protests. Our social work students balanced academic demands, dealt with the stress and trauma of continued racism, and responded by engaging in activist work in our community, displaying firsthand the values and ethics of future social workers. Students reported an increase in depression and anxiety and difficulty focusing on coursework. As social work educators, we acknowledged the physical and emotional needs of our students and responded by making changes to our academic approaches for students individually and collectively.

Our Response to "Respecting the Inherent Dignity and Worth of the Person"

To respond to our students' needs and to respect their inherent worth and dignity, we used the following approaches: First, instructors quickly moved their online courses to an asynchronous learning platform through actions such as developing self-paced learning modules. The shift to online learning required extensive time on our part as instructors, but provided students with the opportunity to not miss valuable coursework if they were unable to participate in live synchronous classes. Faculty also offered voluntary synchronous class sessions to provide students opportunities to engage with one another and connect with the instructor.

Many of our students joined the live virtual platform while working the cash register at grocery stores, packing food at fast food drive-through lines, riding in their cars while traveling, or caring for others in their homes. In response, we gave students flexibility to have their video cameras off so that they could still participate. These voluntary synchronous classes were taped, giving those unable to attend live sessions access to the content at a more convenient time. Each student's situation was different; therefore, we provided multiple options in the delivery of content for students to maintain control over aspects of their education during a very uncertain time.

Students in field placement required new approaches of support due to the abrupt switch to interning remotely. Clear and consistent communication was key during this time, as there were changes occurring daily due to COVID-19. The Council of Social Work Education provided flexibility in the required field hours, which was very helpful to students who had to suddenly leave campus and return home. Faculty liaisons offered synchronous online field seminar sessions to connect students with their field cohorts, where students could process this new

phase of their internship experience and share ideas on how to continue to best serve their clients and field placement agencies. Our agency field supervisors exhibited tremendous flexibility with our students, as they were also adapting to working remotely with their clients.

Finally, when considering the specific needs of our students, we modified assignments, changed due dates, or even omitted assignments that did not seem appropriate and helpful to the learning experience of the students. All these approaches considered the students' unique situations and required that we meet students where they were at, like how social workers approach other aspects of social work practice. Students later shared that these faculty approaches modeled well how professional social workers should respond to others in practice.

Throughout this unique and challenging time, faculty had to notice individual and collective student needs, elicit feedback, and respond appropriately to ensure that we were considering the dignity and worth of our students in our approach. We suggest that, as a strategy, programs consider modeling these examples of grace and compassion—not only to students, but also to fellow faculty, staff, and field placement agencies—in order to identify unique ways in which students are able to complete their field placements and feel supported, while also lessening the heavy feeling of burden as a result of the pandemic, racial unrest, and other social determinants of health.

Ethical Principle: "Social Workers Recognize the Central Importance of Human Relationships" (NASW, 2017)

During COVID-19, the state mandate to socially distance severely limited the types of human interactions that individuals could have with each other. During the stay-at-home order, individuals were only allowed to leave their houses for essential activities. Even as the state slowly opened up, we were not allowed to gather in large groups and, if we did, we needed to stay at least six feet apart. Social distancing had the potential to lead to severe social isolation. As faculty, we were cognizant that social isolation, coupled with the experiences of racial injustices, could undoubtedly negatively impact students' support systems, mental health, and learning.

Our Response to "Recognize the Central Importance of Human Relationships"

To address social isolation and its anticipated negative consequences, we made sure to do frequent check-ins with students. If students did not turn in assignments, we would often email the student as a follow-up to make sure the student was okay. Often it was the case that the student was dealing with an emergency family situation, overwhelmed by the effects of the violent murders of Black individuals that were occurring, caring for a family member with COVID-19, suffering the effects of lack of childcare, or dealing with financial strain from losing a job. We allowed the space for students to process this with us either via email or over Zoom.

We also increased our accessibility. Because face-to-face office hours were not possible, faculty held regular weekly office hours via Zoom. As students' schedules were disrupted (due to loss of childcare, having to adjust to homeschooling, working a front-line job, etc.), we made sure to

explain that we were also accessible at other times. Finally, we made sure to respond to emails in a more timely manner. During a typical semester, faculty are expected to respond to student email within 24 hours Monday through Thursday and the next business day Friday through Sunday. However, while teaching during COVID-19, most faculty responded to emails within 12 hours.

As a strategy, we suggest that other programs consider extending the reach of their current supports: for example, extending office hours in order to accommodate student availability and offering students virtual spaces such as Zoom for check-ins in addition to traditional emails. The latter can be used for unexpected benefits, as well: one possibility we considered was a Zoom room to serve as a "virtual hallway" where students can log in to socialize with their peers and faculty—similar to what happens within departments pre-pandemic.

Conclusion

In summary, three NASW ethical principles, *social justice*, *dignity and worth*, and *human relationships*, informed multiple changes that our Department of Social Work made to aspects of social work education during the pandemic and times of social injustices. Our Department responded by creating flexible due dates, offering the option of Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading, issuing a statement of solidarity, moving to online education, modifying field education requirements, creating safe spaces for students, and increasing faculty accessibility.

Research is beginning to emerge on social work student perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on students' educational experiences (Council on Social Work Education, 2020). Future research should investigate whether responses similar to those we have described were perceived by students as beneficial. These data could inform departments' future responses to pandemics and their continued responses to the ongoing racial injustices Black people experience in the United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the deeply rooted racial disparities in our society have radically impacted social work education—there is a distinct need for accountability felt given our ethical principles. At the core of social work is the NASW Code of Ethics (2017), which serves as a central guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers. The three ethical principles described in this paper served as a lens through which the leadership team and faculty in our department navigated the effects of the pandemic and racial disparities on our diverse student body, as well as provided a barometer to ensuring those who were significantly impacted also felt seen through a direct call to action. Further exploration of the remaining ethical principles of integrity, competence, and service could be made as we strive to provide a student-centered approach during a global pandemic and a continued time of racial injustice. While there is still much work to be done, our department is committed to approaching racial injustices and disparities from an anti-racist and inclusive approach.

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The COVID-19 Trilogy: What I Have Learned

Ed Silverman

Abstract: COVID-19 has caused crises, need for change and total disruption. Yet, ironically, it has allowed time for reflection and learning. As this case study of leadership, ideology and teaching danced around us, there was much to see, feel, and reflect upon. This reflection focuses on new learnings amidst the chaos and boredom of the past year.

***Keywords*:** leadership, ideology, teaching, COVID-19, pandemic

I sit in my home office surrounded by objects that are historically here to comfort more than challenge me. Pictures of youth, dead relatives, dogs, and a trophy or two. Both anxious and bored, I keep the room's window in my peripheral vision. I spy neighbors strolling six feet apart, their pets sniffing along in the comfort of oblivion. The characters recycle every few hours. My candle burns. I have time to see, smell, and think. What am I learning?

Leadership and Science

First, I have confirmed that leadership and the research process are important. Obviously, this is not earth-shattering, but to see a case study dance before one's own eyes is somewhat stunning. One of the first tasks of leadership is to define reality (Depree, 1989). Not *your* reality, but one rooted in expertise and science.

