REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Volume 9, Number 3 Summer, 2003

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

REFLECTIONS: NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING (ISSN 1080-0220)
is a refereed journal published quarterly by the Department of Social Work,
California State University Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California, 90840-0902
Periodicals postage paid at Long Beach, CA.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping, Department of Social Work,
California State University Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California, 90840-0902

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Volume 9 **Summer 2003** **Number 3**

Cover and original artwork by Dan Jimenez

PRINTED QUARTERLY BY **THE CSULB UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Letter from the Editor

Jillian Jimenez, Ph.D.

Summer is a time of lassitude and inertia, when major change seems both unlikely and unwelcome. Most of us concentrate on ways to relieve ourselves of our daily routine through ritualized and acceptable escape, commonly known as vacations. Summer reading is supposed to be light and as non challenging as possible. This issue of *Reflections* belies our expectations of summer, as the authors distill for us their experience of creating change and discovering, sometimes much later, the long-tailed consequences of their efforts. These narratives suggest the shock of the serendipitous, when something unexpected shakes a professional out of the cocoon of the familiar and forces a re-examination of self. Some of this reflection is painful, some is easier done with others and some is postponed as long as possible. While most of us would prefer to avoid the shock of the unpleasantly unfamiliar, the narrators presented here have stepped into the shadowy areas outside the clear edges of their expertise and found new terrain in which to flourish. I hope these narratives present you with the possibility of something new as well as inspiration for revision of something all too familiar.

CALL FOR NARRATIVES

Special Issue: Forthcoming In 2004

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

In celebration of 50th anniversary of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education,* which desegregated public schools, and the 40th anniversary of the landmark federal Civil Right Act of 1964, which desegregated higher education, ***Reflections*** will publish a special issue on past and contemporary accounts of the struggle to achieve social equality within the helping professions—including their educational and training programs, agencies and professional associations as well as within external communities and organizations, including host universities and colleges. Narratives should focus on the struggle to achieve desegregation, civil rights, racial equality, and nondiscriminatory practices within the helping professions. Original narrative articles and oral history interviews are welcome.

Manuscript submissions should be sent to special issue editor:

John Kayser, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Denver
2148 S. High Street
Denver, CO 80208

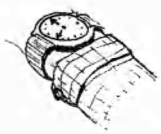
Deadline: September 2, 2003.

I Don't Think a Latino Should Teach About Whiteness: A Story About Essentialism and Latino/a Multiplicity

By José Sisneros, Ph.D., University of Denver

In this narrative the author, a professor of social work who teaches a course on multiculturalism in a Graduate School of Social Work, is shocked when a student tells him that he shouldn't teach about Whiteness because he is Latino. This leads to a period of reflection and clarification which occurs through a dialogue with Sandra a professor of philosophy. Sandra helps the author understand the concepts of "essentialism" and "Latino/a multiplicity." This dialogue enables the author to respond to the student's comment.

I looked at my watch; it was 4:45 p.m., almost time to end the class I was teaching, Multicultural Social Work Practice. It was the summer quarter and the classroom was located in the basement of an old building where the air conditioner never worked as it should. This was the first year that I was teaching this course, which was still controversial among faculty and students and new in the curriculum. The class was developed by a committee of professors who had taken about nine months to develop a syllabus. This process incorporated many different ideologies and ideas on how a multicultural class should be taught. For the students, it was controversial because many felt that since they had taken courses on multiculturalism in undergraduate school, they did not need another one.



Today the topic was Whiteness and what it means to be a White person in this society. The class was difficult and the students defensive. One student verbalized that in classes such as this, Whites were blamed for all of the social ills of society. Another student pointed out that the textbook that we were using, *White by Law*, had a "finger pointing" view. I was feeling irritable and wished that the clock would move faster. I also sensed that the students were irritable. After I dismissed class and the students were leaving the classroom, I began erasing the chalkboard when one of the students, a young, early twenties, White female approached me. I looked around as she blurted out, "I don't think a Latino should teach about Whiteness!" The comment took me by surprise, but before I could answer she made a quick spin, and walked out of the classroom. I finished erasing the chalkboard and put my notes into my briefcase while thinking, "I really don't need this; I have other options."

Walking to my car, which was located about three blocks from the school, I continued to think about the comment and became even more irritable as I began the one-hour commute to my home. As I drove from the ramp onto the freeway, the afternoon sun forced its way into the car and it felt pleasing. I began to relax and think about other things. At about 5:45 p.m. I entered the outskirts of the community where I live. However, I stopped by the side of a mountain where a trail led to a spot where I would go when things were troubling me or where I would go to write when the weather permitted. I locked my car, put on my favorite cap, stuffed my writing notebook in my backpack where I had some articles I planned to read, and started hiking up the mountain.

As I began the walk, I noticed the combination of colors from the mountain jumping out in interesting mixtures. I found my spot, which was located a little off the trail, a large rock with a crevice that looked like a chair. I sat down, stretched my arms, closed my eyes, and drifted off for awhile. I think I was even starting to dream. Then I heard a voice, "José, José." I opened my eyes and standing before me was Sandra, whom I had met two weeks previous at a community function. She was wearing a bright blue jogging suit and carrying a small backpack. She was Latina, lived in the same community that I did but worked as a professor at a different university than I, and was doing some writing around Latino/a identity. I found her conversation to be stimulating. I have always been interested in philosophy and was now interested in how it related to social work and multiculturalism.

"Sandra," I said with excitement in my voice and shook her hand. She said she had been jogging, but she wasn't even breathing hard, and I asked her if she wanted to sit for awhile. She sat down on another rock and took off her backpack as I offered her half of an apple. Talking about our lives for awhile, I learned more about her; she was from Texas, born to a poor migrant family from Mexico, and was now a professor of philosophy in a major university. She was one of a handful of Latina/o professors in philosophy in the United States, if not the world.

Our conversation drifted to the classes we were teaching at our respective universities and in our respective disciplines and we began to share some of our experiences in the classroom. Eventually, I told her about my experience in class that day and the student's comments. After listening to my tirade for awhile, she said, "Wow, that's a good example of essentialism." I had recently been introduced to the word after reading some critical race theory (Delgado, 1996). However, I still was not clear on the concept so I asked her, "Tell me about your understanding of essentialism."

"If one believes in the logic of essentialism, then the student was correct." I was startled. She saw my reaction but continued, "The concept has its roots in the concept of essence. If you remember from your undergraduate days some of the Aristotelian doctrines of essence and substance, where 'things are what they are because they contain the essences of the kinds of things to which they belong: essences (somehow) in individual things that are substances; and the essences of substances support their accidental attributes. Words that refer to kinds of things have definitions that describe the essences of those kinds'" (Zack, 2000).

I think she sensed that I didn't clearly understand what she was talking about. "What I mean," she said, "is that when we as Latinos/as share an identity within this concept, it is indiscernible and it means we share every property." She continued, "This concept is used when we describe different groups and different group identities. It is what Young (1990) calls 'a logic of substance'. Under this logic a 'group is defined by a set of essential attributes that constitute the identity of a group. It is grounded in a fixed set of shared characteristics or experiences of members of an identity group. An example of an essentialist view is the often-used example of the self-help text, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.* This book essentializes gender emphasizing the difference of men and women to the relative exclusion of internal distinctions within either category'" (Henze, 2000).

"So," I said, "in this way of thinking Latinos/as have an essential core that defines us as a group."

"Exactly," she said. "We are often seen as having similar properties based on a common essence, a set of attributes such as the Spanish language, extended families, Catholic religion, and so forth."

"This is interesting," I replied. "You know, I spent 20 years working in community mental health, and in those 20 years I was always expected to be an expert of Latinos/as. I think I understand now. It is because of my essence and this presumed understanding that I share similar properties with all other Latinos/as; therefore, I'm an expert on Latino/a life. What a set up!"

She smiled and said, "Yes, you were an 'essence' expert" (Sisneros, 2002). She continued, "However, this doesn't mean that you wasted your time or that you gave out bad information; you offered a 'minority perspective' and I'm sure your audiences learned a lot about Latinos/as."

"Maybe," I replied. "In those days I wasn't fluent in the literature and most of what I presented was from my own experience. I was no expert on all Latinos/as!"

Sandra continued, "A problem with Aristotelian essence is that it has been used against us. The dominant group perceives the essence of Latinos/as as inferior or 'less than' and it then justifies the oppression. Essence is seen as natural so that's the way it is. It's simply the way things are, have been, and will be."

"Yes, the natural paradigm," I blurted out, proud of myself for remembering that. I pulled out an article that I had thrown in my backpack because I'd wanted to spend more time thinking about it. I took a few minutes looking at the article and said, "Let me read this to you: 'Underlying all racism and sexism is the notion of a natural or biological difference alleged to separate the groups in question in a fundamental, inevitable and irreversible way'" (Rothenberg, 1990). I continued, "Don't you think that what Rothenberg and you are talking about is a biological essentialism? I thought that there was general understanding, at least in academia, that biological essentialism has been discredited."

She smiled, then almost broke into a laugh and asked, "Well, what about the book, *The Bell Curve*?" At this point, we both laughed and gave each other the 'high five.'

She stated, "I do think that in academia we're beginning to discredit biological essentialism. However, let me see the article; I'm familiar with it." I handed her the article and she spent a couple of minutes glancing over it. As she was glancing over the article, there were some moments of silence. Suddenly, I became aware of the noises from the mountain – birds chirping and a sound like crickets from the bushes. She said, "Here it is, let me read you this quote:"

"While the nature/biology paradigm is often portrayed (and even dismissed) as crude and unsophisticated it has never been entirely replaced or supplemented. In fact, additional paradigms have been generated at different historical moments to meet the changing economic, social and political conditions and their attendant needs, but these new paradigms always function within the context of the nature/biology paradigm; they never replace it" (Rothenberg, 1990, p. 45).

"This makes sense," I replied. "One thing that we have done is create another paradigm using culture instead of personal attributes. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) discuss the idea that the mainstream way of looking at difference is what they call pluralist multiculturalism. This is where we define the difference of groups by using cultural activities. Sometimes we do this to the point where we exoticize different groups, a form of cultural essentialism," I continued, again very proud of myself.

"Yes, I agree with that," she replied, "the four F's."

"What?" I blurted out.

"Well," she continued, "according to Kanpol (1997), at times we look at social

groups such as Latinos/as using fairs, food, festivals, and folktales. The four F's." I laughed as she continued, "Let's look at essentialism from a political perspective. There seems to be an assumption that all Latinos/as have the same interests and agree on the values, strategies, and policies that will promote those interests (Alcoff, 2000). Therefore, if we share an identity then we will be political allies."

"Is this a bad thing?" I asked. "Could we Latinos/as really trust someone who is White to represent our interests?"

"This is where we need to be careful," she replied quickly, "because someone is Latino/a doesn't mean that they will share our interests. I think we have learned this from history. Someone's essence does not make them an expert on Latino/a life. However, as a social group we do have broad shared interests. As a group we still have high poverty rates, and could we really say that racism and ethnicism doesn't occur anymore? With these broad shared interests we have a concept called strategic essentialism, which means that we strategically use these broad interests to make demands."

" So," I said, trying to understand, "we use essentialism politically, but the mistake comes in when we try to describe Latinos/as, for example, in setting up clinical programs."

"Yes," she replied, "when we reduce the entire Latino/a population to some single criteria held to constitute its defining essence and character" (Calhoun, 1997).

"Could you give me examples?" I asked.

She replied, "I think the idea that Latinos/as use folk healers; certainly that's true for some Latinos/as, but many Latinos/as even from Mexico don't use them."

"Okay, that helps," I said. At this point, we both became silent. She stood up and stretched. I stood and again became aware of the magnificent mountain that I was on. The sun was starting to set and the brilliant color was pouring through the trees. It was a remarkable sight. I apologized, "I guess you were going to go jogging and we spent all the time talking about essentialism."

She replied, "What we just accomplished was a rigorous exercise for the mind."

I asked her if she wanted to continue this at another time. We agreed to meet in two days, and then started down the mountain together. She gave me the names of Young, Alcoff, and Hames-Garcia to read before we met again, then started running up the trail. At this point, I had a fantasy that she could race a deer.

The two days passed rapidly. Not sleeping much, I spent most of my time reading. When I arrived at her office about 10 minutes early, she was working at her computer, and without turning around she said, "Hola, Jose, come on in. I will be done in a minute." Her office was small and all four walls were covered with books. Looking at the titles, I saw Foucault, Sartre, and many of the philosophical giants.

She turned from the computer smiling, and I realized that she is always smiling. "Tell me Jose, what do you want the multicultural class to do?"

I knew how to answer this question. "I want to help them to be able to understand difference without stereotyping, to be able to conceptualize more than one difference at a time, to be able to talk about difference without talking about sameness."

"I think," she said, "the first thing we need to do is to get out of the conceptual trap we are in and get away from the idea of 'cultural purity' and 'cultural totality.' These are both enlightenment ideas that contribute to the essentialism."

I asked, "Does this mean that we have to get rid of the concept of essence?"

"Well, not necessarily," she answered. "There is an argument in favor of Locke's concept of nominal essences that places essences to be contingent on language and thus variable (Zack, 2000). This makes the

concept more workable, but," she continued, "I think we should follow Young's (2001) advice to see different groups as relational rather than defined by substantive categories and attributes. She recommends that rather than using attributes, we use the concept of a social group. I have it right in front of me":

"What makes a group is a social process of interaction and differentiation in which some people come to have a particular affinity for others. My "affinity group" in a given social situation comprises those people with whom I feel the most comfortable, who are more familiar. Affinity names the manner of sharing assumptions, affective bonding, and networking that recognizably differentiates groups from one another, but not according to some common nature." (p. 399)

"I like this," I said. "It allows flexibility in thinking."

