

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Courageous Writing About the Ethics of Care, and Celebrating Reflections' 30th Anniversary

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Abstract: In Volume 31(2) we are excited to welcome and introduce three new Section Editors to our Editorial Board, along with expressing our gratitude for the many dedicated people who volunteer their time and expertise to making *Reflections* possible. We focus on the meaning of courageous writing, recognizing what courage it takes for authors to put their lived experience into written form—particularly during a war on words. We highlight nine articles written by a variety of helping professionals with backgrounds in social work, mental health, nursing, healthcare administration, and criminal justice. The authors share strategies and interventions they have used to work toward change across national, state, community, organizational, and group levels.

Keywords: courage, engagement, intervention, listening, humanization

Welcome and Appreciation

Our cover photograph was contributed by **Kathy Pryor**, a retired legal aid attorney who specialized in elder law. After many years providing direct legal services to elder clients at Central Virginia Legal Aid, she worked on policy and training for over a decade at the Virginia Poverty Law Center, where she was a lobbyist at the state level for positive change to laws concerning long-term care, guardianship, Medicaid, and other elder law issues. Our deepest appreciation to Kathy for sharing her eye for beauty with us and for providing a cover photograph that illustrates resilience, hope, and light.

So much has happened since our last editorial that we continue to marvel at the dedication of those volunteers who make *Reflections* possible. We want to acknowledge and thank members of our Editorial Board who are retiring or having to refocus their time onto health care or professional commitments. We are consistently amazed as they show their commitment to *Reflections* by recommending others who step up to the plate to commit their precious time by volunteering to be Section Editors.

Reflections continues to have four sections and section editors to which authors can submit their work: Teaching and Learning, Practice, Practicum Education, and Research. **Arlene Reilly-Sandoval** (Department of Social Work at Colorado State University Pueblo) began dedicating her time and talents to the Teaching and Learning Section much longer ago than our beginnings with the Editorial Leadership Team. In fact, Arlene helped us learn how to use the OJS platform on which the journal depends! Thank you, Arlene, for your incredible work, and we are so appreciative that you have helped us find **Cathy McElderry** (Department of Social Work at Middle Tennessee State University) to work with you as Section Editor of Teaching and

Learning. Cathy is a professor within and the chair of the social work department at her university, where she also recently received the 2025 Faculty Trailblazer Award. In addition to her doctorate, she holds master's degrees in both social work and public health with practice experience in medical and mental health settings. Her scholarship and research include a focus on advocacy for Black reparations, restorative justice, and institutionalized racism. Welcome, Cathy!!

Over the last year, our Practice Section has been co-edited by **Pat Gray** (Silverman School of Social Work at Hunter College) and **Joan Blakey** (School of Social Work at University of Minnesota). We are pleased that Joan will continue to be a reviewer for Reflections, and we are so happy to welcome **Anh Ngo** (School of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University) as a co-editor of the Practice Section. Anh served as guest co-editor of our most recent issue of *Reflections* on Care and Control. Anh's scholarship and research focus on the experiences of immigrants and refugees in Canada at both the individual and community level; social policy as knowledge production and its effects on the lived experiences of individuals and groups; critical multiculturalism and critical refugee studies; and social change through community action and engaged scholarship. Pat and Anh will make an excellent team as co-editors of our Practice Section.

We are indebted to **Beth Lewis** (Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research at Bryn Mawr College) who has served as our Practicum Education (formerly Field Education) Section Editor for over 10 years. Formerly Director of Field Education at Bryn Mawr College, Beth is retiring. Beth, we will miss you!! We are most grateful that Beth recommended **Brie Radis** (Department of Social Work at West Chester University) as our new Section Editor. Brie has worked in the field of community mental health and homelessness since 2004. She is a passionate advocate for integrated healthcare, trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and the housing-first philosophy. She is also an experienced trauma therapist and clinical supervisor for students and staff. Welcome, Brie!!