I have enjoyed teaching both the science and art of leadership. It is a competency that is learned; one that is more nurture than nature. Politics aside, it is interesting to watch the nation's president (as of 2020) in action and then superimpose his behaviors upon any given model of leadership competencies: unity, transparency, accountability, emotional intelligence, etc. I find myself concluding that he must have read many an excellent leadership book—in fact, devoured them, and then decided to do just the opposite. An oppositional child!

Leadership is not a value-added piece; it's pretty much most of the pie. Poor leadership is not a neutral variable. It is dangerous and toxic. Poor leadership flows downward. Good employees and stakeholders depart, compounding the problem. Organizational culture devolves inside a toxic petri dish of fear and dysfunction.

More than just teaching leadership, I have found teaching undergraduate research courses fulfilling. Students come in with a low-value expectation, often with their survival mode most prominent. I try to convince all that an understanding of the scientific methods can be strategic, whether it be with a client or program evaluation. An understanding of the research process can even help with advocacy: for self, client, and profession.

For example, many years ago I was attending a nurse-driven grand rounds, a type of observation learning common in medical fields. A group of nurses did a study on the length of patient stay and discovered that it tripled when social workers were late (beyond three days of admission) in

opening their cases on their patients. Trying not to be defensive, I asked if the study controlled for patient acuity. Unsurprisingly, it had not. What the nurses captured, in live practice, were the social workers doing an effective and efficient job in triaging their large caseloads, anticipating, and aligning their efforts with each patient's medical diagnosis, prognosis, and projected discharge timeline.

Leadership driven by valid and reliable data is a powerful tool. It becomes essential—especially, say, during a pandemic. This current crisis will pass, and life will return to normal. Still, I fear that without science and leadership, a future rogue tidal wave will appear on the horizon, approaching New York City and heading straight for the Statue of Liberty and Lower Manhattan. Scary and sad, but who could have predicted this "climate change" thing was coming?

Fluid, Personal Ideology

Secondly, I learned that there is something innately bipartisan—hypocrisy. My dad and three teacher friends (at least they were friends when the endeavor started) owned and operated a summer camp when I was a kid. The Vietnam War was raging, and folk music of the "protest" variety was all the rage. One of my counselors' favorite "folkies" was Phil Ochs, and his songs eventually looped around and within my ten-year-old brain. Yet, until my mother explained later that fall, I did not realize that Ochs' song about "liberals" was one of chiding. Introducing the song, Ochs lamented that liberals were "ten degrees to the left of center in good times; ten degrees to the right of center if something affects them personally" (Ochs, 1965).

Now, many decades later, I have learned that free market capitalists and conservative Republicans are, too, not so securely anchored in their ideology when medical testing, masks, ventilators, and customers are scarce. They appear willing to nibble at socialist-flavored nuggets if taxpayer funds can bail out their self-interests.

Supply and demand does not work nor apply in safety net, crisis situations. In the "business" of healthcare, it is inefficient to stockpile beyond traditional demand. It is also "good business" to discharge frail patients during a snowstorm rather than accumulate a non-acute day or two. This practice is not the hospitals' total fault, though; they often have to operate in an irrational system, and on the slimmest of margins.

Certainly, we now find ourselves in a rather rare predicament. But our current situational crisis is not true for all. For those historically affected by health care disparities, this is their typical: continual access challenges, fear, mistrust, and—at best—a fragmented clinical treatment experience. Ironically, one that is less efficient, costlier, and paid for by you, the taxpayer and the privately insured. As I write this, data is emerging showing virus outcome disparities along racial and social-economic lines. In fact, Nova (2020) reports that in addition to the 28 million pre-COVID uninsured adults, another 5.4 million have recently joined their ranks. Mostly as the result of job loss. This cannot be surprising, but, perhaps, now harder to "turn a cheek" to. Curiously, America seems to struggle with the notion that health care could work more effectively and efficiently as a universal entitlement and should not be jerry-rigged into a capitalist, free-market business model. Especially when that system does not work for most

providers and consumers. The virus will make this clear. Health care is, in practice, already a governmental care-taking responsibility and moral imperative. Go to any emergency room and you will get health care. But an emergency room is not the place for primary or preventative care.

Finally, people seem to have this primitive, tribal need to pick our political teams and defend them at all costs (Klein, 2020). These seemingly hardwired, ideological chasms close quickly when one is face-up on a gurney—or in the queue waiting for one.

Managing and Teaching Humans from Home

The third learning leg of my COVID-19 education shifts to the possibility that technology can be your friend, especially if you do not get too clingy and become overly dependent on it. At the beginning of my college's online transition, my sister sent me a picture of a border collie sitting in front of a computer screen. On the screen, in rows of three, were fifteen neatly herded sheep. I laughed, until I quickly realized it was going to be much harder corralling a group of first-generation freshmen once they left the college-controlled pasture. And, clearly, I was not feeling the virtual-leadership confidence the border collie projected.

Thinking back to my own college days, I remembered singer/songwriter John Prine, who had recently died from virus-related complications. His lyrical stories and ironic melodies were first among the many things I'd come to appreciate during my college years. The political science student down the hall heard my Phil Ochs record and thought I'd appreciate Mr. Prine. Being campus-based was everything to me; I considered then how this change would affect students, and the disconnect now is visible.

On the "shepherd" side, at least, our current-day faculty have done a miraculous mid-semester pivot. During our virtual weekly division check-in meetings, we actually see, attune, and certainly talk with each other more so than during a typical week. Last week's Zoom faculty meeting had greater attendance and discussion than any one in recent memory. Still, I think about our freshmen (as well as the student body in general). They struggled this initial year to retain and remain at school: They fought homesickness, intellectual self-esteem, and that psychological undertow that pulls them back to what feels safe and familiar. For months, students and I worked together—at least one of us understanding the stakes were life-altering—only for me to suddenly watch them pack and leave prematurely. And as students attend lectures from the safety of their (often non-private) bedrooms, we now try to re-engage.

Like many small, private colleges, our success is interdependent with that of the student's. Budget success is tuition driven and relies heavily on retention. I feel confident that we can and will deliver the curricula to each student. However, keeping them engaged and feeling supported presents a more daunting prospect. A developmental process has been interrupted and, environmentally, students have returned to the safety and chaos of their family life. No less, at a time of extreme stress and anxiety. Can an email carry the same influence as a smile or supportively stern office meeting? Can they afford to stay involved? Will they return in the fall? Will they be allowed to? Will there even be a campus to return to?

Conclusion

In conclusion, if a crisis provides the opportunity for growth, then perhaps these days may prove purposeful and fortuitous. Slowing down does allow for observation, reflection, and learning—in technology, science, leadership, and "person-in-environment" behavior.

As such, from within the slowness of the pandemic some shortfalls are easier to spot. Higher education leadership, for example, faces its share of painful sustainability dilemmas, especially as online learning cuts costs. Deming (2020) writes that colleges may now come to view online learning as a money-saving, "non-rival" good, meaning an online lecture's lifespan is not shortened with each use or viewing. He worries more about students, though, than teaching, and fears that on-campus learning, with all its relationship building and co-curricular enhancement, will further become a luxury of the rich—thus creating more future disparities.