She continued, "There is another close concept called 'linked fate' that signifies a felt connection to others of one's identity group based on the belief that their fate will impinge on one's own, operates to tie individuals together on the basis of being subject to a certain type of treatment" (Alcoff, 2000).

I responded to her statement: "These concepts – nominal essence, affinity and linked fate – they help in understanding. In this way of thinking one can be a Latino/a and not understand the Spanish language or practice the traditions, but yet have a connection because of our 'linked fate.' I think this is important because over the last 20-some years, I have seen Latinos/as who don't have certain attributes excluded from certain situations."

"Yes," she replied, "the other danger of essentialism is that it leads to who is 'authentic' or who has the credentials to belong to a group. I've seen how some middle class Latinos/as and some biracial Latinos/as felt left out of the Chicano/a movement."

"Ok!" I blurted out, "How do we teach about Latino multiplicity?"

Sandra then asked, "José, how many identities do you have?"

"Well, I'm Latino, male, 52 years of age, heterosexual, have an illness that could turn into a disability, and I'm a professor, a father.... I could go on. What's your point?" I think I sounded irritated by her question.

She stated, "Your identity as a Latino is only one identity of many, but it is politically salient. Let's hold the idea of political saliency for a little bit here. Our individual experiences are raw materials whereby we construct identities. Thus, all of our experiences are different. Look, Jose, I'm from Texas, my parents are from Mexico, and I think you told me that your parents are from New Mexico. Our experiences are different."

"But, but," I said mumbling, "I feel a bonding with you for many reasons, but one is that you are Latina."

She looked at me and softly replied, "Remember the concept of a social group, and even though we have had different personal experiences, we have both been oppressed. That in itself ties us together. We are held together as a 'structural social group.' We grew up in different parts of the country, were treated as we didn't belong; it is not that we shared the same cultural attributes. Gracia (as quoted in Young, 2000) proposes that

"There are many people in the world rightly associated with the group 'Hispanic/ Latino' but not because they share a particular set of attributes – whether race, nationality, language, or religion. What defines a group instead is the relation to its members have to the long and determinant history of Iberian colonization of the Americas." (p. 154)

"Ah! Another example of linked fate," I said. Mohatny (2000) discusses the idea tha identity constructions provide narratives that link our historical memories of social groups.

"Ok, now are you ready for understanding political saliency? Listen to this metaphor from Garcia-Hames (2000)." She picked up a sheet of paper and again smiled, "Think of a photograph," she said.

"Photographs can portray endless shapes and variations of hue and contrast. While one album may contain hundreds of photographs, no two are even remotely alike. All of the photographs contain combinations of three primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. Each of the photographs may contain yellow, yet the yellow may be present in different densities and shapes and combine with red and blue in different densities and shapes. Thus no two photographs contain yellow in the same way. In some photographs, the yellow may not be visible; there may be only some green or orange. What the yellow looks like depends not only on its own shape and density but also on the shape and density of the red and the blue and their position in relation both to the yellow and to each other. Thus yellow next to red looks different from yellow next to blue." (p. 103)

"Wow! You are really getting abstract with me."

"Hang on," she said. This time she wasn't smiling. "Think of the self in relation to this conception of a photograph. Think of the colors as groups. If we think of being conservative as red and being gay as green, those two colors put next to each other stand out brighter than if left alone. Memberships in various groups combine with and mutually constitute one another. You said you were Latino, a professor, a male, and a heterosexual. Each of these identities mutually constitutes one another. For example, membership in the group maleness means something different in the context to simultaneous group membership (Latino). All of your identities blend together. They expand and constitute each other's meanings. The subjective experience of one's group membership depends on and relates to memberships in other groups."

"I like this, but I'm still confused," I confessed.

She continued, "Of all of your identities some are salient, for example, you being a Latino professor. My guess is that when you walk into the classroom the first thing that students notice is that you are Latino. Of all of the identities that you've talked about, your identity as a Latino becomes reduced or restricted. If you were gay, then you would have two identities that were restricted because of political saliency."

"I think I'm starting to understand. If none of the identities are politically salient then they remain in the background. The reason that they are politically salient is that they are based on social movements."

I was intrigued as she declared, "If none of your identities are politically salient they are transparent. You don't see them. Lopez-Haney (1996) talks about the transparency phenomena when it comes to Whiteness. To be White is not to have to deal with it on a daily basis. However, your Latinoism becomes opaque, or as some have called it, 'thick group membership.' The transparency is the normate that designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definite human beings. Young (1990) states, 'One group occupies the position of a norm against which all others are measured. The attempt to reduce all persons to the entity of a common measure constructs as deviant those where all attributes are implicitly presumed in the norm.' Young (2001) continued, 'The norm becomes a universal subject position and the theory of privileging begins where only the oppressed

and excluded groups are defined as different. Whereas, the privileged groups are neutral and exhibit free and malleable subjectivity, the excluded groups are marked with an essence, imprisoned in a given set of possibilities' (p. 397). The closer one fits this, the more transparent one is. The further one moves away from the normate the more opaque one becomes. The problem comes when people 'try to fit the description in the same way that Cinderella's stepsisters attempted to squeeze their feet in the glass slipper'" (Thompson, 1997, p. 8).

"José," Sandra said, "I have a meeting across campus. Do you want to walk with me?" I got up as she gathered some papers and we walked out of the office. She closed her door and it locked automatically. We started walking. The day was beautiful; since it was the summer quarter, the campus was quiet, yet there were students sitting in the grass reading, talking, eating. Then all of a sudden we heard, "To your right," as a student on a skateboard flew past us.

"José," she asked, "What are you feeling?"

"I don't know. I feel my mood changing. Everything we have been talking about makes sense. I think that the student's comments were very important. I think a Latino/a could teach about Whiteness, and I think people who are White should teach multiculturalism. But, you know, I've heard some faculty say that a person of color is the one who should teach a multicultural class."

"Maybe they're right," she said.

"No, I don't think they are. I think what we've done is to simplify something very complex and in doing so, we've fed into essentialism." I continued, "We're complicated human beings in a complicated world. I was going through some literature that stated that about 36 percent of us Latinos/as now have married outside the group. I heard it's the same for some of the other groups. However, I was surprised to hear that 75 percent of Native Americans are now married outside their group. What this tells me supports what you were saying about cultural purity. It's gone, but it doesn't mean that we don't have differences. We need a new language to talk about all of this stuff. I think I'm ready for class tomorrow."

We stopped before she went into the building. She extended her hand, which I shook tightly, not wanting to let go. She looked directly into my eyes and said, "Buena suerte, Jose." I was speechless and watched her as she went into the meeting.

After looking at the door for several minutes, I started walking home. I only lived a few blocks from the campus. At first I walked briskly, and then, all of a sudden, I felt exhausted, having not slept well for a couple of days. Walking into my living room, I turned on the TV, sank into my couch, and promptly fell asleep, awaking suddenly and looked at my watch, it was 3:36 a.m. I staggered off to bed and entered into a series of dreams about identities and colors all merging together with different combinations emerging. When I woke up around 9:00 a.m., I realized that I had only a couple of hours to prepare for class. I remember a colleague telling me that sometimes students present individual concerns but are really speaking for the entire group, and I think that is what this student was doing. I also remember some advice from another colleague who said that I had to remember that I was well read in multiculturalism and most of the students were not. The advice was to go slower.

As I entered the class, I realized I had forgotten to shave and probably looked a little disheveled. I opened up a dialogue with the students, addressing the issue of essentialism and asking them what it felt like to take a multicultural class from a Latino professor. This discussion went well, but one student said she felt if she said something to offend me that I might label her as a racist.

Afterwards, reworking the class syllabus, I focused on the concepts that I learned from Sandra. The rest of the quarter went well. I learned some valuable lessons from Sandra, who in reality is myself, my alter ego. Delgado (1996), author of several books about affirmative action and other issues around race, uses an alter ego named Rodrigo. I chose Sandra, a Latina, as an alter ego since she represents the influence of feminist thinking, especially from Latina writers and philosophers, on my current thinking and growth on multiculturalism.

I am pleased to state that the class has continued and is a requirement for all of our entering students. It has gained credibility among our faculty, which was evidenced in a recent faculty meeting where some decisions had to be made concerning some of our courses in the curriculum. It was clear from our declining enrollment that some courses had to be cut. One of the suggestions was that we cut the multicultural course for advanced students. The faculty almost unanimously rejected that idea and voted to keep the course as it is. The students continue to provide feedback that the course has been helpful and that they enjoy the class. The students also report that they are able to use the concepts learned in the multicultural class in other courses in the curriculum.

References

• Alcoff, I.M. (2000). Who's afraid of identity politics? In M.I. Moya & M.R. Hames-Garcia (Eds.), *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* (pp. 312-341). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

• Calhoun, C. (1997). *Nationalism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

• Delgado, R. (1996). *The Coming Race War.* NY: New York University Press.

• Garcia-Hames, M.R. (2000). Who are our own people?: Challenges for a theory of social identity. Who's afraid of identity politics? In Moya, M.I., & Garcia-Hames, M.R. (Eds.), *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* (pp. 102-127). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

• Henze, B.R. (2000). Who says who says?: The epistemological grounds for agency in liberatory politics. Who's afraid of identity politics? In Moya, M.I., & Garcia-Hames, M.R. (Eds.), *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* (pp. 229-250). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

• Kanpol, B. (1997). *Issues and Trends in Critical Pedagogy.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

• Kincheloe, J., & Steinberg, S.R. (1997). *Changing Multiculturalism.* Philadelphia: Open University Press.

• Lopez-Haney, I.F. (1996). *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race.* NY: New York University Press.

• Mohanty, S.P. (2000). The epistemic status of cultural identity. Who's afraid of identity politics? In Moya, M.I., & Garcia-Hames, M.R. (Eds.), *Reclaiming identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism.* (pp. 29-64). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

• Rothenberg, P. (1990). The construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of difference. *Hypatia,* vol. 5. No 1. pp. 42-55.

• Sisneros, J. (2002). The loss of a language I never had: A story of linguicide. *Reflections,* Vol.8, No.2. pp.69-76.

• Thompson, R.G. (1997). *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. NY: Columbia University Press.

• Young, I.M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

• Young, I.M. (2000). Structure, difference, and Hispanic/Latino claims of justice. In Gracia, J.J.E., & DeGraiff, P. (Eds.). *Hispanics/Latinos in the United States: Ethnicity, Race, and Rights*. (pp. 147-167). NY: Routledge.

• Young, I.M. (2001). Social movements and the politics of difference. In Boxill, B. (Ed.), *Race and Racism*. (pp. 383-419). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

• Zack, N. (2000). Race and philosophic meaning. In Boxill, B. (Eds.). *Race and Racism*. (pp. 43-57). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The Circle of Helping: From Dark Dungeons to Raging Rivers

By Barbara L. Rich, MSW, University of Southern Maine

In this narrative, the author relates the story of her work with a Native American male adolescent in a juvenile corrections facility and the experience of meeting him several years later when the circle of helping was completed.

Recently, I heard on the radio about a man who had drowned while rafting a wild northern river. I know that river and I know a little about drowning. This is a tale about how I almost drowned and about how, in the process, I experienced a reaffirmation of my belief in social work.

Several years ago, I worked at a juvenile correctional facility, a place where young people who had broken the law were remanded into the care of the state, supposedly for rehabilitation. There, in a male-dominated, militaristic environment, a few social workers tried to serve the unlucky legions who were relegated to this place set apart for them. I remember it as one of the most challenging and rewarding jobs I ever had, where daily dramas and crises played out against a bleak background of decaying buildings and tired, overburdened staff.

The particular unit I worked in was home, sometimes temporary but often a long-term, revolving-door residence, to a population of males between the ages of sixteen and twenty. The number of residents in our unit varied, anywhere from twenty-five to fifty youth at a time with one social worker for all of them. These young people were among the neediest in the state. As older residents, most of them had long criminal histories although some had been adjudicated on single Class A crimes, usually arson that caused death, murder or manslaughter, or a sexual assault. They tended to be poor, throwaway, mentally ill, abused, angry, and violent.

Lonnie

Lonnie (not his real name), a Native American boy from a rural area, had grown up in the care of the state. His social history was a patchwork of placements, foster homes, group homes, treatment centers, and correctional facilities, with an occasional bounce "home" to the reservation to live with his mother or another relative. These home stays were nothing more than short visits until another incident involving substance abuse and criminal activity brought him to the attention of the police and then the courts. As a ward of the state he had burned through a long procession of human service caseworkers, from neophytes to world-weary, battle- scarred veterans.

Starting out in the units for the youngest residents, Lonnie was committed for both short stays and longer ones through the age-graded units until he "graduated" into ours. This latest incarceration was for two burglaries and a minor drug possession charge. He was, of course, already well known throughout the juvenile facility since he had virtually grown up there. As in any closed society, the people, both staff and residents, are known by their reputations. A big, powerful, dark-haired kid, Lonnie was labeled occasionally charming but ruthless, smart but underachieving, manipulative, criminally minded, sociopathic, doing life on the installment plan.

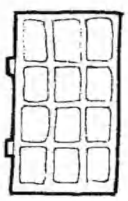
While outwardly engaging, Lonnie was deeply suspicious of corrections personnel.

Although this attitude is common among incarcerated juveniles, Waller and Patterson (2002) believe that the historical and current oppression that has been experienced by Native Americans may exacerbate this tendency. As a social worker employed by the facility, I was not immune. I did, however, have one advantage over other workers—I had previously worked with his cousin and had helped him to get into a Native American-sponsored alcohol treatment program. The cousin wrote Lonnie a letter stating that I was a good person who might be able to help if Lonnie gave me a chance. Having been vetted by a family member, I was able to develop a contract with Lonnie that began with helping him to stabilize his behavior in the unit and progressed to assisting him in considering long-term plans.