Crystal Coles-Quander (James Bell Associates, Inc.) served as Research Section Editor for the past three years and we have been so fortunate to have her on our Editorial Board. Crystal is stepping down, at least at this time, as personal and professional demands have grown. Thank you, Crystal!! A member of our Editorial Leadership Team is temporarily filling in until a Research Section Editor can be found.

We continue to be indebted to our publisher **Beth Massaro** (Associate Dean of the School of Social Work at Salem State University), **Justin Snow** (Digital Initiatives Librarian of the Frederick K. Berry Library at Salem State University), and to our then-student, now alum copyeditor **Afsana Rahman** (Salem State University). And once manuscripts are accepted, we continue to be in awe of the skill, attention to detail, and passion that our Lead Copyeditor **Jack Pincelli** (Pillbug Editorial) brings to the copyediting and production process.

Courageous Writing

In previous editorials, we have written about *Reflections* being a brave space. Yet in today's challenging times we must stop and examine exactly what that means. We offer a platform for narrative writing, but we also recognize what courage it takes for authors to put their lived experience into written form. MacArthur (2022) equates the kind of writing we are asking authors to submit to “walking naked into bookstores ... [or] practicing some extreme yoga of radical vulnerability on the page” (p. 2). Writing for *Reflections* is “an act of radical generosity ... And this vulnerability creates connection; this connection creates community” (p. 4).

We ask a lot of our authors because narrative writing removes many of the filters that scholarly publishing requires of us. There are no set formulas in which the categories of methods, results, and discussion constrain what authors have to say. There are no tables and charts that report data collected or allow us to claim (or pretend) objectivity. Narrative writing is subjective; it flows as lived experience emerges into printed form, it reveals feelings and emotions that are the essence of subjectivity, and it demands introspection with first-person pronouns. One's lived experience is unique. Narrative writing reveals the self in relation to others, and as the words move forth on the page there is a vulnerability in knowing that we are putting ourselves out there—naked on the page of our experience.

As we write this editorial, we are increasingly aware of how much fear and uncertainty cloaks we who are submitting our work for review to any journal these days. In an escalating war on words, we recognize so many of the words we have used in this journal are on ban lists designed to bleed humanity from our vocabularies and leave us speechless. The pages of *Reflections* are replete with those words because helping professionals are engaged in work that speaks to the human condition, and that fact underscores our ethics of care. “The human voice is a voice of resistance, and care ethics is an ethics of liberation” (Gilligan, 2023, p. 110).

Given the complexities of being helpers in this time, we are excited to have announced *Reflections'* latest Special Issue, which envisions manuscripts platforming helping professionals as they navigate an environment whose social policies and political actions target, lay bare, or multiply the vulnerabilities of the very communities they strive to empower—even more sharply than usual. This Special Issue, *Navigating Change: Reflective Insights for Helping Professionals in Shifting Political Landscapes*, seeks submissions that highlight how helping professionals are adapting, advocating, and intervening in response to evolving political challenges. From racial justice and police reform to healthcare disparities, voting rights, and civic engagement, this Special Issue will highlight the strategies and insights that shape professional practice in these tumultuous times.

When government agencies, nonprofit groups, educational institutions, and business enterprises across sectors are scrubbing words from their websites and written materials, we recognize that their funding streams and their very existence are threatened. We also recognize that helping professionals who voice resistance or speak truth to power face consequences we have never seen before. It is in this climate that we are incredibly grateful that authors continue to garner the courage to share their stories about the ethics of care so that their experiences are not

subjugated. It is more important than ever that human voices are raised through multiple expressions of creativity and hope. In times like these, inaction is not an option. It is precisely in times like these that *Reflections* best lives its purpose.

Highlights of This Special Issue

The articles in this General Issue of *Reflections* are written by a variety of helping professionals with backgrounds in social work, mental health, nursing, healthcare administration, and criminal justice. As a multidisciplinary journal, it is always a joy for us to publish narratives from a variety of professions, and it is particularly affirming to hear those stories united in sharing strategies and interventions used to address change in the institutions and systems that comprise the human experience.