The one presidential message in 2020 that did resonate with me was to not make the cure worse than the disease. Some of us may be forced to do just that. Lack of leadership, environmental influences, pre-existing disparities, and the unintended assault on higher education access and retention threaten our students' ability (and ours) to level the playing field. Both the science and art of leadership will be critical as we move forward, not only in Washington DC, but across college campuses. Can our leaders ever become more egalitarian and manage their jobs toward a greater good? Or, at least, just do their jobs and govern? Can our shepherds guide our sheep with virtual crooks? In my worries I am focused not so much on the virus itself, but on our reaction and what might be our collective takeaways and continuous learning.

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Against All Odds: Transitioning from Academic Faculty into Administrative Roles While Maintaining Successful Scholarship

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Abstract: This narrative manuscript introduces and describes how we have maintained scholarship identities throughout (and beyond) our transitions from newly tenured academic faculty into program director roles in a school of social work at a private university in the U.S. Here, we present concepts relevant to how scholarship agendas can be maintained—refined, adapted—post-transition into academic leadership positions. Taking inspiration from Helen Sword's (2017) Behavioral, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional (BASE) writing tool, we present individual vignettes and reflections that illustrate the role that growth has played in being able to move our agendas forward. Our shared experience of doing so "against all odds" offers support to others for whom transitioning to leadership may threaten ongoing scholarly success (or potentially threaten to undo it). We provide several recommendations for weathering transition and creating leader-scholar productivity post-transition.

***Keywords*:** administration, leadership, role transition, peer support, scholarship

While there is a pressing need for academic faculty to take on leadership roles within the academy, the process of transition itself may feel particularly challenging for those who wish to maintain previously developed scholarship agendas. Maintaining scholarly work like writing, research, and publication in the midst of—and following—transitions is no small feat. Leaders may be tasked with leading long-term projects such as re-affirmation and accreditation in professional academic programs, such as social work. They may also be struggling with other realities inherent to their new roles such as reduced control over their schedules due to more administrative obligations. Before long, cycles may become established. Fewer completed manuscripts leads to drops in both rates of publication and presentations. An overall drop-off in creative scholarship may ensue (Franz, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2003).

The maintenance of scholarship (scholarly work and interests) among academic faculty who have transitioned into leadership roles may be in particular influenced by their ability to reconnect with previously established work habits (Sword, 2017) and varies from academic leader to academic leader. Similarly, each leader's process may depend on their unique work situations and the degree to which they are able to adjust to their new conditions (and the end to which these are static) once they have assumed leadership roles.

The purpose of this narrative is to consider how scholarship agendas can be maintained, refined, and adapted after transitioning into academic leadership positions in baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate social work programs. Grounded in the review of the literature and informed by Helen Sword's (2017) Behavior, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional (BASE) theoretical considerations inherent to maintaining writing practices, we three authors consider how our BASEs have shifted as we transitioned from academic faculty into new leadership roles, and then as we performed that transition into leadership roles. The goal of our article is to describe the BASE that we created in order to maintain our scholarship agendas once transitioning into program director

roles at the University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, and how our experiences shall help inform subsequent transitions. An examination of the literature outlines some of the challenges of maintaining scholarship within leadership roles. Furthermore, exploration of BASE-related concepts helps explain how and why our ability to maintain scholarship while transitioning into leadership roles was successful. Throughout the article, we use vignettes to illustrate our key points (Sword, 2017).

Our Beginning: Academic Scholarship Pre-Transition into Leadership

Vignette 1: The Proposal

Part one of our four-part vignette illustrates how moving into our leadership roles was proposed, what we grappled with, and how we made our decisions to move into administrative roles.

Our respective transitions from academic faculty into administrative roles began during the winter of 2017. After we had enjoyed years of stability among a rather large faculty within a good-sized school of social work, suddenly change was constant. Though three rather recently tenured and newly minted associate professors, we agreed to move into doctorate-, master's-, and baccalaureate-level program director positions within weeks of each other.

When Catherine was asked to move into a doctorate program director role, she was enthusiastic about this possibility for professional development after returning from a one-semester sabbatical. Catherine was interested in leadership opportunities in the doctorate program because she had a strong interest in doctoral education and examining professional development in administrative positions. Although somewhat hesitant because of fear related to less scholarship activity, she agreed.

When Kari was asked to move into a master's program director role, short-term transition into leadership was far from her mind. Though hoping to move into leadership someday, Kari often pictured that day arriving years down the road. Her energy, at that moment, was directed toward planning her upcoming (first!) sabbatical. When asked, the first thing she said was, "Can I think about it?" Off to think about it she went. Later she returned and asked, "Why me?" Then off she went to consider the offer further. Finally, she returned. "Yes, I'll do it! After I come back from my sabbatical."

In the BSW program, a series of administrative changes (retirements, job transitions within the school) left the position open, with Katharine the most senior person standing. There were multiple discussions among BSW faculty about filling the role, and no one was interested in stepping forward at that time. At the time, Katharine's research and scholarly agenda was gaining some significant traction, and her teaching was a source of deep joy. Stepping into the BSW role, she recognized, would require that she significantly curtail her work in both of these areas. However, Katharine agreed out of a sense of loyalty to the program and her colleagues.

Scholarship Agendas Among Faculty Pre-Leadership

To date, little, if any, literature pertaining to maintaining and establishing a scholarship agenda

has looked at doing so *after* transitioning into leadership roles nor considered the impact of scholarship upon the longer trajectory of academic faculty careers.

Nevertheless, a small body of research is found within social work, specifically barriers and facilitators to scholarship engagement among social work faculty. Barriers include challenges related to balancing demands such as researching, teaching, and providing service in light of institutional obligations and priorities (Moriarty et al., 2015; Teater et al., 2018). Facilitators for engaging in scholarship include factors such as time (both finding it and protecting it) and support (from institutions, mentors, and peers) to make engagement in scholarship and research, teaching, and administration more possible (Teater et al., 2018).

Shifting from instructional culture in favor of greater support for faculty research has been identified as salient in helping faculty engage in scholarship and research given the difficulty of balancing academic roles (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Shera, 2008). Conference funding, reduction in teaching time via external funding, and grant writing financial assistance provided by social work programs also facilitate encouragement for faculty (Freedenthal et al., 2008). In addition to institutional provisions, it's recommended to establish and maintain school/department-level social work scholarship and research support centers for faculty as well as create research collaborations with community practice partners and other academic institutions (Shera, 2008). In efforts to help balance research, administration, and teaching loads, reducing the latter two aspects while promoting collaborative scholarship and publishing may help social work faculty (especially junior faculty) produce scholarship. Furthermore, they may be more equipped to aid in completion of research projects in light of less demanding teaching and administrative loads (Jones et al., 2009).