Things went well for awhile and Lonnie seemed to settle into the institutional routine, even moving up the various group levels of status and privilege. The Christmas holiday, traditionally a difficult time in any prison, brought with it the usual minor incidents and one major episode: Lonnie and two others from our unit escaped in the night. He was on the run for several weeks and was caught committing an unusually serious crime, a burglary that escalated into a high-speed, stolen car chase, ending with several people, including Lonnie himself, severely injured. By then he was nearly eighteen and with such a checkered past that the courts and the administration of the correctional facility decided it was best for him and for society that he be "bound over" into the adult prison system. It was believed that he was beyond redemption in the juvenile system, having received all the "benefits" that it had to offer. Legally, since he was approaching eighteen, he could be sent to court for a bindover hearing and in this proceeding, several legal standards would have to be met. The state would need to convince the judge that, among other things, Lonnie had committed serious crimes of an adult nature, that he had lived in the world as an adult rather than as a child, and that he was beyond any help that the juvenile system could give him.

Dark Dungeons

When he was returned to us from the hospital, I went to see him. Due to the escape, the resultant pending criminal charges, and the initiation of the bindover procedures, he had been transferred into a locked unit. I helped him to connect with a lawyer who specializes in juvenile bindovers and visited him regularly to offer support while he waited for a court date. Since he was no longer in my unit, I had to see him after my regular work was done and so I would stop at the locked unit a couple of times a week on my way home. This unit consists of a large, windowless, cement room with individual cells around the perimeter, dark and cool in both summer and winter, reminiscent of a cave or a dungeon. He was there through the long winter and seemed to look forward to my regular brief visits, especially since he received no family visitors. In consultation with his lawyer, he decided not to fight the bindover since being convicted as an adult would end his tenure in a juvenile system that he hated. Also, as an



adult, he would be a first time offender and thus receive a lighter sentence for his crimes.

It was not a swift process, however, and as the winter wore on, we re-contracted to focus on this enforced pause between adolescence and adulthood. I helped him to redefine his incarceration as an important moratorium, a time to consider where he had come from and where he was going, who he

had been and who he wanted to be. I pointed out that as a newly minted adult, he would be leaving behind his struggles with hated authority figures from his childhood world—the teachers, probation officers, corrections staff, and caseworkers—and I challenged him to consider how he wanted to shape his adult life path and what strengths and talents he could find in himself, his culture, and his community. According to Greene, Jensen, and Jones (1996) "many clients of color who have been devalued and disempowered by society may deny or downgrade the strengths and resources they have" (p. 178) As an adjudicated juvenile offender and a ward of the state, Lonnie had collected a file full of labels and negative identities and as a Native American, he had internalized some of the devalued identity that is reflected from the dominant culture.

Knowing that the use of a narrative modality can help "clients find internal validation through already existing examples of resiliency and strength" (Kirven, 2000, p. 261), I introduced the idea of using the long hours to write about himself. Lonnie wanted to use his time productively and laboriously began to construct a life narrative, giving me several pages each time I came to visit. I would review them, writing comments and questions that I hoped would elicit his strengths and resources, and drop them off in the morning, thus giving him time to think and respond in writing.

Anticipating his return to the reservation upon his release from the expected adult jail sentence, I encouraged him to assess sources of strength and support that existed within his immediate and extended family and in his Native American culture. After some discussion, Lonnie was able to identify a paternal uncle who had been helpful to him after his father had died. This man did not live a criminal lifestyle and was positively connected to his tribal identity. With some encouragement from me, Lonnie began to correspond with his uncle and reestablish their relationship. Waller and Patterson (2002) point out how important it is for helpers to consider the cultural strengths and informal familial resources that exist in Native American communities and believe that the most important intervention might be to "strengthen existing connections, restore broken connections, or establish new connections" (p. 82) to natural and familial resources.

Some of the high-risk youth in Ungar's (2001) study of the social construction of resilience reported finding a few adults in their placements who were able to help them redefine their identities. Ungar gives an account of one Native American adolescent: "When returned to his community, J.R. successfully brought his new identity construction home with him. He joined a youth drumming circle and began to look for role models in Native Warrior societies. For J.R., time inside broke a cycle of delinquency and offered him, through his participation in the discourse of his caregivers, greater access to the resources necessary to sustain a powerful self-definition" (pp.147-148).

As time went on, I attempted to focus Lonnie's attention on how his family and friends would be able to tell that he had left his old "badass" identity behind him in prison. What would be their first clues that he was different, more adult? These questions were designed to help him to consider solutions and discover specific new behaviors that would encourage him to shed his problem-saturated identity.

Eventually the exceedingly slow grind of the wheels of justice ended with a completed bindover that sent him immediately to an adult jail. While there, he wrote to me occasionally to let me know how he was doing, but eventually I lost track of him.

Raging Rivers

Now my story fast forwards several years to a time when I was on a weekend trip with

some family members. We had decided to go white-water rafting, a first-time experience for all eight of us. Upon arrival at the pre-trip briefing, we were excited and a little nervous and carefully listened to the safety instructions. After being loaded on vehicles that transported us to the point of embarkation, we carried our rafts down to the river. Outfitted in lifejackets and helmets, we piled into the boat. Each boat had a guide and our family's guide was a small woman who inspired confidence with her crisp directions and good humor. In a swirl of water, we were off with several other rafts, all paddling down the river. It was an exciting day and I found myself thoroughly in the moment, intensely aware of the bright sun, the rise and fall of the raft as we dug our oars into the white water, the green of the trees as the riverbanks rushed by, the continuous soaking in waves of cold water, the squeals of exultation we uttered as we flew down the river.

By midmorning, we were settled into the rhythm of paddling, with the white water

sometimes giving way to a break of swift current in calmer waters. Our guide yelled out that we were approaching Magic Falls, the biggest and most dangerous stretch of white water on the river. Suddenly we were in the midst of so much surging foam that the nearby banks of the river vanished from view. My exhilaration changed to fear as I felt the raft rise into the air and my body tilting over the side of the boat past the point of recovery. In slow motion, I arced up and then down, deep down into the chilly water. Just as quickly I bobbed to the surface, only to find myself enveloped in the churning foam that obscured my vision. The world narrowed to the surging current, the washing machine effect of the water, and my struggle to breathe. Every time I inhaled, my mouth and lungs filled up with water. "So this is how I'm going to die," I thought in stunned surprise.

At that moment, there was a break in the waves; I was able to breathe and I could see our raft behind me and to the left. My survival instinct kicked in. "Nose and toes, nose and toes," I repeated to myself silently. I was recalling the safety briefing that we attended that morning when we were told that if we went overboard, we should head downriver with our noses and toes pointed ahead of us to minimize damage if we were thrown against the many rocks in the river. The waves pushed me up and suddenly I could see our raft with the guide trying to maneuver over to my position. She extended her oar to me and I grabbed it, only to be swept away once more by the huge waves, tossing me further and further downriver. Again, I was plunged into another long stretch of whitewater, gasping for air, lungs bursting, straining with the effort to keep afloat and correctly positioned. As the inevitability of death by drowning became obvious, I thought, in a brief moment of clarity, that this was not such a bad way to die, here in this wild river, deep in the forest.

Then, from out of nowhere, to my right was another raft, and the male guide was offering me an oar, pushing me over to our own boat. Just as quickly, our guide maneuvered our boat alongside and I was able to grasp the ropes on the side. My nephew and my niece's fiancé reached over the side and heaved me aboard where I fell to the deck in a soggy heap. "Are you all right?" the guide yelled. "I think so," I croaked, "but just let me lie here a minute." My shoulder and arm were pinned uncomfortably under my body but I didn't have the strength or the breath to move them. After a few minutes, grateful for breath and life, I resumed my place in the raft and we continued our swift descent down the river.

Reunion

Around one o'clock, all the boats in our party pulled over to the side of the river for a lunch break. Although wet and waterlogged, I was happy to be alive and on dry land. As we ate, a young man dressed in a guide t-shirt kept looking over at me and I was aware that he seemed vaguely familiar. He smiled and I smiled and he ambled over to the rock where I was seated. "I thought you weren't going to make it," Lonnie said as we hugged each other. "So that was you! Oh my God, you saved my life!" I responded, suddenly realizing that he was the other guide who had come to my rescue.

Much later, as everyone piled into the main lodge to have a surf and turf dinner while we watched videos of the river run that had been shot from various places on shore, the head guide joked about how I had decided to go for a "swim" at Magic Falls: "We usually lose a few there but we don't always get them back!" I laughed, too, feeling the exhilaration that comes from surviving a near-death experience.

Lonnie met my eyes across the room and nodded his head toward the door. We walked out into the cool evening and made our way along the large deck that encircled the lodge building. Sitting with me in the twilight, Lonnie caught me up on what he had been doing since he got out of jail. He proudly told me that he had not been involved any other criminal activity although his life had not been easy. He had lived around with several relatives, including his uncle, and worked at many different jobs. Finally he had found his way to the white water rafting company where he could use the river running-skills that his uncle had taught him. His easy affability helped him to fit in with the other guides, and he was popular with the customers who went on the river trips. He was proud of his skills and of his new identity as an accomplished river guide. Using the skills taught by his uncle, Lonnie had found a constructive occupation that was a good fit for him, providing plenty of excitement, the freedom of being outdoors and working autonomously, and a way to make a living without resorting to criminal activity.

We recalled our memories of the correctional facility, and I learned that he had fond memories of some of the people who worked there, but a shadow came over his face when he recounted the many dark days that he spent in lockup awaiting his fate in court. "I want to thank you for all the help you gave me. There were a lot of times that I wanted to give up but then you'd show up and we'd talk and I'd feel like I could hold on a little longer. All that talking and writing helped me to figure things out, helped me to see I didn't want to be locked up all my life." I smiled at him, "And now the shoe is on the other foot, isn't it? I thought I was going to drown and then you came along and helped me." "Yeah," he replied, smiling with me, "I guess people have to help each other through life. I'm glad I was able to return the favor." We talked about the importance of people helping each other whenever they could, that somehow that completed the circle of our common humanity.

As we said warm goodbyes, I thought I would probably never see him again, and I was thankful that our life paths had crossed. Not only had he helped to save my life, he had given me a special glimpse of the futures of many of our clients. As social workers, we usually don't know how the lives of our clients turn out after we have been part of their life journeys for a time. I have often thought about particular clients, wondering how they were and wishing them well. At least in Lonnie's case, I have part of the answer. My reunion with Lonnie reinforced my commitment to social work as a force for positive change in the world and to being a part of the human circle of helping.

Lonnie, like J.R., was eventually able to find a new identity and empower himself within

our written and oral dialogue. When Lonnie and I met again years afterward as helper and helped, our were positions reversed. By helping others to empower themselves, we are creating a future where they will be able, in turn, to help us as a society and sometimes, as in my case, to help us in a very personal way.

References

• Greene, G.W., Jensen, C., & Jones, D.H. (1996). A constructive perspective on clinical social work practice with ethnically diverse clients. *Social Work, 41* (2), 172-180.

• Kirven, J. (2000). Building on strengths of minority adolescents in foster care: A narrative-holistic approach. *Child and Youth Care Forum, 29*(4), 247-263.

• Ungar, M. (2001). The social construction of resilience among "problem" youth in out-of-home placement: A study of health-enhancing deviance. *Child and Youth Care Forum, 30* (3), 137-154.

• Waller, M.A., & Patterson, S. (2002). Natural helping and resilience in a Dine (Navaho) community. *Families in Society, 83*(1), 73-84.

Hitting a Granny Bea

**By Susan Eftink, LCSW, University of Mississippi,
with the assistance of Jo Ann O'Quin, Ph.D., University of Mississippi**

When asked how they can do the work of a social worker in a hospice, the author answers by telling the story of one fascinating patient and the patient's wonderful family, the story of "hitting a Granny Bea."

As a social worker for a hospice program, I am often asked, "How can you do what you do?" I always reply that "it is a privilege to work with dying persons and their families." That rather noble response usually stops further inquiries, but it also does not let the inquiring person really know why I choose to do what I do. So I follow up my response with, "Let me tell you a story which will help you understand . . ." I then proceed to tell them the story of "hitting a Granny Bea."

Ms. Bea was one of my first hospice patients. She was in her late seventies, very thin and frail but with a fierceness of spirit and energy (even when lying in bed) that put my energy level to shame. When Ms. Bea became bed-bound, she insisted that her bed be moved to the living room of her small, comfortable home so that she could be in the "middle of the action." As she requested, the bed was placed in front of the large picture window that dominated the living room. The window afforded Ms. Bea a view of her lovingly tended yard and allowed her to be an observer of the comings and goings in the neighborhood. She enjoyed watching the birds and squirrels playing in her yard. From her bed beside the window, she loved watching the seasons turn.

Ms. Bea had been married and became a widow. She had been a career woman when it was unusual to be one. She had two sons, Ken and Mike. After Ms. Bea retired, she came to live in the same town as her son Ken, his wife Jo Ann, and her two young grandsons, Jake and Taylor. Ms. Bea was diagnosed with cancer and battled it successfully for many years. But eventually the cancer began to win, and Ms. Bea needed help to stay in her home. An unlikely helper emerged—Jo Ann's mother, Delores. Delores had cared for other patients and, when needed, came from Arkansas to Mississippi to care for Ms. Bea. They had a great time together, and the grandsons loved having two grandmas in one house.

During the months that I served as Ms. Bea's hospice social worker, we had many visits together. Sometimes, we talked about her plants and flowers. She tried patiently and diligently to instruct me in her gardening techniques. She just wouldn't listen when I expounded on my firm belief that I did not have a "green thumb." She gave me small plants from her garden, and I'm sure she grieved when I reported their demise under my care. We talked about life—her life and life in general. We also talked about death.