The first two articles focus on national- and state-level interventions, providing insight into the importance of civic engagement. Lane and seven social work colleagues recount their experiences as poll workers in 2020 and 2021, sharing what they learned as participants in election administration during contentious and COVID-19–fraught times in the lives of US citizens. Their narratives reveal differences across states in using technology, recognizing that some polling sites are more comfortable for voters than others, and provide a deeper understanding of the complexities in assuring fair and just elections. Montoya, Robinson, and Murray are healthcare professionals who focus on engagement in large-scale healthcare systems that are in realignment. Understanding the realignment process and the uncertainty accompanying changes in the industry is required to intervene with staff and patients who are caught in the midst of rapid change. Both articles are calls to action for helping professionals to become part of the solution by fully engaging in political and healthcare systems when there are challenges that impact citizens, staff, and service recipients. They educate us as readers by sharing what they have learned, and they offer sound advice for reacting to the onward march of complex systems from within.

The next two articles focus on creative grassroots interventions that inform practice in local communities. Both authors use the art of expression to connect with diverse population groups. Cole’s narrative highlights the resilience among women in a rural Southern US state who have been human trafficked and unhoused as they engage in an illuminating photovoice project. Using photovoice as a tool to create safe, empowering spaces; tell unheard stories; and reveal the reforms needed locally and nationally, the authors lift up to the light the lived experiences of women who have taken brave action to help others exposed to similar abuses. Chandler’s article focuses on group engagement by socially prescribing hip-hop to intervene in underserved communities to reduce isolation and address feelings of hopelessness. Identifying as a social work educator and as a rapper, the author uses both skillsets to create an intervention that touches the lives of at-risk young people. Both articles emphasize how visual and musical expression offer safe spaces to build a sense of belonging in the presence of others—fostering the gain of both confidence and hope for the future.

The following three articles target organizational-level interventions in the areas of criminal justice, mental health, and education. Keyes writes from the perspective of being a “Black cop”

who reminds us that policing is a helping profession. In the author's intent to inspire others to tell their stories about what it means to perform a role within the police subculture, this narrative is steeped in the tangible personal and professional experience of servicing the criminal justice system amid questions of race, duty, and social justice. Bergmans joins five mental health colleagues and peer facilitators in writing about the importance of providers and caregivers recognizing the vicarious trauma associated with a suicide attempt or death. The authors explain why instituting trauma-informed care and collaborative safety planning into their agencies is necessary to improve engagement with services and to place healing above re-traumatization. A third article by Dyson and colleagues reveals the barriers encountered in conducting a study on mentoring in social work education. During the data collection process, the researchers faced a number of microaggressions and racist comments, which underscored the need for strong mentoring to be available to support faculty in dealing with insensitive and biased respondents. All three articles take a hard look at established institutions in which any intervention is often fraught with unanticipated reactions and resistance. We thank these authors for disclosing the ups and downs of trying to improve their workplaces and their openness in sharing their lived experiences.

Our last two articles focus on interventions at the group level. Mukerji, a social work educator, and nine students collaborate on a writing project about how they weathered the angst of disenchantment with current events to turn their classroom experience into a joint reflection of what gives them hope. Each co-author takes a turn in this moving collection to use the process of group narrative as a positive intervention; this allows both the fashioning of the classroom into a safe space and the sharing of a method of response to difficult realities that humanizes themselves and others. Feize uses Tuckman and Jensen's (1977) model of group development as a framework to tell the story of how a collaborative across five disciplines teamed up to implement a behavioral health program. Drawing on literature about interprofessional education, Feize takes the reader through each stage of the group's development, sharing the importance of patience as challenges arise and group members develop trust. Both articles emphasize the humanization of the classroom and group settings, where listening to one another and trusting the process become central.

The articles in this issue reveal challenges encountered in pursuing interventions at the national, state, community, organizational, and group levels. We trust you will find this Special Issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights useful to a myriad of professions, educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

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With Gratitude...

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We appreciate your commitment to *Reflections* and its authors!!