Faculty Roles and Responsibilities Regarding Scholarship

Research examining scholarship among leaders across academic disciplines has primarily examined intersections between role transition, scholarship productivity, and support that helps faculty meet scholarship expectations (Hotard et al., 2004). Faculty perceptions regarding teaching and scholarship responsibility differ within and between disciplines. Weighing variables such as institution size and teaching load given their influence on scholarship is important when considering how faculty maintain scholarly engagement—that is whether an institution is research-intensive or teaching-intensive, and its requirement for courses taught (Hotard et al., 2004).

The importance of productivity among faculty within research literature cannot be overemphasized. It has been documented among the most highly ranked criteria for tenure review (Rayfield et al., 2004). Productivity levels tend to be higher among tenured when compared to non-tenured faculty (Bland et al., 2006). Additionally, the level of productivity may be influenced by individual (autonomy and commitment to conducting research), group (positive group climate as well as departmental norms), and/or institutional (support considerations at the leadership level) factors (Bland et al., 2005; Bland et al., 2002).

Developing a Scholarship BASE

As tenure track academic faculty, we had developed a rhythm of scholarship quite suited to our respective preferences. We developed what we later learned Helen Sword (2017) refers to as BASE (Behavioral, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional) habits that, while different for each of us, contributed to our finding what worked (for each of us) scholarship-wise as academic faculty. *Behaviorally*, we had created routines that worked for us in terms of finding times (e.g., the same time each day; chunks of time) and places (e.g., home or office; coffee shops until deadlines approached) to write that fueled our academic writing preferences and habits. *Artisanally*, we sought mentoring and training support that further developed what we'd previously received and learned to further appreciate the process of writing for publication inherent to our respective research areas. *Socially*, we learned about what our aims of writing were (our audience); whether we liked to write *with* others (e.g., collaboratively) or more simply liked writing *around* others (e.g., in writing groups, writing retreats). *Emotionally*, we learned what habits helped us (e.g., were motivational) and what our thoughts about our writing were (e.g., whether we viewed it positively or negatively).

Preparing for Our Transitions
Vignette 2: Our Faculty (Pre-Admin) Scholarship BASE

Part two of our four-part vignette illustrates the established scholarship agendas we each had prior to moving into administrative roles.

As we transitioned into leadership roles, we began to contemplate whether maintaining our respective scholarship agendas would be possible if we agreed to shift out of primarily academic roles. As faculty who entered full-time academia as a second career within a year of each other, each of us had already developed strong roots—10 or more years each working at some capacity—within our respective scholarship areas. Catherine worked with Latina women who had experienced domestic violence. Kari worked with military-connected populations. Katharine worked in policy practice and program evaluation, particularly in the special education and child welfare systems. Prior to moving into our leadership roles, each of us identified as faculty members who valued and prioritized scholarly works. As Catherine noted, "From the very beginning, I both prioritized my scholarship activity because it was important for my own professional development and because it was important for tenure, promotion, and evaluation." As Kari noted, "During a time where developing support for military-connected communities has been particularly important, I was (and remain) very committed to scholarship, research, service, and mentorship." As Katharine noted:

> *I see my professional engagement as getting to be part of a national—or international—conversation about topics and issues that are of importance to me. It has been something I have prioritized because it is how I see myself being a changemaker and contributing to my profession and community.*

As assistant professors, we had thought about engaging and/or maintaining scholarship agendas in different ways. In her first year, Catherine recalled: "I established consistent scholarship

habits, including carving out at least one day per week to work, and by joining a writing group." Kari recalled, "Since I needed to complete my dissertation and establish a tenure track-worthy scholarship agenda, my motivation to engage in scholarship was extremely strong. I found support through writing groups and (eventually) found collaborators who shared/maintained my research interests." Katharine recalled thinking about her research in stages:

> *I was really focused on spinning out publications and presentations from my dissertation—and had that largely mapped out prior to starting in my role. But I also really had to think hard about what I wanted to do once that phase was done—what was the scholarly agenda that best fit my interests for the next five or 10 years?*

Role Transition: Transitioning from Faculty to Administrative Roles

Current literature highlighting academic faculty transition to administrative roles emphasizes optimal conditions for success as well as barriers associated with this shift (Allison & Ramirez, 2016; Clift, 2011; Dunbar, 2015; Gonaim, 2016).

Optimal Conditions

In terms of optimal conditions for successful transition into new administrative roles and their associated responsibilities, faculty benefit from peer and leadership support, mentorship, understanding of professional identity, and training (Allison & Ramirez, 2016; Clift, 2011; Dunbar, 2015; Gonaim, 2016). In one study, Gonaim (2016) discussed ample funding and available graduate students for administrators to continue engaging in scholarship activity after leaving teaching positions. Gaining an appreciation for taking on responsibilities of encouraging scholarship rather than engaging in it oneself is important for transitioning into administrative roles, in addition to cultivating the internal and external skills to invest in the new role (Harris, 2006). In another study, Palm (2006) explained that transitioning to administration often requires a sacrifice of academic career in favor of serving one's institution. Due to the changes in roles, it is necessary to provide ample training and mentorship for faculty members taking on administrative positions (McCarthy, 2003). In addition to role contrast, faculty need to be prepared to shift their professional focus from academic achievement to organizational matters including politics, fundraising, and personnel management (Foster, 2006).

Barriers

In terms of barriers, lack of mentorship was a key indicator. Findings indicated faculty members' personal experiences of moving from faculty to administrators were impeded by insufficient mentorship and preparation to take on the new role (Foster, 2006; McCarthy, 2003). Research suggests that declining productivity due to steep learning curves inherent to new administrative appointments, demands associated with managing a new program, lack of mentorship, limited institutional support, and limited internal support such as by dean and colleagues may be contributing factors (Moriarty et al., 2015; Teater et al., 2018).

Maintaining Scholarship Agendas After Moving into Leadership Roles
Vignette 3: Transitioning into Leadership Roles and Reconciling Our New BASE

Part three of our four-part vignette illustrates the challenges we experienced post-transition to our administration BASE.

The time had arrived. As we prepared to transition into our respective program director roles, we relished our final moments as newly tenured faculty who maintained robust scholarship agendas one last time. We had tackled the challenges of maintaining scholarship agendas while academic faculty, and now we turned toward the more daunting prospect of doing so within our new administrative roles. We each faced many unknowns as we entered our respective roles: Did we know what we were getting into? Would we be able to consistently carve out time to write or would we be engulfed in administrative duties 24/7? We had agreed to step up to become leaders, and the next step was to actually move into our new roles.

For Catherine, the biggest challenge was learning how to manage the new day-to-day administrative duties such as mentorship meetings with faculty members working on tenure and promotion materials, course scheduling, meetings with administration, and significant work on curriculum revisions during the first year. She was trying to figure out how to conduct scholarly activity (e.g., writing, analyzing current data, and working with community partners) with the new schedule. She quickly realized that persistence in scholarship projects and incorporating daily writing schedules was integral as she developed skills in managing a program, faculty, and staff.

For Kari, the biggest challenge was that her style of working under deadline vis-à-vis dedicated chunks of scheduled time was no longer a reliable option. Administrative fires and unplanned emergencies seemed to pop up at inopportune times, leaving little room—even during evenings, weekends, and summer months—for the uninterrupted periods of writing time Kari had relied on previously to complete and/or oversee substantial scholarship projects. After starting in her new role, she grappled with coming to terms that her administrative responsibilities were now her priority. While she hoped to someday learn to work and juggle both, her current reality was (in the interim) that her scholarship would take place more intermittently, sometimes even getting placed on hold.