One day, I asked Ms. Bea what she thought was going to happen when she died. She was quiet for several moments, then shared her belief that we were all part of a great cosmic whole and that when we died we became part of an eternal cosmic entity, a part of the universe. To speed and ease this process, the very practical Ms. Bea decided to be cremated. Cremation in rural Mississippi was a bit out of the ordinary in those days but seemed to fit Ms. Bea's philosophy.

Ms. Bea had been a religious person in

the early part of her life. However, she had experienced some painful events in her church and left the church, along with religion, several years before I met her. She wanted no clergy, no funeral, no fuss after her death. She wanted a party! She wanted a gathering of family and friends at her house to remember her, tell stories, drink, eat, and have a good time. This wish, although somewhat unusual for the social community to which she belonged, seemed to suit Ms. Bea's spirit perfectly.

Ms. Bea and I talked about her wishes for the moments surrounding her death. I always try to ask patients if there are songs, passages of scripture or poetry, and persons they want (or don't want) with them as they are dying. Ms. Bea's request, once again, was somewhat out of the ordinary. She wanted music—JOAN BAEZ! What seventy-year-old woman wants Joan Baez playing at her death, I wondered. Ms. Bea, of course!

As Ms. Bea became more weak and frail, she gradually became more and more unresponsive. We encouraged the family and Delores to continue to speak to her, to stroke and hold her hand, and to let her know she was not alone.

Early one Saturday morning in October, my beeper roused me from sleep. It was time to go to Ms. Bea's house. She was dying. It was one of those perfect fall days—cool and crisp, the sky a vivid blue, leaves in glorious color—a day Ms. Bea would have loved. When I arrived, the family—Ken, Jo Ann, 7-year-old Jake, 5-year-old Taylor, and Delores—were standing around Ms. Bea's bed. As time passed, the boys became restless and went in and out of the door to play outside. We finally decided to leave the door open so that Ms. Bea could hear the birds and the laughter of her grandchildren. After one visit to the oak tree in the yard, Taylor brought in an acorn. He wanted to give it to his Granny Bea. We adults looked at each other uncertainly. Finally, I gently opened her hand, Taylor placed the acorn in it, and I slowly closed her fingers around the acorn. Taylor smiled and ran outside to play in Ms. Bea's yard again.

With Joan Baez singing softly from the stereo, Ms. Bea's breathing became very shallow, with long pauses (called apnea) between breaths. With her loved ones encircling her bed, touching and loving her, Ms. Bea took what I believed was her last breath. Through my tears, with all the solemn authority I could muster, I intoned, "She's gone." Ms. Bea promptly took a breath. After several more breaths and a very long pause, I again rather pompously intoned, "She's gone." Again, Ms. Bea had other ideas—she took another breath. This time, with laughter and tears, I said, "Okay, Ms. Bea, this is your show. You run it any way you want to. I'll be quiet." Soon after, she really did take her last breath. You will have to believe me when I say that if death can be beautiful, Ms. Bea's was beautiful—loving, peaceful, and in Ms. Bea's own style.

Ms. Bea's party was a fine affair. Her family and friends gathered in her home to look at pictures and mementoes, tell stories, and generally celebrate Ms. Bea's life. She would have loved it!

Jo Ann shared with me at the party that Ms. Bea's ashes were going to be scattered around a gingko tree that Ms. Bea had loved at the country home of Ken and Jo Ann's. The home is surrounded by beautiful trees

beside a lake. I thought it was the perfect spot for Ms. Bea.

The next spring, I met Jo Ann and asked her how the scattering of Ms. Bea's ashes had gone. She gave me a very sheepish look and said, "If I tell you something, you have to promise you won't think we're crazy." Fascinated, I quickly agreed, and Jo Ann told me what had happened when the family gathered to scatter the ashes. Jo Ann said that they had gathered in a lovely spot and talked about Ms. Bea and how much she loved and was loved by them. Jake spoke up and said that he remembered how much Ms. Bea loved to see the boys play baseball on the nearby baseball field Ken had made for the boys. Then he floored his parents by asking, "Since Granny Bea loved our baseball field so much, can't we put some of her ashes there?" Ken and Jo Ann looked at each other and hesitantly walked with the ashes toward the baseball diamond. They stopped at home plate and, hoping for Ms. Bea's understanding, scattered some of her ashes there. The boys, really getting into the spirit of the event, insisted Granny Bea also needed to be part of first, second, and third bases. So the scattering continued around the bases. The boys were ecstatic, and soon Jo Ann and Ken joined them in feeling that Ms. Bea would surely have enjoyed the idea of becoming a part of her grandsons' life in such a special way. Jo Ann went on to say that now on "Granny Bea's field," when someone hits a home run, they hit a "Granny Bea" and have to touch all her bases. And I thought, "Wouldn't she love that? She really is a part of that eternal cosmic whole!"

And so, to the person who inquires how I can do what I do, I tell them it really is a privilege to work with dying persons and their families. They tell me much more about life than about death. They enrich my life daily. It's a privilege.

Call for Narratives

SPECIAL ISSUE:

The Making of a Gerontologist: The Role of Intergenerational Relationships

This special issue focuses on the role that intergenerational relationships played in choosing a career in the field of gerontology. ***Reflections*** seeks to give a voice to gerontologists to describe how their interest in aging emerged.

Narratives:

* Accounts by members of the helping professions about how a relationship with an older adult impacted their decision to become a gerontologist.

* Narratives about an intergenerational relationship that impacted your professional development.

* Narratives by retired members of the helping professions about the role of intergenerational dialogue in mentoring newer members to the professions.

Mail manuscripts to:

Molly Ranney, Ph.D.
Department of Social Work
CSULB
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90840
(562)985-5237

Manuscripts are due by: September 30th, 2003

Privileged Information, Passwords, and Politics: What I Learned About Teaching Web-Page Development on a Shoestring Budget

By Rebecca Chaisson, Ph.D., Louisiana State University

This narrative discusses the experience gained by a professor of social work who, with a small grant, makes use of web page development in an addictive disorders course. The professor tells of the lack of knowledge and the protection of technology information in the university setting. Students reflect on their learning experience. The author also suggests that this particular project demonstrates the ways in which knowledge of technology is denied to some, and, therefore, creates a system of privileged information.

After looking at a request for proposals for a $2,000 faculty development grant that centered on innovative approaches to reduce "risks associated with college-age drinking through community, faculty, and student activities and initiatives," I thought that I could be interested. However, the inordinate amount of time required to submit a proposal for such a small grant reminded me of Oliver Twist asking Mr. Bumble for more soup: "Please, sir, I want some more." Usually, the hunger is greater than the portion given. Besides, I had secured several large grants from other organizations that provided comfortable funding for human and material resources, so why spend effort on this one? Nevertheless, a group of women faculty in the School of Social Work called a meeting to discuss submitting a proposal for the $2,000. During the discussion, I was seduced by the enthusiasm of the members and by the interesting possibilities of the project. I soon agreed with the ideas of the group: to submit a proposal that combines technology with increasing awareness of the consequences of irresponsible drinking in the university environment.

We began collecting suggestions for what was to be called the "Drink, Drank, Drunk" project and further discussed the need for students in the Graduate School of Social Work to develop a web page. They would learn the techniques of becoming webmasters! Their project for the semester would be to design a web page that would increase campus awareness of the abuse of alcohol in the University community. As we continued to generate ideas for the project, we thought of including an ethnographic journal. The students would visit bars near the campus to observe drinking behavior and describe the images they observed, as well as their feelings, in a reflective journal. They would photograph posters, flyers, and any forms of advertising found on or near the campus that would attest to irresponsible drinking in the University environment. We would administer a questionnaire to the students taking the course in substance abuse before the project to evaluate their knowledge of the risk of college-aged drinking and after the project to determine their growth, i.e., to quantify the level of their awareness about alcohol consumption and its abuse on the college campus. Finally, we developed a budget.

Two digital cameras were to be purchased and software compatible with the University's existing software had to be obtained. Refreshments were budgeted to help the students cope with the Louisiana heat as well as with the stress associated with

capturing "drink, drank, drunk" information through digital photography. A student knowledgeable in web page development would be hired for the semester to act as consultant to the graduate students and to help with the technical aspects. Everything seemed to move quickly in place as we spoke more about our ideas. We even felt that we could team-teach classes and present our findings at professional conferences. So we budgeted in conference fees for two students. We got the blessings of the Dean, submitted our grant proposal for $2,000 "to impact student attitudes and behaviors about high risk drinking, and its associated negative consequences," and waited.

The Wait

We knew we had submitted an innovative proposal and that incorporating technology in an Addictive Disorders course in the School of Social Work would be a "first" for our School. How could someone not see the innovation in curriculum development and the student empowerment inherent in the proposal? We waited past the time of the award announcement and, because we had not heard anything, I could wait no longer. I contacted the head of the funding group and was told that we had been selected for the award. Everyone was thrilled! Our photos were taken for the campus newspaper, and all of us were energized by the news of the award.

A week later, the semester would start. The excitement waned. I began revising the previous year's syllabus to fit the content of the grant. Since I am the faculty member who teaches the addictive behaviors course to MSW students, I began to integrate key aspects of the grant into the course syllabus. I was eager to bring the excitement of the new project to the students, but there was a certain diffidence on my part. All the gremlins of doubt and foreboding crept into my mind. I began to question the timing of the project. I believed that the syllabus, with the new project, would create a surprise for students, who would have no idea what to expect with the inclusion of this type of project into the course. I reflected on this issue and discussed my apprehension with the other members of the team. They validated my concerns and helped me to work through my anxiety and to focus on the benefits of the project to social work students. The discussion with my colleagues helped me to reframe student participation in a meaningful way, reminding me also that the ultimate responsibility for choice, of course, is with the students. I knew that they would make an informed decision even after class started. Besides, social work students need knowledge about web page development and evaluation given the way technology is used to inform social workers and their constituents in the areas of child-support enforcement, adoption registries, and other social service related resources. To understand how a web page is developed would help students to understand knowledge development and dissemination while enabling them to be judicious about content found on web pages.

The Reality: Class begins

On the first day of class, I provided an overview of the new addictive disorders course to the fourteen students registered. They would have an opportunity to develop an innovative project that would benefit other students while learning new skills in developing an alcohol-prevention project. The students would design a web page that would help them to "acquire an understanding...of the concepts related to substance abuse with a specific focus on prevention strategies for alcohol abuse" (course syllabus). In designing the web page, they were to consider the following questions:

- How do the media shape drinking behavior?

• How is this technology useful in reaching college-age students?

• What campus and community-based resources are available for the treatment or prevention of alcohol abuse?

• How can technology be used as part of an overall strategy to reduce high-risk drinking?

• How do cultural norms, policies, and practices affect the use/abuse of alcohol?

The class became enthusiastic and remained interested throughout the course, although a few of the students were anxious about developing a web page. Some students voiced their concerns about their lack of experience in the area of technology. I listened and reassured them that they would have all the assistance they needed and that I had unbridled confidence in their ability to create an interesting and skillfully prepared web page. In fact, I believed that the anxiety felt by the students would propel them to develop web pages successfully, especially since the project was worth fifty percent of the course grade. After the first class, I was confident that all would go well. I also recognized that developing a web page would help students discover a new and exciting way to create a prevention project that could reach a large population of the University community.

The first three classes focused on an overview of addictive disorders from a social work perspective, various theories about addiction, including the disease concept, and team building/task group development strategies. The fourth class session was to include an overview of web page development and camera work. So off to the lab! However, fate had a different agenda. There was no lab, and "plan B" had to be put into effect. Students were assigned to read material about drinking on college campuses and to learn about the current modes of prevention as they relate to hazardous drinking on college campuses. The works of Walters, Bennett, and Noto (2000), Cummings (1997), and Vik, Culbertson, and Sellers (2000) were made required reading. This unexpected change in the syllabus eventually made sense because the information provided by the readings, as well as the discussion, helped students to think about research-based strategies for effective alcohol-prevention programs for college-aged students and thus design exemplary web pages.

Facts versus Privileged Information

While students learned about addictive behavior through various instructional methods in the classroom, I worked steadily to develop the materials and resources that we spelled out in the proposal, which, I discovered, were not the same material and resources needed for the course. Let's say that we were overly ambitious about what we could do with $2,000, and that we were clueless even though we researched what we needed for the project. We had a case of "false facts" here! The computer lab, software, passwords, and political process were critical pieces of the project that we didn't immediately understand and demanded a great deal of time and energy. Although I had some help from the faculty member who taught a summer web-page development workshop at the University, I remained stranded when it came to finding a laboratory with the kind of software required by our school. I called numerous people on campus to find a laboratory. I had earlier felt a sense of challenge because we have a large campus; I knew that the computer lab with the software we needed would eventually surface. What I did not know was that finding a lab would involve traveling down many roads, with dead ends and detours, all during a time of construction because I was not a member of

this particular coterie. In retrospect, I should have figured out some of these limitations since every member of the team, and almost all faculty members in the School, had the "under construction" sign posted on their web sites.

At the time I was navigating the lab space problem at the University, I learned that I needed a license agreement along with the software program we were to purchase. I was familiar with a license agreement but had assumed that our campus had a license agreement for this kind of coursework. I called a few places on campus to purchase software for the class. The cost of the license would substantially reduce the amount of the small grant. It was at that moment that I recognized the lack of awareness of our team and how hope, enthusiasm, and goodwill can turn into a frustrating dilemma. I tried to solve the problem by seeking more funds—in essence, "Please, sir, I want more." Unlike Mr. Bumble in *Oliver Twist,* the people who funded the project were kind when they denied the request.

I contacted other people in an attempt to solve the budgetary problem. Nothing seemed to work. The distress seemed to be expanding. Classes were in session. My level of frustration paralleled feelings of inadequacy, and I was cast in a drama where I played a central character in the "run around." Many social workers, clients, and students have starred in that feature. It is unpleasant. Finally, when I was at my wit's end, I spoke to someone at the University who could tell me all about software purchasing, license agreements, and computer labs on campus. After playing telephone tag for days with him, he called me at home, apologetic about being unavailable yet willing to help me solve the problems. He inquired about the project and then suggested that maybe the School of Social Work had a license agreement. After searching, he found that although the School of Social Work did not have an agreement, the research unit in the school had the agreement. Eureka! I now had the information I sought and an ally in that exclusive circle of technology. We could buy the software without decimating our budget. Then, this miracle worker suggested that I try for the lab that was in our building. "Lab? What lab?" I asked. "The other department in your building has a computer lab on first floor," he said. I had never seen a computer lab in our building. I then spoke to people in the school who verified that there is a lab that we share with the other unit in the building. This information was a closely guarded secret, since most of the faculty to whom I spoke at the School knew nothing about the lab. I promptly marched downstairs to find a well-hidden, locked computer lab that had enough computers for all of our students. Success again, right under my nose! After meeting with the faculty and staff in the other unit, I obtained a key to the lab and a reservation to use the room. My plan to get the students on task with this assignment was coming closer to fruition.

Politics 101

I told the Dean of Admissions at the School of Social Work that we were interested in hiring a social work student to teach web page development to our students. No student came forward from within the School, so I advertised outside of the School. I subsequently interviewed three students who had experience developing web pages. The final selection for the student teacher was a young woman who had her own web page business and had taught a course to junior high school students in a learning-disabled classroom environment. I thought that if she

could teach students with learning disabilities, the course should be a walk in the park for our eager Master's level social work students. It seemed, at first, that our Webmaster in charge of the School's web page opposed our selection, perhaps because the student teacher was not a member of the technologically privileged cadre of the School. When he learned that she had not only been screened and selected by me and by the other team members, but also been referred to us by someone whom he considered a "respectable person" on campus, he was quick to give his stamp of approval. His sudden reversal of opinion alerted me to the political nature of the technologically privileged group on campus. It soon became clear that finding the key to the web page development project was like finding, as Winston Churchill put it, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." I had the big picture of the project. The larger campus was the architect of the pieces of this picture, and the developers of the bits were technocratic secret agents who had the key and would not freely share any information to the outsider.

Password Police and Secret Intelligence

I was now ready to teach students how to use the software program, but fate again became unkind. I didn't know that I needed a password to download the software, and the privileged guardian of the sacred word refused to give me the password for downloading the software. His student worker (who also had the password) was given instructions to download the software so that we could use it for class. Since the student had other pressing obligations such as class and examinations, she was not able to download the software when I needed it. I tried everything to obtain the password. The gatekeeper would not budge. This was classified information, only available to those individuals deemed trustworthy and tightlipped. I thought that I was in one of those old movies where secrets, codes, and passwords were reserved for intelligence agents who were barred from speaking to anyone.

The trouble with obtaining the password occurred on the day that I planned to facilitate the orientation to the software program. I expected the computers to be ready with installed software. The director apologized for the no show by the student and said that he would install the software since he could not give me the password. He explained that a student might download inappropriate material on the campus computer. I wasn't listening. He protected that assumption with his power to conceal and, thus, control the information. Nevertheless, he and his assistant downloaded the software on nine of the sixteen computers that were in the lab to serve the fourteen students I had in the class!

The first class on web-page development for this course on addictive disorders took place two weeks behind schedule. It consisted of the student teacher reviewing basic web language. The students seemed interested, frustrated, and lost. They had to double up on computers, and they did not have written information about the topic that was being presented on that day. After that class period, we were able to get the software program downloaded on all of the working computers. Two sessions later, students met in the lab again, this time to learn the software. The student worker gave them a web site to review that explained the particular software program. They were now given digital cameras and instructed on their use by one of the faculty team members. Students selected their teams. There were three teams that all had access to digital cameras.

In the classroom, the students continued to learn about addictive behavior through lecture, videotapes, and discussion. They attended a twelve-step program of their choice in order to understand the nature of twelve step programs, wrote papers about

their experience attending the twelve-step program, were encouraged at each class period to think about the value of newly discovered information for the development of their page, and asked to integrate course content into the prevention project. With three class sessions left to work on their pages, students were advised that although the lab remained locked during the day, they had access by simply requesting the key.

Once the students completed the web page, the student-teacher/technician attempted to place the page on the School web site but another frustrating password problem arose. She lacked "high-level" clearance in our department and thus was not allowed to have the School's password. Consequently, one web page developed by students was linked to my faculty web site.

Students were given two written checklists to evaluate their web page and the group work process. The first checklist helped students to examine the content of text and images and the placement of both text and image on a web page. A second checklist was a web-page evaluation that included self-evaluation as well as an evaluation of the team. These checklists were submitted by each student at the end of the semester along with their journals.

The Student Experience

A few students described a sense of panic at the beginning of the assignment. They recorded their thoughts and feelings in their journals. They wrote about the challenge of the assignment and their concerns about group work. At the same time, other students described feeling confident and gratified, especially when they took photos. One group of students divided tasks and assigned one person to photography, another to research. Another group had each member develop a page with photographs and text.

Despite the fact that the students had a great deal of trepidation, the groups rose to the challenge. All three groups designed web pages. Only one of the groups had difficulty publishing the segments to make an entire web page. One group published a web page that was easily accessible on the Internet. A second group published a page and saved it on computer diskettes. In addition, several students in the class developed personal web pages as part of an additional assignment for extra credit. The self-evaluation from the checklist showed that students learned a number of things about themselves and their group. Some comments on their accomplishments:

"I learned the importance of group work and I learned the need for increased awareness of addictions on a college campus."

"I learned to use web page designs, software, and eventually grew to see [that] this can be an asset and something that I would like to build on to market myself in social work."

"I learned to e-mail pages and pictures. I learned how to upload a web page."

"I also learned how to make my own web page."

Students also made comments about the benefits of the project to their educational experience in the School of Social Work. Some students commented on their evolving creativity.

"...Drawing on my visual creativity for the first time in this program..."

"I liked the freedom to be creative."

"This was the first time I had ever used a digital camera and the first time I had combined photos with writing. I enjoyed that process and found that images added depth and creativity to what I had been thinking about contributing to the site."

Several students enjoyed researching content on the web page. Other students seemed to enjoy reviewing other types of software, and one student purchased a copy of the software in order to increase his understanding of and sense of accomplishment with the software program.

In addition to student learning outcomes, students were asked for suggestions to improve the project. The overwhelming majority of students wanted more flexibility with the choice and use of software and more accessibility to the lab with functional computers. Students made the following comments:

"Easier use of the computer lab."

"I would like written instructions on how to use the software and more time in the computer lab."

"As an alternative to group projects (that again proved difficult because of lack of access to technology and geographic distance of members), individuals could develop personal web pages using any software available."

"I wish there would be a better lab available for us to use. The technical problems often caused a hindrance."

Nevertheless, despite the obstacles inherent in the course, students seemed excited about their accomplishments with the project. I was impressed with their commitment, their determination, and their achievement.

Student comments about the lab, the course, and the software were quite valid. In addition, beyond technical materials, the network to technical knowledge often seemed privileged to webmasters, technicians, and other specialists who tended to operate in a hierarchical fashion. "I have the technological information, the passwords, and the codes. You don't. Access denied!" This hierarchy collided with the process of knowledge dissemination, relegating it to a system of "haves and have nots." This system seems to be reminiscent of the continued dilemma in this country as to who has access to resources such as housing, education, health care, and other slices of the American pie.

Another dilemma that seems to mirror the social welfare state in this country is the gatekeeping practice of password distribution to those individuals deemed worthy. This unequal distribution prevents some groups from entering into a location of increased capability and increased knowledge acquisition.

The "Drink, Drank, Drunk" project had a sobering effect on me, especially when I consider the role of privilege, politics, and passwords in knowledge development and transmission. It convinced me of the importance of connecting with those individuals in organizations who allow you not only entrance but also access to pertinent knowledge. It reminded me of the perplexing necessity of involuntary lifelong learning that challenges not only intellectual capacity but also emotional and spiritual agency lest we become sullen and embittered as a result of feeling left out of a particular knowledge loop, thus becoming hopelessly disempowered. Furthermore, the experience taught me to evaluate local resources differently. Although resources may exist, access may not be allowed. Thus, a different set of questions has to be asked before one can embark on a

relatively new, highly technological project because the paradigms are different. In the future, I would opt for more specifics in order to be able to problem solve more expeditiously. At the same time, I have experienced the pain and frustration associated with the feeling of being left out and being marginalized in a large bureaucratic organization. It may not be an uncommon occurrence in such organizations, but the experience with this course represents a caveat to those of us who are ambitious in creating a new and creative learning environment that will help students when we are not clear about the formal and informal, spoken and unspoken, written and unwritten rules governing privileged information.

References

• Cummings, S. (1997). An empowerment model for collegiate substance abuse prevention and education programs. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 43, 46-58.

• Vik, P., Culbertson, K., & Sellers, K. (2000). Readiness to change drinking among heavy-drinking college students. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol.* 674-680.

• Walters, S., Bennett, M. & Noto, J. (2000). Drinking on campus. What do we know about reducing alcohol use among college students? *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment,* 19, 223-228.

One Day in the Life of a Mental Health Case Manager

By Rupert van Wormer, MSW, Mental Health Case Manager, Downtown Emergency Service Center, Seattle, Washington

After learning about the harm reduction model as a transfer student at a school of social work in England, the author found work at an agency in Seattle, Washington, which was founded on the principles of this innovative framework. The agency works with clients who are sheltered homeless people suffering from both drug addictions and mental illness. Their goal is to help them stay alive, stay out of the criminal justice system, and live as functioning members of the community.

It is Monday morning, the busiest day of the week at the Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) Mental Health Program. After a half-hour bus ride, I arrive in downtown Seattle at the Pioneer Square district, the old part of the downtown area. The agency itself is one block away from Yesler Way, famed for being the original Skid Row. Hundreds of homeless people live in this area today. This area is reported as having the highest arrest rates in the entire city: panhandling, public consumption of alcohol, drug dealing, and prostitution are common sights. The alleyway next to the building that houses the outpatient mental health program is commonly used by people as a place to smoke crack cocaine and inject heroin.

As I approach the front entrance to the clinic where I have worked for just over a year as a mental health case manager, I see a gathering of about 30 people, mostly our clients, waiting for the door to open at 9 a.m. I unlock the door to let myself in and am greeted by four or five of my clients simultaneously; some just say hello while others ask to meet with me immediately. I explain that I will see them after the clinic opens at nine. (To get my work done, I had to learn early on how important it is to set limits.) Entering the building, I lock the door behind me. This may sound like your typical bureaucratic agency; in fact, it is anything but. Run by a predominately social worker trained staff, DESC clinic is regarded as an extension of the clients' home. Clients come here to talk, for recreation, to get help with major crises, and to receive medication monitoring service. Unlike the traditional agency, appointments are encouraged but not required. Also unlike traditional treatment centers, clients are not required to be clean and sober to get treatment or housing. As a politically progressive social worker who studied addiction treatment in Britain, I often don't realize how unique this program is, given the more punitive American context.

I have an interesting and diverse caseload. Many of my clients are dually diagnosed; often they have spent several years living on the streets. Typical clients we serve have either schizophrenia with co-existing chemical dependency or major depression with chemical dependency. The people with schizophrenia are generally prescribed what are called "atypical anti-psychotics," which include Clozaril, Risperdall, Seroquel, and Zyprexa. For depression, Paxil, Prozac, Zoloft, Effexor, and Wellbutrin are commonly prescribed. Drugs most commonly misused by my clients include heroin, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, and alcohol. Many of my clients also have physical health concerns as well, including Hepatitis C, TB, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes. Although I had studied social work with the mentally ill in my

MSW program, no academic course could have prepared me for the magnitude of the problems these clients, with their multiple diagnoses, face every day.

At DESC, we endorse the harm reduction model. While we would like our clients to get off drugs, we realize the impetus for change must come from within. In the meantime, we strive to build a relationship with each individual, whom we regard as special. Our goals are to keep the clients alive and as healthy as possible, and to deter them from engaging in illegal behavior. If someone has a bad liver, for example, I might advise him or her to smoke marijuana rather than to take other drugs that might be lethal. For a man who is breaking antennae off cars (to use to smoke crack), I might advise him to buy a glass pipe at the shop down the street. Consistent with the strengths-based perspective, I reinforce positive small steps in the direction of recovery and independence.

We run what we think of as "pre-recovery" treatment groups at the center. Sometimes clients in the group are nodding off from heroin. Still, we'd rather have them come than to lose touch with them. We provide coffee and bagels and plenty of nurturing along the way. The groups are unstructured, non-confrontive; the focus is on being open and honest about substance use. When our clients go off to AA or NA meetings or traditional treatment programs, though, they tend to get confused. Sometimes they are told to get off all mood-altering drugs, including their anti-depressants that the doctor here has urged them to take. Because of their emotional instability, these clients can't handle the contradictions. Also, they often can't resist the temptation to use once off their antidepressants.

I pour myself a cup of coffee and walk back to my cubicle to check my voice mail. Typically, I have anywhere from five to fifteen messages on a Monday morning. Often these messages are from clients or mental health workers reporting an incident, arrest, or hospitalization that occurred during the after hours. A few minutes after 9 a.m., the receptionist at the front desk pages me with a list of clients waiting for me in the reception area. I try to be as fair as possible; however, clients with emergency situations are always bumped to the top of the list. I usually reserve the first hour or two each day for this type of client— the "walk-ins." The rest of they day I meet with the more stable clients who have scheduled appointments.

Fourteen of my twenty-eight clients are money-management clients, which means that my agency is their representative payee. Their SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and SSDI (Social Security Disability Income) checks are sent to my agency and we assist these clients with their finances. For most of our payee clients, this means we pay their bills and disperse cash to them between one and five times per week, depending on their level of need. At the end of each month, I sit down with these clients individually and help them plan the next month's budget. One client with whom I work comes in daily, Monday through Friday, and collects $10 on each visit. He also picks up his daily medications at the nurse station. For many clients, the money-management program encourages treatment involvement. Take Ben (not his real name) as a case in point.