For Katharine, the biggest challenge was time management and setting priorities. She had maintained a fairly active research agenda, working in several different areas and methodologies. With the time demands of the administrative position, she had to scale back on some projects, renegotiating her role in research teams and the amount of time and effort she could commit to each one. She also had to reframe what was most important to her in her various projects so that she could prioritize those areas when she had opportunities for scholarship. She was forced to have some honest conversations with her collaborators—and herself—about what was possible and in what time frame, given her new role.

Maintaining Scholarship and Research Post-Shift from Faculty to Administration

To increase scholarship and research productivity among faculty, it is necessary to recognize individual and institutional roles in facilitating scholarship (Franz, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2003). Findings from previous studies suggest elements such as a strong senior faculty presence within programs and willingness from them to mentor junior faculty; administrative support for research initiatives; defined departmental research priorities; research autonomy; designated teaching and research terms; and research collaboration with other academic institutions all provide an environment of successful scholarship productivity (DuPree et al., 2009; Gopaul et al., 2016; Kennedy et al., 2003; Meyer & Evans, 2003). Relevant for practice-oriented disciplines such as social work, DuPree and colleagues (2009) encouraged academic programs to educate future faculty within a scientist-practitioner model to prepare them to balance faculty responsibilities. Finally, Meyer and Evans (2003) offered insight into both what motivates faculty to engage in scholarship and several strategies institutions may utilize. First, administrators are moving away from universal productivity benchmarks (these create a culture of anxiety and negative reinforcement) and instead giving individual faculty members the opportunity to set their own professional and academic achievement goals (Meyer & Evans, 2003). Second, there is a move away from negative reinforcement to a more strengths-based approach, creating a system that incentivizes faculty productivity and professional development (Meyer & Evans, 2003).

Successfully Maintaining Scholarship: Post-Transition into Administrative Roles
Vignette 4: Lessons Learned and BASEs Built

Part four of our four-part vignette illustrates how we learned to manage challenges we initially experienced after moving into our administrative roles and how we continue to work on reconciling our post-transition to administration BASE.

Against all odds, we have each maintained our scholarship agendas post-transition into leadership. We have reflected upon practices developed as we have built our new BASEs. Overall, we view our continued BASE challenges post-transition to be reconceptualizing our concept of, and the realities of, our behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional habits now that we're administrators.

Behaviorally, we have noticed (and the literature supports that) we're now less in control of our schedules than we were before our transitions. We have increasingly come to the realization that what used to work for us in faculty roles no longer reflects our realities. Catherine has reconciled this by committing to working on one scholarly project per semester, thus preparing a timeline of writing opportunities within a 15-week period (e.g., one hour of writing on two or three days during one week, and other weeks writing all day for eight hours). Kari continues to embrace occasional (fewer and further in-between) opportunities to write in her preferred (pre-administrative) ways yet has accepted she must be more efficient, strategic, and realistic habit-wise (her everyday habits, overall, she considers still good but uneven). Katharine has reconciled this by adapting her writing style to fit the available time and becoming more protective of the writing time she has scheduled. She also has learned to embrace the

spontaneous opportunities to write that may arise—for example, when her family members all make other plans on a weekend afternoon!

Artisanally, we have noticed that many aspects of honing habits are developmental and iterative in nature. Fortunately, what we've learned in our pre-administrative roles we carry with us today. For Catherine, her passion for scholarship projects and the recent publication of her Sí, Yo Puedo *curriculum motivates her to continue with writing habits for future publications. These habits are integral for effective leadership; role modeling for peers is important. For Kari, she is grateful that with regard to her craft of writing she remains confident in her ability to write clearly and well (time permitting) within her primary scholarship areas and comfort zones, and that she remains motivated to learn as she moves further into leadership and engages in writing in new ways. For Katharine, moving the focus of her scholarly work to areas that most closely mirror her practice expertise in political and civic engagement has helped to make scholarship feel immediate and integrated into her work.*

Socially, as we see ourselves as administrators who really, really want to maintain productive scholarship agendas, this area felt particularly important to us. The three of us are one area of support for one another—it is nice that we can encourage one another and appreciate the challenges that we have in remaining engaged. Catherine likes to spark conversations with colleagues or her interim dean about scholarship and writing projects (e.g., if colleagues are still revising a writing piece, or if they're almost ready to submit to a journal). She says,

> *By having these conversations, she creates an environment of social engagement grounded in scholarship, writing, and scholarly works. I find myself reflecting on what are the next steps post the publication of my curriculum during this administrative phase and I seek out support and advice from senior faculty members.*

Kari is aware that she wants to continue certain previously acquired social habits (e.g., writing in the presence of others, collaborating with others), while some of her social needs continue to shift post-transition as her career progresses (e.g., she benefitted from social support to work toward tenure early on whereas now she seeks out social support to grow within her leadership role) and as her needs have shifted. For Katharine, her strong relationships with co-authors and researchers have been enormously important. She has found that honestly renegotiating her role in research teams to reflect the realities of her administrative role has helped her to maintain relationships that support her writing and kept her engaged and moving forward.

Emotionally, we are trying to remain connected without getting overwhelmed—we must juggle our new and old roles, but also not lose sight of what we like about (and why we stay active in) our respective scholarship agendas. For Catherine, this means staying connected to colleagues in her field and checking in with Kari and Katharine about how they are doing. We try to have monthly breakfasts to check in about administrative duties and scholarship, as well as to support one another with our writing projects. For Kari, this means seeking out support (early and often) and trying to engage in self-care, both so that she can continue forward in the administrative role and so that she can stay engaged in scholarship post-transition. For Katharine, treating writing and research time as important and something to be scheduled and

protected is both productive and emotionally helpful—it feels like self-care as well as research productivity.

Further Recommendations

Based on our review of the literature, Sword's theoretical dimensions (2017), as well as our critical analysis of our own experiences, we have identified several additional areas that may support new administrators as they integrate scholarship into their new roles.

Supportive Environment

Our position on fostering a supportive environment for scholarship activity and productivity is similar to previous findings indicating a positive departmental culture, internal and external institutional funding support, and reduction in teaching time (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Shera, 2008) are significant factors for success. The importance of strong, extended supportive scholarship environments cannot be understated. Encouraging environments also include the ability to have connection with faculty members not in administrative appointments about current scholarship activities. These important conversations with faculty colleagues may take place in a variety of ways, such as during individual supervision meetings, faculty meetings, in between meetings, and seeing each other in passing (e.g., faculty kitchenette area or walking in the hallways).

Accountability

Accountability of scholarship activity among administrative peers is another important personal attribute for program directors. For example, the interim dean of the school of social work, faculty colleagues, and colleagues in writing groups are supports that have aided our successful scholarship activity. Additional strategies we now employ include maintaining ongoing relationships with research partners and writing groups to help build accountability and implementing interim deadlines for big projects. Each of us has found ways of staying motivated, connected, and committed.