Ben lived a life of instability until recently, when he became a payee client. Before this change, his SSDI check was sent to his mother, who would then send him a money order for the full amount ($688) at the beginning of each month. Ben would be flat broke in less than two weeks, would have nothing to show for it, and would still live at the shelter to get room and board. During this

time Ben had frequent drug binges, taking his psychiatric medications for schizophrenia inconsistently. This resulted in frequent psychiatric hospitalizations. While Ben was "decompensated" he would think he was a pedophile and would turn himself in at various police stations. But after DESC became his representative payee, stability returned to his life one step at a time. Ben started coming in regularly for medications. I met with him twice a week, during which time I helped him fill out housing applications and encouraged him to continue taking his medications consistently. I also used our time together to discourage him from using alcohol and other drugs. After a few weeks of counseling, I worked with him, coaching him in role playing for the interview with an apartment manager. He did well at the interview and was able to get "clean and sober" housing that provided daily medication monitoring.

The clients I see first thing in the morning are usually money-management clients. Money is a good engagement tool. While I am disbursing money to the clients, I have the opportunity to ask them how they are doing. I try to engage clients in conversation relating to nutrition, housing, drug use, relationships, personal hygiene, medication compliance, and psychiatric stability. This contact also provides me an opportunity to assess how the client is getting along, just through observation. A client who is "decompensated," for example, will often have worse than usual hygiene, may be responding to hallucinations, and may seem confused. A few things I always need to monitor for are suicidal and homicidal ideation and grave disability. Many of these problems could require immediate psychiatric hospitalization.

By the time 11:45 rolls around, I will have met individually with nine clients for money management. Today their sessions range from five minutes to a half-hour. Those clients who need additional time with me are given appointments later in the week.

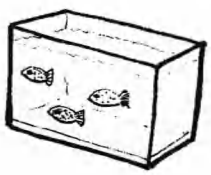
I spend the afternoon doing the progress notes for each of the client interactions I have had in the morning, and answering mail. Today there is a letter from the Social Security Administration telling me that one of my clients is up for "disability review." I fill out the multi-page form and drop it in the outgoing mailbox.

Then it is off to the DESC Shelter, home to about 250 people each night, a place for homeless people to socialize or rest by day. The purpose of my visit is to look for a man in his mid forties diagnosed with schizophrenia whom I have not seen in several weeks. (This part of the job is referred to as "outreach and engagement.") As I walk through the shelter hallway, I am reminded of a 19th century insane asylum. Momentarily, a wave of anger arises in me: we could do better than this in the 21st century. This place is dirty, there is a foul odor, and there are dozens of disheveled looking people lining the wall. Some are standing or sitting while others are stretched out asleep on the linoleum tile floor. Scanning the faces looking for my client, I notice one person talking to himself in "word salad." Then I see my client. He is leaning against a wall, staring blankly. I say hello and try to interest him in reconnecting with mental health services. I suggest that we meet later to work on housing applications. We set a time and I return to my office.

Back at the office, I check my voice mail: a few new messages but nothing urgent. It is now 2:15, and my 2:00 appointment is still not here. I have in my office some possessions that belong to a client who has recently moved into an assisted living facility. Since this person's new residence is only about ten blocks away, I decide now would be a good time to take her her things. Gathering them up in a bag, I start walking toward her residence.

Mary (not her real name), a 68-year-old woman suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, lived at the shelter for about 20 years. Recently we were able to persuade her to move into a

nursing facility. Of all my clients, Mary is the most difficult to engage. Sometimes wearing three coats at a time, Mary is paranoid and especially suspicious of mental health treatment providers. Any direct contact with this client was out of the question. Establishing a relationship was important so that we could move this physically (and mentally) ill woman from the overcrowded shelter into a nursing home. So the problem was how to communicate with her in some way to make her want to get the care she needed. The means to engage Mary came in the form of fish. Every day Mary would appear at the clinic and dutifully empty half of the fish tanks (she believed the water was poisoned and that the fish would die if she did not care for them). As Mary performed her ritual, she would talk in familiar tones of affection to her charges—the fish. Through trial and error, I discovered I could use the fish tank as an engagement tool, chatting with Mary as she eliminated the "poisoned" water. If I talked to her about her circumstances, she would clam up entirely, but I could talk to her about others who had found housing, and who had shopped for new clothes. Gradually over time, I built up enough trust to get her to try out the nursing home. She did obtain housing in this way. But a weird thing happened. Although we took over care of the fish in the aquarium, all but one of the fish died, just as Mary had said they would.



Walking now to the nursing home, I go about half a block from my building when I notice one of my other clients, Joe, walking toward me. He stops in front of me and says "Guess what?" Since Joe has a big smile on his face, I expect that it will be something positive. To my surprise, and horror, however, it is not— a case of inappropriate affect. Joe tells me that he has just swallowed all of his medications and injected a gram of heroin, an obvious suicidal gesture that could have been fatal. My adrenaline is high; we must act fast. I get him to come with me back to the clinic so we can get a "med list" from the nurse. After getting the list, we arrive at the ER, pushing our way to the front of the line. I explain the situation to the intake nurse and give her the med list. While Joe is getting his stomach pumped, I talk to the hospital social worker and advocate for my client to be admitted into the inpatient psychiatric unit of the hospital after he is medically cleared. Confident that the appropriate follow-up care will be provided, I leave.

It is now almost 5 p.m. A few blocks from the hospital is the assisted living facility that was my original destination this afternoon. Fortunately, I remembered to bring Mary's bag of possessions with me. Feeling somewhat emotionally drained from the medical crisis, I make this delivery and call it a day.

Comment

One of the toughest things about my job, and the area of greatest personal frustration, is the difficulty associated with trying to get clients into inpatient chemical dependency programs. Frequently, clients will reach a point when they realize they are in need of inpatient chemical dependency treatment, and they are ready and willing to get intensive treatment, long-term treatment. The hard part for me at such a moment comes when I have to explain that I can try to get them on a list somewhere, but it may be three months to a year before they will be admitted. The problem stems from the shortage of publicly funded inpatient chemical dependency centers. The few centers that do exist have the option of being selective when it comes to admission. Clients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar mood disorder, or major depression, as well as chemical dependency, generally have a

harder time getting into treatment than people who are not identified as having mental health problems. One client, a daily crack cocaine user, had his moment of clarity nearly six months ago. He completed an application to an appropriate treatment facility, and we are still waiting. Another client from our agency was awaiting an opening at another treatment center. But before she could get the help she needed, she was picked up by the police and was sentenced to three years in prison for providing an undercover agent with crack cocaine.

As I reflect on my work at the clinic, I feel grateful to be a part of an establishment that operates as an oasis of caring within a wider social welfare system with ever declining benefits. Here social workers function as a close-knit team, putting the interests of the clients first. Staff members actively advocate on behalf of homeless, disabled people through lobbying city officials and writing grants for expanded facilities and outreach programming. But then, again, I feel despair at living in a society that creates the conditions that give rise to homelessness in the first place.

Thoughts and Reflections on the Situation in Israel

By Joyce Rosman Brenner, D.S.W., Yeshiva University, and Coordinator, Block Program, Israel.

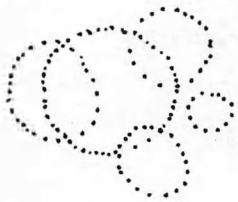
In this narrative, the author reflects on the situation in Israel one year ago from the vantage point of an Israeli, a Jewish feminist (originally from America), a social work educator, and a psychotherapist.

Introduction

I began this article in January 2001. I sent it to *Reflections* in May 2001. It is now March 2002 and obviously more needs to be said. So much has happened since last year. It seems that the volatile current events with which we live will continue to impact upon us. Our reactions and emotional barometers will persistently demand updating according to the latest daily occurrences. But we are not journalists for a daily newspaper and we can only respond within the framework of our profession. And even as I write these very words, the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians has escalated beyond all of our worst imaginings. So I offer this update on my own observations about Israel and the connections to events internationally, acutely aware of my limitations, and still wanting to believe in the possibility of peace.

Yes, so much has happened in the last year and a half. Not only has the 'situation' in Israel developed to an 'almost war' but the events in New York City on September 11 have changed all of us and made us realize that we must redefine our visions and images of the world in which we live. The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers has made us all feel the vulnerability of our lives. There is a joining of pain across oceans and there is a helplessness as we are silenced by devastation and the uncertainty of our futures.

In the many talks and events that I have participated in during this very troubled time period, I make every effort to offer suggestions and ideas that might help us to cope with deep pain. In Israel, as elsewhere, I find that I repeatedly return to the mechanism of denial. I present this word in capital letters and with a sense of having learned to appreciate its value. I have come to believe that we all need to build a bubble around ourselves in order to cope with incessant stress. The bubble enables us to protect ourselves, our families, and our lives while we go about our daily activities. Routine and ordinariness are our aims. We are seeking ways to maintain the normalcy of our lives. But I don't believe or intend to suggest that this bubble should be impermeable – rather the opposite. It must be penetrable. But all of us as individuals must learn how to control the flow of information. We must become experts in handling information, each person according to his or her ability to handle information. This, then, may seem paradoxical. I am essentially suggesting that we do two opposing tasks at the same time. We need our bubble at the same time that we need to let the news in. We need to protect ourselves, as we need to be aware. Essentially I am saying that we must continue to feel and know what is going on around us in order to retain our humanity.



We need to cry and to wail. In Israel there are funerals every day – young people, old people, soldiers, Israelis and Palestinians, teenagers and families, often innocently enjoying an evening out. We must not stop feeling the pain connected to these events.

Only by continuing to feel do we then continue to scream and protest this horrific mess that is happening around us. But we also need to experience joy and fun. This week in Israel we celebrated the holiday of Purim – an opportunity for children and grownups to laugh and be silly and to remind them that there is more to life than sadness. Again a paradox.

Perhaps what I have written here seems impossible to do. But I have come to believe that living in defiance of all that is bad/evil around us is in itself a marvelous victory of the human spirit. This seems to me to be a very authentic social work message – the belief in the possibility of humanity to survive and fulfill its specialness and express its fullest potentiality in spite of the appalling events which surround us.

And now I offer you my original piece, written two years ago.

September 2000 – May 2001

During my over twenty years of living in Israel, I find myself hard pressed to recall a year as difficult as this one is turning out to be. We are talking about the year that began with the Jewish New Year, 5761 – September 2000 – the year that has been called the El Aqsa Intifada, the year that began with Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount and has since been characterized by demonstrations, violence, and terrorism. I would like to share with the readers of *Reflections* some of my thoughts about this period of time from my perspective as an American Jewish immigrant to Israel, a psychotherapist, and a social work educator. Some of these thoughts were presented as a talk at the mid-winter Wurzweiler School of Social Work Block Conference held in NYC at Yeshiva University in January 2001. Some of these reflections have been churning inside of me since I've returned and experienced terrorist attacks in my own hometown of Netanya, a seaside resort between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

The Talk

The audience was composed of about a hundred social workers from all parts of the U.S.A. and from a wide variety of social agencies. They were interested in learning about the impact of daily violence upon the general population, our clientele, our students studying social work in Israel, and ourselves.

"I was asked today to present some of my feelings about what is going on in Israel currently. I've been here in the States now for a few days and the most serious crisis situation that has been discussed on the news has been ***the weather****. Will it snow? How much snow will fall? And how much will we be inconvenienced? Well, to my sadness and distress, every hour on the hour in Israel, the news presents another aspect of "The Crisis Situation." We live with the feeling of tension, of stress, every moment of the day. And I'm talking about life and death tension.*

"Let me try to share with you some of the reactions of the general population, professional mental health practitioners, social work students, clientele, friends, and family.

"Amazingly, in a quick survey of my immediate circle of contacts I found that no one wants to talk about 'it', 'the situation.' This is a rather contradictory statement because at the same time that people are saying this they are doing just the opposite – meaning talking about 'it' all the time. In taxis, on buses, at the local bagel place, without failure someone queries: "What are we going to do?" And so the conversation begins. Strangers are now discussing 'it' and offering their solutions, which are obviously better than the politicos' views because the experts have certainly not offered anything worthwhile. Friday night discussions all focus on 'the situation,' with voices rising

with emotion and agitation as families and friends agree and disagree and express their pain about "the mess we are in."

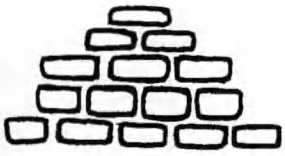
"There is massive denial about the awfulness of the situation. I need to clarify that this statement does not declaim or oppose the above observation but rather refers to the need of the Israelis to get on with daily living. Israelis are very good at doing this. This means that in spite of the constant broadcasts on the half-hour, if not more frequently depending upon occurrences, the general population makes every effort to go about its routine. At first, this ability to get on with things astonished me, but I've come to respect this as a desperate need for normalcy within the constant turmoil. The terrible uncertainty with which we are all living is tremendously burdensome and therefore the mundane routine is the most reassuring. I will discuss this defense mechanism later on in this writing and explore its effectiveness.

"Who you are greatly impacts upon your reactions to 'the situation.' Obviously this is not an enormously brilliant statement, but it helps to understand how varied the Israeli population is. The old timers, the born in Israel Israelis, are the most accustomed to the stress and uncertainty of 'the situation.' They remind us of times gone by when things have been worse. They see the erratic turmoil as part of the Israeli scene: "So, what else is new?" many comment. Holocaust survivors are also attuned to every nuance of tension. They are ready 'to go' at a moment's notice. After all they've already been through one upheaval so often see the picture as exceedingly bleak. I've heard many stories of survivors who keep cash money available so they can travel in a minute. The new settlers, those imbued with ideology, are enthralled with their commitment to 'saving the land.' Some 70's Zionists have begun to wonder what happened to the country to which they were drawn. Parents of young children and teenagers are constantly worried about the whereabouts of their youngsters. And, of course, anyone with a soldier in the Army is in deep stress, to say the least. Thank goodness for cell phones. They help the Israelis maintain their sanity.