Collaboration

Collaboration is another area that has influenced our successful scholarship productivity. We work with other colleagues across disciplines in the institutions and in national and international social work programs. Furthermore, we find partnering with faculty colleagues in research centers or sponsored programs and offices related to research in institutions fosters collaboration within a helpful environment (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Shera, 2008).

Institutional and External Supports

External institutional funding is another area of scholarship support. We have sought various grants and research assistantships, which aid us in making critical programming decisions in our scholarship and research projects. By having external institutional funding and research

assistantships, our research projects have become valued by our institution and helped us make progress towards publications and promotion. Over the past 10 years, we have each worked with several research assistants for an average of two years each.

Permission to Adapt Research Agenda and Goals to Fit New Circumstances

One final consideration is giving ourselves permission to adapt our respective research agendas and goals to fit our new circumstances. Each of us was clear-eyed as to our respective challenges maintaining scholarly agendas while meeting administrative role demands. While we all had different strategies, we learned to acknowledge the challenge of "doing both," and made adaptations as needed. We adapted our styles of scholarship (e.g., Katharine shifted her focus on what she most cared about), slowed the rates with which we conducted our scholarly work—while still maintaining a presence—and reconceptualized our work to better align with our allotted time, perhaps by bringing in new collaborators or different methods of analysis.

Conclusion

In this narrative, we have highlighted our efforts made to sustain scholarship activity after moving into (baccalaureate-, master's-, and doctorate-level) program director roles. Collectively, we have argued that successful scholarship productivity and scholarship activity remains possible after moving into administrative roles. We viewed our methods to maintain scholarship agendas prior to, during, and after our transitions by using and redefining what works for us informed by Helen Sword's (2017) BASE framework. By offering our personal successes and challenges to sustaining robust scholarly work, we hope that we have inspired confidence that scholarship *can* be maintained within leadership roles in higher education.

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Malfeasance in Helping:
A Misguided Approach to Meeting Critical Client Needs

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Abstract: Social workers are called to work in practice areas that are complex and multilayered and with client systems that present moral and ethical challenges. In these situations, we social workers can find ourselves left to navigate incredibly challenging cases in isolation. Our desire to help may exacerbate the moral and ethical issues that frequently accompany our work, leading practitioners to engage in rule-bending, unethical behavior, professional misconduct, and perhaps even criminal behavior—often with good intentions. While the social work code of ethics offers practitioners guideposts, the true action decisions are ultimately left to the practitioners' professional judgment, leaving room for subjective application of standards of competency and ethics. I outline how intersecting practitioner and systemic factors can converge to create a circumstance ripe with opportunities for lapses in professional conduct. I also explore the influence supervision may have in deterring or preventing these incidences.

***Keywords*:** social work, ethics, misconduct, competent practice, practice standards

Social work professionals frequently work with clients and in client systems that are complex and present high needs. Throughout my tenure as a social worker, I worked with clients from vulnerable populations in critical need of services for themselves and their family systems. One of the challenges I encountered in this work was meeting these crucial needs of my clients with limited resources and systemic barriers to support. Given this reality, it was common for me to hear of practitioners bending the rules to access services for their clients. In many of these instances, the rule-bending seemed small, and I perceived it as harmless. However, one case changed my perspective of this practice—suddenly, I was questioning how practitioners navigated the challenges of their work. I wondered if the impact of these smaller incidences of rule-bending could accumulate into a desensitization and result in more egregious acts of misconduct. This experience also led me to have a greater understanding of the consequences that a client may be exposed to because of social workers engaging in unethical behavior or misconduct. Perhaps these issues were not foremost in my mind because the number of social workers that do engage in unethical behavior and misconduct, particularly criminal misconduct, is not as significant as is found in other professions (National Practitioner Data Bank, 2020). However, social work is not immune to practitioner malpractice, and it is imperative to examine what factors might lead a social worker to act in ways inconsistent with the profession's ethical standards—and perhaps even the law.

The ensuing scenario outlines a case I encountered during my practice in which a colleague behaved problematically in what I believe was a misguided effort to meet the critical needs of their client. In this case, the practitioner found themselves addressing the high needs of an undocumented, HIV+ client within a social context that was increasingly hostile toward undocumented immigrants and a system with limited health resources to manage a significant health crisis. All identifying information has been changed to protect those involved.

A Case of Professional Misconduct

Prior to discussing the key factors of this case, it is important to understand how the broader societal context made it more challenging. This case occurred in the mid to late 1990s, where issues of immigration and the global epidemic of HIV/AIDS were converging within the United States. It is estimated that by January 2000, there were seven million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S. (Warren, 2003), a number which had peaked from 1999 to 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2005). Although rates of unauthorized immigration were increasing in the late 1990s, there still simultaneously existed wide hostility toward immigration policy, immigrant populations, and unauthorized immigrants in particular (Young, 2018). Additionally, in the late 1990s, the U.S. was still in the throes of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. During this time, disparities in HIV infections and deaths were beginning to be stratified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The emerging data indicated that African American and Hispanic communities were being hit particularly hard by the disease (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). Following a limited initial response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, the CDC began a larger effort at mobilizing to address the ongoing crisis (CDC, 2017). However, because the U.S. was slow to respond to this epidemic, by this time, there was a great deal of misinformation, stereotyping, and outright discrimination directed toward the HIV+ population. Many agencies serving the communities struggling with HIV/AIDS found themselves overwhelmed. I entered this environment determined to apply the advocacy and practice skills I had developed via my social work education.

I was a relatively new practitioner when I was invited to join a well-established agency that provided many programs and outreach services to residents of a large metropolitan city. The agency aimed to build stronger families by teaching life skills necessary to manage health, financial, and relationship challenges. I was hired to join a particular project within the agency that provided support services to individuals who had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. These services addressed a variety of client needs, including assistance with acquiring and accessing healthcare services, identifying resources for mental health and other health services, financial resource assistance, and emotional support, among other needs.

Shortly into my tenure with the agency, I was notified that I would be taking over the clients of a former employee. As I worked my way through connecting with my newly assigned clients, most of them spoke highly of my former colleague and seemed pleased with the services their previous social worker had provided them. After contacting these new clients, I felt I would have some large shoes to fill. At the same time, I felt energized; I was now a practicing member of the profession I had long aspired to join.

One particular client transferring to my caseload was in their early 30s and was married with three children. The client had known of their HIV diagnosis for many years. Additionally, they had migrated to the U.S. more than 10 years prior and had been living unauthorized in the U.S. since. The client had been receiving services from our agency for more than a year. They expressed great appreciation for the services they had received through my agency, identifying the services as very helpful to themself and their family.

During my initial meeting with the client, they spoke at length about their needs, their family, and their related interests. The client mentioned how helpful it had been to be able to see a primary care physician on a consistent basis. The client emphasized how these ongoing doctor visits had helped maintain their health and overall well-being; they shared how the benefit of having their medications refilled on a regular schedule meant they had recently been more compliant than at any other time in their disease history. The description of the care the client was receiving was interesting because I knew there were several physicians providing sliding-scale services for clients with HIV, but the waits were usually long for these appointments, doctors' visits were often spread out, and services were frequently over-extended. I asked how it was that the client had been able to manage the cost of a primary care physician with their own practice, given that they had no insurance, were unemployed, and were not authorized to be in the U.S. To my surprise, the client responded that they had "been given a Social Security number" by their previous social worker, who had encouraged them to use that number to apply for medical and other support services for themself and the family. I thought I misunderstood what the client said, or that, surely, I was missing something that would explain the number. Therefore, I asked the client to elaborate on how my former colleague was able to "get them a number," asking if the social worker helped with any applications or materials to acquire some form of U.S. resident benefits. The client responded that they had not worked on any such documentation and shared that the social worker had simply been able to acquire a Social Security number. The previous social worker had assured them that with this number the client would be able to apply for county-level health services and locate a primary care physician.

I was confused and wanted to hear more. I felt certain there must be some misunderstanding that looking at the client's paperwork would clear up. I asked the client if I could see the number they were given. The client showed me a note in the previous case manager's handwriting outlining the telephone numbers for several resources, and at the bottom of the note a number was written in the form of a Social Security number. I thoroughly examined the client's file and was only able to find a medical record number. After an extensive conversation with the client and an in-depth review of the case documentation, it became apparent that the previous social worker had modified the client's medical record number so that it looked like a Social Security number, labeling it "SS#." My immediate thoughts were to try to assess whether perhaps there was some way this might have been an oversight, or perhaps somehow my colleague had managed to acquire such a valuable resource for this client. To clarify if this was a possibility, I continued asking the client questions related to how the number may have manifested. I kept investigating but did not want to entertain the thought that perhaps this number may not be real. I felt that if I acknowledged that potential, I would also have to consider what that meant for my social work colleague and my client. As a relatively new social worker, I assumed ethical purity on the part of all social workers was a given; this experience was not fitting my narrative of social workers.

I thought that perhaps the client and social worker had worked on this collectively, so I asked the client for more details on their collective work with the social worker. The client was adamant that they had not worked with the previous social worker on applying for legal U.S. status. However, the client shared that they had recently independently begun the process of applying

for legal authorization to remain in the U.S. Additionally, the client expressed how helpful it had been to their family to have a number they could use to initiate applications for additional support such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

As our conversation progressed, it became increasingly clear to me that the number given to my client was not an actual Social Security number. I worried about the legal jeopardy my client had been placed in by using the number, but at the same time I was concerned about the amount of upheaval I was about to create for this client and family by pointing this out. Following an extended conversation about how the number arrived to the client, I pointed out that the number appeared to mirror the client's medical record number, and that the validity of the number could be in question. We engaged in a lengthy discussion about the implications of continuing to use the number to access services. The client was overcome with surprise at the possibility that the number was not a real Social Security number and shared immediately that they no longer planned to use the number. Hearing this, I felt a sense of guilt for being part of a group that had potentially exposed this client to harm and consequences. I feared this would affect my client's ability to continue to work with me. I wondered if the trust had been violated beyond repair. We then worked together to identify resources and create a plan to transition to no longer using the number they had been given. Although initially I was concerned about how this disruption would affect my ability to connect with my client, the client was ultimately grateful for my honesty and transparency in pointing out the number and the risks associated with continuing to use it. In contrast to how I thought the client might respond, the client expressed a high level of trust in me and was significantly engaged in the services I provided. As a result, I was able to continue to work closely with the client until the end of my tenure with the agency.

Following the appointment, I returned to my agency and discussed the interaction with the director of the program and a head administrator in the agency. Ultimately, the agency determined the previous social worker had indeed modified the number and presented it to the client as a false Social Security number. The agency worked with their legal department to report the social worker's actions to the appropriate entities, including the state social work licensing board. In the ensuing months, the agency conducted an agency-wide audit and began steps to establishing a more formalized structure for supervision throughout the agency and my program in particular.

Social Workers Navigating Need

For years following this incident, I contemplated what factors could have created a circumstance where such a breach of ethical standards could occur. As a student, I received ample examples of ethical challenges and case scenarios to debate with my classmates. However, as I reflected on the scenarios I assessed as a student, I could not remember any that presented an instance of a social worker engaging in unethical behavior or misconduct. A majority of the scenarios focused on dynamics or issues that *clients* brought to the social work encounter; few, if any, focused on addressing conduct on the part of social work practitioners.

In this circumstance, I believe a confluence of factors converged to contribute to this

misconduct. A primary factor may be the challenging nature of the issues and client systems in which social workers practice. Faced with overwhelming client needs in a system with limited access to resources, practitioners may feel stunted in their ability to help. With this stunted feeling, some may conclude that "working the system" is the only way to be useful. For example, practitioners may direct resources to clients that may not fully qualify for those resources, share information on resources that are about to be made available with clients ahead of time so that they can apply before others, or provide services beyond agency policy to assist the client (giving them gas money, rides, etc.). A social worker may justify a slight bending of rules or even misconduct if they perceive they are helping the client by getting them much-needed services.

Due to the nature of our work, *many* social workers have a prolonged exposure to these discussed high-need, low-resource client systems. Relatedly, social workers evolve in their practice approaches through personal experience and observation. Perhaps the social work practitioner, in this case, was the recipient of social workers bending the rules for their benefit. Perhaps my colleague witnessed senior social workers engaging in similar rule-bending practice behavior, which may have normalized this practice and led to the social worker replicating those actions with their own clients. A social worker exposed to smaller infractions by other practitioners may create an environment where the social worker's own ethical boundaries are permeable and unfixed—a circumstance where so long as the goal is to help a client, ethical (and at times legal) boundaries may be willingly crossed. Social workers may initially engage in smaller incidences of "bending the rules" or "borderline violations" of ethics with plausible deniability—which then lead to more serious breaches of ethics and, ultimately, potentially criminal misconduct. I thought that perhaps it was easier for this colleague to engage in misconduct because there had been previous minor ethical violations.

It is also possible that my colleague believed that the only way to get their clients the resources they desperately needed was to circumvent perceived systemic barriers. My colleague may have felt that in giving the client a Social Security number, they were helping the client in accessing much-needed life-saving medical services and medications in the face of unjust barriers. The worker may have weighed the legal infraction against the possibility of the client's disease progression and thought the more appropriate response was to get the client medical services via whatever means necessary. In these instances, although practitioners are well-intentioned and mean to help their clients, their actions create quandaries that overstep ethical boundaries. Thus, although their efforts were initially to help the client, the practitioner may instead do long-term harm. In the misconduct I observed, there were legal consequences that could have caused great harm to my client, including incarceration and deportation. Additionally, the client was unaware that the number they were given was not legally permitted and was thus engaging in illegal activities unknowingly. This represents not just potential criminal misconduct, but also a particularly egregious practice violation, as the client did not knowingly choose to take criminal action but would almost certainly endure the consequences upon discovery anyway.