"'Living with enormous tension' becomes the daily description and observation of events. In one week, three women were murdered by their violent partners – is their personal violence part of the larger picture? While driving in the car, on Israel's very crowded roads, there seem to be even more expressions of rudeness, impatience, and dangerous maneuvers than usual – is this too an aspect of the enormous tension? Waiting on lines at banks, buses, local medical facilities has become more unpleasant than ever – another facet of the tension? I mention all of this just to give you a sense of the mood in Israel today.

*"What to do – the **big** question? I wish I knew. I occasionally fantasize that if only I had magical powers, I would solve everything miraculously. To my discomfort and concern no one seems to have any good answers to ease the tensions. My colleagues and I offer some of the following suggestions: a) Dealing with children's fears is a predominant challenge. Much depends upon where the family lives, but there are some children that are going to sleep every night with the sounds of shooting. We are organizing parent and teacher groups to respond to the needs of the situation. It is not easy to distill the fears of our youngsters. We are trying to*

prevent hatred from escalating and hope that our children can feel safe with thoughts of co-existence with our Palestinian neighbors. But not every family or school is as tolerant as I would prefer. Recently a television film clip portrayed nursery school aged Palestinians repeating the rhetoric of hatred toward Israel. Certainly not a pleasant sight, but even more depressing as the hope for a negotiated peace becomes ever more slim. b) Kindness to one's partners, loved ones, and friends. As we become more aware and sensitive about each person's individual responses to tension, we need to remind each other not to tease too much and to be tolerant of idiosyncrasies. A wife who came for therapy too easily ridiculed her husband's anxiety attacks, perhaps as a way of reducing her own tensions. But then, when she was reminded to be kinder and more loving of her partner's way of coping, she realized that 'life was not at all simple.' Humor sometimes assists people in finding the right balance in dealing with their tensions. c) Finding other ways to relieve tension. I strongly believe that we need to encourage acceptable and healthy outlets that are built into our daily life opportunities to reduce the 'pressure-cooker' situation that is emerging in Israel. Perhaps more sports? More walks on the beach? Outings with good friends with whom we can argue safely? Short trips out of the country? What is most disconcerting is that living in Israel seems to demand acceptance and adjustment to the 'adrenaline high.' Will we *become a nation that cannot live without this type of excitement?*



"I end this talk with sadness and distress, as I began. I hope I have given you a small sense of the difficulties of this time period."

Further Reflections

I am writing this paper some months after the presentation of my talk in NYC at Wurzweiler School of Social Work. Much has happened since my visit to the U.S. in January. I would have to be honest and say that 'the situation' has certainly not improved; perhaps more accurately it has deteriorated. There have been elections in Israel with Ariel Sharon becoming Prime Minister. His extreme political views and approach to peace are very worrisome for those of us who are more on the left of center in our political beliefs. The newspapers more frequently use the word 'war' to describe the daily outbursts of violence. I have personally experienced several terrorist attacks close to my home in Netanya and in nearby towns. I have anxiously called the hospitals to check on family and friends. We cautiously discuss whether we should go to the movies or on a picnic or drive through a questionable road (where someone was just shot), and jokingly try to ease our anxieties with some inanity about "accidents can happen anywhere." I do not like living with fears about unexpected violence from any direction. I do not like walking down the streets of Israel, where my children grew up with amazing freedom of movement, and wondering if that strange person is or isn't an Arab terrorist. In fact, I hate it – yet this is my home and here I remain.

One of my long-time social work friends living in beautiful Boulder, Colorado, frequently asks me why I continue to live in a war zone. I am repeatedly astonished by her question and I repeatedly respond with denial – "What are you talking about? There is no war here!" I am obviously incorporating the defense mechanism of denial into my own repertoire of reactions, which I mentioned

earlier. It is most useful to rationalize, deny, use humor, and pretend that we are going about our daily normal routine. Without these defenses, we could not deal with the overwhelming fears that the larger situation threatens.

I read newspaper articles from every point of view. I have come to realize that my Zionist philosophy, emerging from my adolescence in America after World War II and the Holocaust, may be somewhat naive and misguided. I do not like to think of myself as part of a people that have been called 'occupiers,' and yet I need to acknowledge the mistakes that Israel has made in dealing with our Arab neighbors. We cannot relive history and make a different peace in 1948, one that includes the knowledge of the 21st century. But I continue to hope and believe that some of those politicians whom we have elected will find their way to end this useless round of violence by again sitting together with the Palestinians and talking. The terrible situation that we are living through daily is exhausting, depressing, and damaging to all. I hope that more of us will realize, very soon, that the only solution is one that legitimizes co-existence between two peoples in one land. I do not lose hope, but I often wonder if my hopes will be realized soon enough and perhaps prevent more senseless deaths. I guess my social work identity is much a part of who I am and much a part of my hope for the future and the belief in the possibility of change. Perhaps we can all hope together.

Comments on "Diagramatic Assessment of Family Relations"

By Ann Hartman, D.S.W.

Dr. Hartman's article was originally published in the October 1978 edition of *Social Casework. Reflections* would like to thank *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* (formerly *Social Casework*) for allowing us to reprint the article in its entirety, exactly as it appeared 25 years ago.

Introduction

It is not difficult to trace the routes that led me to the ideas presented in "Diagramatic Assessment." I started doctoral training at Columbia in 1966. Carel Germain was in the class before me and had an enormous impact on my thinking and my experience at Columbia. She had been in the last doctoral class Lucille Austin taught before her retirement. In that class, Austin, always open to new ideas, had brought in some material about general systems theory. Carel was very excited about it and she loaned me a dog eared mimeographed copy of Werner Lutz's monograph "Concepts and Principles Underlying Social Case Work Practice." This was a very early effort to bring GST to social work.

Carel, her classmate, Sister Mary Paul Janchill, and I became enormously interested in the potential of general systems theory in conceptualizing "person in situation," social work's historic focus. All three of us soon published articles in which we explored the possibilities in the application of systems theory to social work practice. Carel (1968) looked at social study from a systems perspective. Sister Mary Paul (1969) presented a very useful general introduction to systems theory for practice. I (1970), perhaps because of my background in philosophy, wrote about the epistemological issues and the way GST could alter and expand our thinking processes. We all struggled to make the theory more accessible, more clearly related to human experience, but the high level of abstraction and the language made that difficult.

It was Carel, with her introduction of the ecological metaphor into practice, that humanized systems theory and made its experience near. It was understandable that she would make that leap. She, a native Californian, had always had a deep love of

nature and her studies in ecology and of the works of many biologists and ecologists led her to see how useful this would be. Carel continued throughout her career to expand and deepen this approach and had an enormous impact on the field. She remained my teacher, my colleague, and my dear friend until her death in 1995.

In the early '60s, I had also become very involved in the early family therapy movement. Sanford Sherman, a colleague of Nathan Ackerman, came to the community mental health of which I was executive and began training us to work with families. Family therapy felt for me, and for many other social workers, like going home, as it was socially oriented clinical work with emphasis on both the current and the historical social world of client families. Mary Richmond would have been delighted!

By the time I joined the University of Michigan faculty in 1974, I was an "ecologically oriented family centered social worker." Joan Laird and I, with three other family-oriented practitioners, founded the Ann Arbor Center for the Family where we did training and practice, bringing in leaders in the family therapy field for teaching and consultation and learning from each other in our weekly staff meetings. I was also very involved developing training materials with Lynn Nybell in the University of Michigan's Child Welfare Learning Lab and in training child welfare staff for the Michigan Department of Social Services.

The eco-map, which is presented in "Diagramatic Assessment," was developed out of my experience of working with child welfare workers. With my commitment to an ecological perspective and my interest in epistemology and the importance of "thinking differently", I wanted to find a way to help workers think about and organize the overwhelming amount of data that confronted them in their work with complicated, stressed, and over burdened families.

Being a visually minded "right brained" person, I turned to the possibility of drawing a picture to capture the family's world, and this picture quickly turned into the eco-map. When you added the genogram, you had a comprehensive picture of the family in space and through time. The eco-map was first intended for use by the social workers in organizing the data they had collected. However, we soon realized that its greatest strength was in its use as an aid in interviewing. We tested the eco-map throughout the State of Michigan in child welfare training and with child welfare leaders from around the country who participated in Project CRAFT at the University of Michigan. Finally, in 1978, I put the years of work and thinking together in "Diagramatic Assessment of Family Relationships."

The response to this piece over the years has been amazing and a total surprise to me. There have been more requests for reprints and republication for it than for any other article in the history of *Families in Society* and its predecessors. The eco-map has turned up everywhere in social work, nursing, psychology, and all over the world. It is now a fixture in the public domain, as if it had always been there.

Why? I was enormously puzzled by the response to the eco-map. Why was it so widely adopted? Recently, I think perhaps I have discovered why. Michael White, Australian post structural social worker and family therapist, has described most usefully the qualities that should exist between a worker and a client. As I learned about White's work, I realized that the use of the eco-map promoted the kind of relationship he and other

postmodern therapists have described. First, the relationship should be collaborative. The eco-map promotes collaboration. As people do eco-maps they quickly begin to sit shoulder to shoulder, rather than face to face, working jointly on the project. All of the information is shared, which leads to shared discussion and planning. Second, the relationship should be reciprocal. Doing the eco-map is a two way process. Both the worker and the client change. I remember the child welfare workers saying, after they used the map in interviewing," I never saw that family like that before." They too had changed. Third, the worker should be appreciative of clients as experts on their own lives, their own experience. In both the eco-map and the genogram, the client is the expert and the worker is in the learning position. Fourth, the worker should be decentered. The use of the eco-map and the genogram puts the client in the center as the expert, the planner, the one who does a lot of the work. Finally, the worker should be acknowledging and addressing issues of injustice. We were very aware of this when we first started to use the eco-map. Doing the eco-map helps the worker to experience what it is like to live in the client's world. The emphasis immediately shifts from assumed deficits in the client and the family to the tension, stress, lack of resources, and supports in the environment. Not only is it not pathologizing, but it illuminates possibilities in the environment for advocacy and in the relationship between the environment and the client for change.

I think the eco-map was widely adopted partly because it is a simple visual aid, but even more because of the impact it had on the "positioning," on the stance of the worker that in turn, produced a positive response from the clients.

It was strange to read the article for the first time in many years. To some extent it was a nostalgia trip, as rereading it, I revisited many old friends and colleagues and a rich learning and teaching experience. In the past years, I have been increasingly aware of and concerned about power issues in practice. I was pleased that without even being aware of it, I developed something that led to collaboration, a definition of the client as expert, something which emphasizes the social environment and the injustices many face in trying to cope with depriving and demeaning life situations.

However, my thinking has also changed and so has the world. I now prefer the metaphor of the anthropologist rather than the ecologist. As Bateson said, "mind is a part of nature." The ecological surround continues to be important but so are meanings, values, beliefs, and the power of discourse. I still think the eco-map can be useful, but it must be postmodernized. It must be expanded to include a much more complex view of environment, an environment that is largely socially constructed, an environment that includes very powerful discourses such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, agism, and all the other "isms" that create identities, shape lives and limit options.

References

• Germain, C.B. (July 1968) Social study, past and future, *Social Casework 49,* 403-409.

• Hartman, A. (Oct. 1970) To think about the unthinkable, *Social Casework 51,*467-474.

• Hartman, A. (Oct. 1978) Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships, *Social Casework 59,* 465-476.

• Janchill, Sister Mary Paul (Feb. 1969) Systems concepts in casework theory and practice, *Social Casework 50,* 74-82.

Ann Hartman

Diagrammatic assessment of family relationships

Two methods of diagramming family relationships offer insights into complex family and community interactions and facilitate the interviewing and intervention process

Ann Hartman, D.S.W., is professor, School of Social Work, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Integrating new knowledge and conceptual frameworks from the many sources that inform and support social work practice is a long and arduous process. General systems theory, which was introduced to social workers over twenty years ago,[1] has been particularly difficult to assimilate because it is so abstract. The distance is great between the lofty principles enunciated by systems theorists and the practical knowledge and skill that guide the practitioner's work with people, day by day. The field has made some progress in utilizing systems concepts in developing middle-range theory, in organizing practice models,[2] in extending and clarifying the boundaries of the unit of attention,[3] and in prescribing general directions for action.[4] Professionals in the field are now at the point of attempting to translate concepts from this middle-range theory into specific and testable prescriptions for practice.

Particularly interesting is the potential a systems orientation has for altering cognitive styles and enabling practitioners to organize and process increasingly complex systems of variables.[5] The attempt here is to derive from systems framework new conceptual models that can enhance the practitioner's and the client's perceptions of reality, thereby contributing to competence and creative adaptation in therapy.

Social workers, in attempting to understand their traditional unit of attention—the person in his total life space over time—are faced with an overwhelming amount of data. These data must be ordered, selected, and arranged to reduce confusion and overload. Edward Tolman has likened this mediating process to a map room where intervening cognitive charts shape data, lending meaning and manageability to the influx of information.[6] These cognitive patterns have

[1] Werner A. Lutz, *Concepts and Principles Underlying Social Casework Practice: Social Work Practice in Medical Care and Rehabilitation Settings*, monograph 3 (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers, 1956).

[2] Gordon Hearn, ed., *The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward an Wholistic Conception of Social Work* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969).

[3] Carel B. Germain, "Social Study: Past and Future," SOCIAL CASEWORK 49, no. 7 (July 1968): 403-9.