Support for Practitioner Competence in Complex Work

An additional factor I believe created an opportunity for this type of misconduct to occur was the

lack of systemic features that would have provided support and guidance for social workers managing highly complicated cases. When faced with a challenging issue or case, social workers are advised to consult the National Association of Social Workers' ([NASW], 2017) Standards of Conduct and Professional Code of Ethics to guide us toward an appropriate response. Although the code of ethics does provide social workers with ethical standards to consider in decision-making, it does not mandate a rank order or hierarchy for how these standards are applied. Rather, the code of ethics relies on the "informed judgement of the individual social worker" to determine which standards to prioritize when making a decision (NASW, 2017, Section 2). This subjective application of the code of ethics creates circumstances in which practitioners may be tasked with responding to a complex case where practice standards may conflict, thus complicating their case further. Because of this subjectivity, it is imperative social work practitioners have resources and support to guide them through decisions that present challenging dynamics.

The 1996 NASW Code of Ethics and Practice Standards—the one in use during this Social Security number case—mandates that social workers in administrative positions provide supervision for social workers; however, there is little guidance for when the practitioner at the administrative level is *not* a social worker, as was the case at my agency. The director from my program came from a different professional background that was not bound by the NASW practice standards. As a result, there was no set supervisory structure for my program or the broader agency. This created a system where practitioners were operating independently with a great deal of autonomy. The lack of a formalized supervision structure created a silo where practitioners were left to develop their own strategies to manage client needs. Many of these practitioners, like me, were developing strategies with limited practice experience to draw from. In conjunction with this lack of supervision, consultation on cases was most frequently conducted via peer consultation. In circumstances where a practitioner had a question or was uncertain how to proceed, we were directed to consult with a peer practitioner—most of whom were social workers, but some with backgrounds in other disciplines. A challenge was that many of these peer social workers had themselves not received supervision or consultation either. Despite this limited practice experience, social workers were left to manage each other.

Studies indicate that supervision may play an important role in socializing new practitioners into the social work field, although availability of supervision in and of itself may not be sufficient to ward off practitioner misconduct (e.g., Berliner, 1989; McCarthy et al., 2020). Much of the benefit of supervision depends on the type of supervision a practitioner receives. For example, studies suggest that supervision can be effective at promoting practitioner skill development, employee retention, and a positive work environment (e.g., Mor Barak, et al., 2009; Carpenter et al., 2013); however, these positive gains are tied to the type of supervision available (Carpenter et al., 2013). Supervision that promotes a shared power base, builds trust, and inspires a perceived competence can encourage the exploration of social work values and ethics and can support practitioners through ethical challenges (McCarthy et al., 2020). In the case I described, the absence of supervision and limited case consultations meant social workers were navigating these incredibly challenging cases in a vacuum. This created a circumstance where agency practitioners were working with little to no support or oversight in how to manage the ethical challenges that accompanied many of our cases.

In 2005, the NASW Standards for Clinical Social Work included a standard mandating access to professional supervision for practitioners in their first five years of practice (Singer, 2008). While this was a positive step forward, in a study of almost 900 social work practitioners sanctioned from 1994 to 2004, Boland-Prom (2009) found that a majority of sanctioned social workers were sanctioned five years or more after receiving their social work license, with the next highest sanctioned group being those that received their license within the previous year. These findings suggest that social work practitioner development as well as supervision should be available and evolve with the social work practitioner throughout their career. Perhaps consistent supervision would have helped my colleague—a well-established practitioner—avoid engaging in misconduct. Similarly, as a relatively new social worker, I would have benefitted from a direct supervisor advising me in navigating and processing this experience. The presence of consistent supervision and training could have helped convert this event into a learning experience; one that would have increased my own practice abilities by highlighting problematic practice behaviors and stressed appropriate practice behaviors in this situation.

Collateral Implications and Prevention

Behavior like my coworker's can negatively influence the working relationship beyond repair, but this harm extends beyond that particular client and that particular social worker. In this case, the previous worker misled the client; based on this experience, the client could have chosen not to trust the agency or any future social worker, including me, and perhaps steered friends and family away from social work resources. This direct, negative result is inconsistent with our ethical guidelines and, beyond basic ethics, may be criminal. Regardless of intent, working from this approach is inconsistent with what social workers are called to do. A key social work task is to help via empowerment to build client capacity to address issues, not to take shortcuts to resolve client problems for them. Also missing when engaging in this type of practice behavior is the opportunity for practitioners to work toward addressing mezzo- and macro-level factors that create or exacerbate the problems our clients are experiencing. In adapting by bending the rules, social workers are not responding to shared broader needs or advocating for resource development. By adapting in this way, social workers may help clients in the short term, but odds are that similar clients in the broader community are having similar needs. Because of this short-sightedness, social workers are missing an opportunity to develop community capacity and rectify mezzo- or macro-level gaps in needed support and resources.

Given current technology and the advancements the social work profession has made in supporting the accessibility of supervision and consultation for practitioners, it is hard to imagine this sort of misconduct occurring today. However, the availability of supervision is in itself not sufficient for preventing social workers from engaging in potentially unethical behavior or misconduct. In social work education and in practice, a primary source of practice development is exposure to fellow practitioners and supervisors who educate and model practice skills and behaviors. If social workers are exposed to supervision that is perceived as both competent and safe, they are more likely to explore the ethics and challenges of the cases they are working on with their supervisors. Alternatively, social work practitioners exposed to unethical behaviors via their supervisors and mentors may adopt these same behaviors, believing that it's "just how things are done." Thus, as social work practitioners must commit to a lifelong pursuit of

educating themselves in ethical approaches to practice areas, so should social work supervisors commit to consistently adding to their knowledge of best practices in supervision.

Conclusion

The case above outlines ethically challenging interactions social workers may experience in their practice. Frequently, these challenges are multilayered, where decisions will have a significant impact on the client's general well-being. One of the greatest strengths of social work is its holistic view of client problems. However, this perspective can be challenging for practitioners trying to address the breadth of issues that clients come to us with. Literature on pro-social rule-breaking suggests that at times workers may break established rules to benefit the organization they work for or for the benefit of a stakeholder of that agency (Dahling et al., 2012). If the same benefit theory is applied to this case, it is possible that the social worker engaged in "rule-breaking," in their perspective, to help achieve the agency's mission of providing much-needed services to a particularly vulnerable community. Social workers want to help, but we cannot allow that drive to blur the boundaries of practice standards and ethics. Although a social worker may engage in misconduct in an effort to help their client, it is imperative they understand the greater liability they are bringing upon that client by doing so. In this case, the previous worker's actions placed the client at risk of experiencing legal consequences, negative health implications, and familial upheaval, which, ironically, were the very issues for which the client was initially referred to the social worker. More research is needed to explore the circumstances under which social workers may engage in rule-bending or breaking, as well as the association of those actions with more serious incidents of misconduct.

Social work areas of practice will continue to represent complex and multilayered issues. While I do not condone the actions of my former colleague, I believe that their actions did stem from a misguided desire to help my client. However, I wish my former colleague had the opportunity to witness with me the client's response to their actions. Had my former colleague seen the client's concern and fear of the consequences created by their misconduct, they would have—hopefully—reconsidered their approach to this case and others like it.

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