[4] Ann Hartman, "The Generic Stance in the Family Agency," SOCIAL CASEWORK 55 (April 1974): 199-208.

[5] Ann Hartman, "To Think About the Unthinkable," SOCIAL CASEWORK 51 (October 1970):459-68.

[6] Quoted in Jerome S. Bruner, Jacqueline Goodnow, and George A. Austin, *A Study of Thinking* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962), p. vii.

tremendous influence on how reality is perceived, but are not readily observed or easily changed. They are an ongoing and familiar part of the self and, as Frederick Duhl has pointed out, "that which is constantly experienced is neutral to awareness, being so immersed in the identity, so 'egosyntonic,' that it is rarely open to observation or challenge."[7] As social workers interact with their environment, these mediating cognitive processes so strongly imprint a particular view of reality that they may well be just as crucial as knowledge and values in determining professional decision making.

In dealing with almost continual information overload, cognitive processes tend to operate analytically: to partialize, to abstract parts from wholes, to reduce, and to simplify. Although this makes data more manageable, it does damage to the complexity inherent in reality. Ways of conceptualizing causation have tended to be particularly reductionist as reality is arranged in chains of simple cause and effect reactions. Such linear views reflect the limitations of thought and language rather than the nature of the real world, where human events are the result of transactions among multiple variables.

An emphasis on identifying the roots of problematic conditions in tremendously complex situations has frequently pushed social workers into supporting simplistic explanations and into arguments over what is the cause and hence the cure. Since nineteenth century scientism found expression in Mary E. Richmond's *Social Diagnosis*,[8] the profession has struggled with the temptation to deal with this "radically untidy universe" through reductionist solutions growing out of reductionist assessments.[9]

If social workers are to avoid reductionism and scientism, if they are to translate a systems orientation into practice, they must learn to "think systems," or to develop within their own cognitive map rooms new and more complex ways of imprinting reality. They must then devise ways of using this view in specific interventive techniques and strategies.

As one learns to "think systems," one tends to move to the use of metaphor and to the use of visual models in order to get beyond the constraints of linear thought and language. Social workers have always been frustrated in writing psychosocial summaries—they find it not unlike the attempt to describe the action in a football game over the radio. In attempting to describe the complex system of transacting variables, the meaning and the nature of the integration of the variables and the totality of the events and action is lost. The use of metaphor in poetry and of two- and three-dimensional simulations in painting and sculpture demonstrate the integrative power of such approaches. Similar artistry can be used to expand the social worker's understanding of the nature of reality. Of many possibilities, two simple paper-and-pencil simulations have proved to be particularly useful, not only as assessment tools, but in interviewing, planning, and intervention.

One simulation is the ecological map or "eco-map," which was originally developed three years ago as an assessment tool to help workers in public child welfare practice examine the needs of families.[10] This tool pictures the family or the individual in the life space and has since been tested in a variety of settings with a wide range of clients. The second simulation is the genogram, which has been used by systems-oriented family therapists to chart intergenerational family

---

[7]Frederick Duhl, "Intervention, Therapy, and Change," in *General Systems Theory and Psychiatry*, ed. William Gray, Frederick Duhl, and Nicholas D. Rizzo (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969).

[8]Mary E. Richmond, *Social Diagnosis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917).

[9]For a discussion of casework's relationship with science and scientism, see Carel B. Germain "Casework and Science: An Historical Encounter," in *Theories of Casework*, ed. Robert W. Roberts and Robert Nee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

[10]The eco-map was developed in 1975 by the author as a part of the Child Welfare Learning Laboratory, a project of the University of Michigan School of Social Work Program for Continuing Education in the Human Services. The project was supported in part by a grant from Region V, Social and Rehabilitation Service, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Section 426, Title IV, part B of the Social Security Act. The author is grateful to Lynn Nybell, Coordinator of the Family Assessment Module, for her ideas, criticisms, and encouragement.

history.[11] This tool has also been found to be highly adaptable for use with individuals or families in many different settings where it is important to understand the development of the family system through time.

The ecological metaphor

The task of making general systems concepts operational and humane, of giving them flesh and blood meaning, presents a difficult challenge. Although "input," "throughput," "moving steady state," and "deviation amplifying feedback loops" are precise and useful concepts, they mean little to social workers if they are unrelated to a human context. Recently, there has been a growing effort to utilize the science of ecology as a metaphorical way of humanizing and integrating system concepts.[12] The science of ecology studies the delicate balance that exists between living things and their environments and the ways in which this mutuality may be enhanced and maintained.

In utilizing the ecological metaphor, it is clear that the salient human environment includes far more than air, water, food, spatial arrangements, and other aspects of the physical environment. Human environments also include networks of intimate human relationships. Further, over the centuries, human beings have erected elaborate social, economic, and political structures that they must sustain and through which their needs are met. People must maintain an adaptive mutuality with these intricate systems which are required for growth and self-realization.

An ecological metaphor can lead social workers to see the client not as an isolated entity for study, but as a part of a complex ecological system. Such a view helps them to focus on the sources of nurturance, stimulation, and support that must be available in the intimate and extended environment to make possible growth and survival. It also leads to a consideration of the social, relational, and instrumental skills individuals must have to use possibilities in their environment and to cope with its demands.

The eco-map

The eco-map is a simple paper-and-pencil simulation that has been developed as an assessment, planning, and interventive tool. It maps in a dynamic way the ecological system, the boundaries of which encompass the person or family in the life space. Included in the map are the major systems that are a part of the family's life and the nature of the family's relationship with the various systems. The eco-map portrays an overview of the family in their situation; it pictures the important nurturant or conflict-laden connections between the family and the world. It demonstrates the flow of resources, or the lacks and deprivations. This mapping procedure highlights the nature of the interfaces and points to conflicts to be mediated, bridges to be built, and resources to be sought and mobilized. Although all one needs is a piece of paper and a pencil, it saves time to have "empty" maps available. These maps can be worked on by an individual or a family.

Instructions for drawing an eco-map

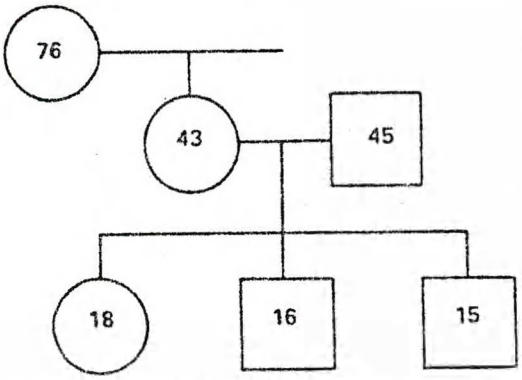
First the nuclear family system or household is drawn in a large circle at the map's center. It has been common practice in mapping families to use squares to depict males and circles to depict females. Relationships are indicated as in the traditional family tree or genetic chart. It is useful to put the person's age in the center of the circle or square. Thus, a circle with "80" in the center would represent an elderly woman.

Figure 1 (see page 468) represents a household consisting of a father, a mother, three children, and the wife's mother. The usefulness of this is demonstrated when one considers the number of words it would take to portray the facts thus represented. (The mapping of more complex nuclear family systems will be demonstrated in the discussion of genograms.)

[11]The genogram has been used extensively by systems-oriented family therapists. For example, see Philip J. Guerin and Eileen G. Pendagast, "Evaluation of Family System and Genogram," in *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Philip J. Guerin (New York: Halsted Press, 1976).

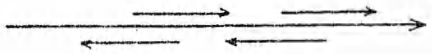
[12]Carel B. Germain, "An Ecological Perspective in Casework Practice," SOCIAL CASEWORK 54 (June 1973), 323-30.

Figure 1



After drawing the household in the large circle in the middle, add the connections between the family and the different parts of the environment. In the empty map (figure 2), some of the most common systems in the lives of most families have been labeled, such as work, extended family, recreation, health care, school, and so on. Other circles have been left undesignated so that the map can be individualized for different families.

Connections between the family and the various systems are indicated by drawing lines between the family and those systems. (See figure 3.) The nature of the connection can be expressed in the type of line drawn: A solid or thick line represents an important or strong connection and a dotted line a tenuous connection; jagged marks across the line represent a stressful or conflicted relationship. It is useful to indicate the direction of the flow of resources, energy, or interest by drawing arrows along the connecting lines:



In testing the eco-map, it has been found that the use of the three kinds of lines for conflicted, strong, and tenuous relationships is an efficient shorthand when the worker uses the eco-mapping procedure, without the family, as an analytic tool. However, when using the map as an interviewing tool, this code has often been felt to be too constraining. Workers have preferred to ask clients to describe the nature of the connection and will then qualify that connection by writing a brief description along the connecting line.

Connections can be drawn to the family as a whole if they are intended to portray the total family systems relationship with some system in the environment. Other connections can be drawn between a particular individual in the family and an outside system when that person is the only one involved or different family members are involved with an outside system in different ways. This enables the map to highlight the contrasts in the way various family members are connected to the world.

It is easy to learn to plot the eco-map and it is important to become comfortable with the tool before using it with clients. A simple way to learn is to sketch out one's own eco-map. It is also useful to practice with friends. By then, one is generally ready to use it with clients.

Uses of the eco-map

No matter how the eco-map is used, its primary value is in its visual impact and its ability to organize and present concurrently not only a great deal of factual information but also the relationships between variables in a situation. Visual examination of the map has considerable impact on the way the worker and the client perceive the situation. The connections, the themes, and the quality of the family's life seem to jump off the page and this leads to a more holistic and integrative perception. The integrative value of visual experience was aptly expressed by one twelve-year-old client when he said, "Gee, I never saw myself like that before!"

Initially, the eco-map was developed as a thinking tool for the worker. It was helpful in organizing material and in making an assessment. Sketching out an eco-map in the early stages of contact brought out salient areas of the family's life space that had not as yet been explored and suggested hypotheses for treatment. Before long, it became apparent that the eco-map would make a useful interviewing tool. Client and worker cooperated in picturing the client's life space. This led to much more active participation on the part of the client in the information-gathering and assessment process. The growing collaborative relationship between worker and client was often expressed in a change in seating

Figure 2

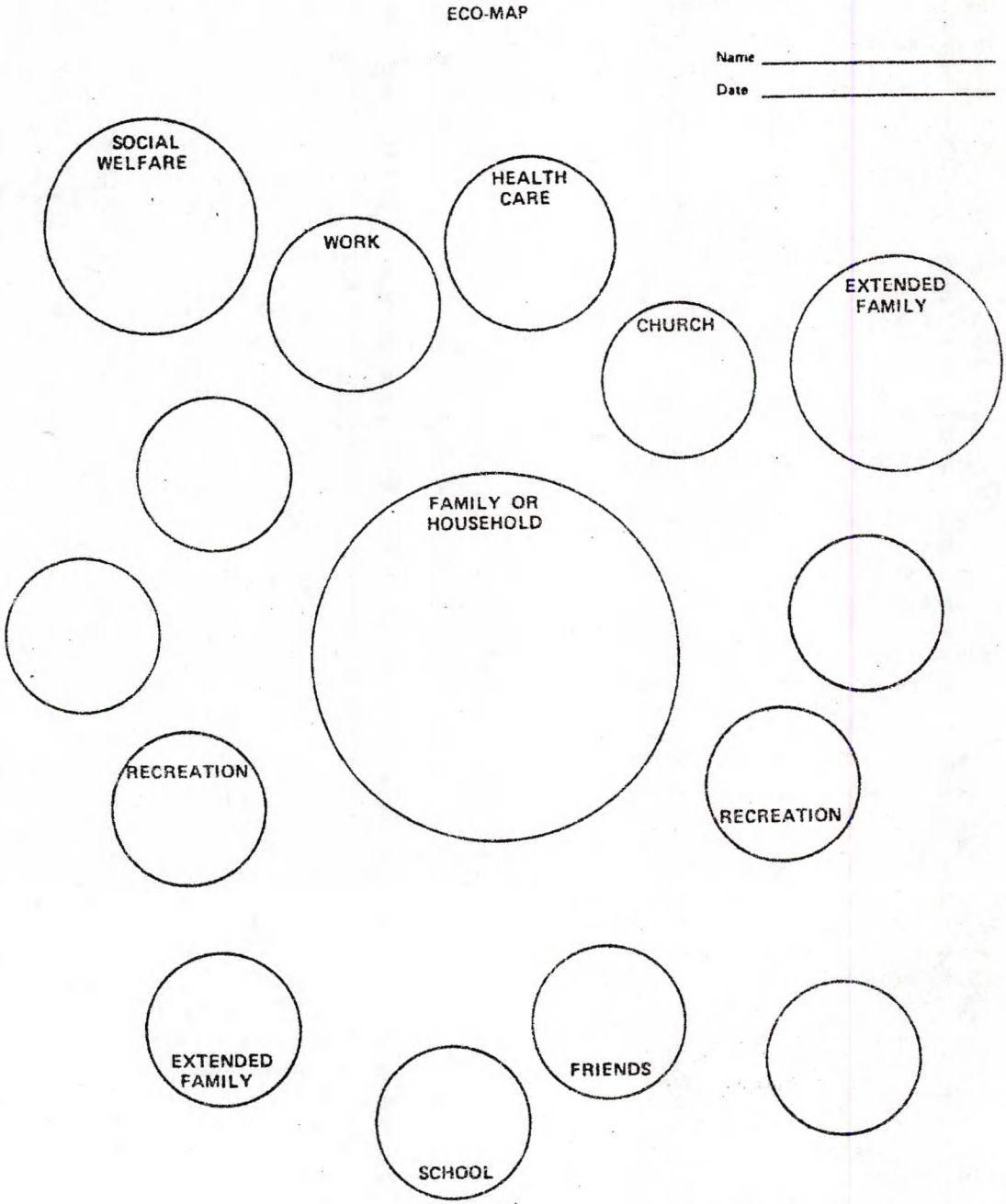
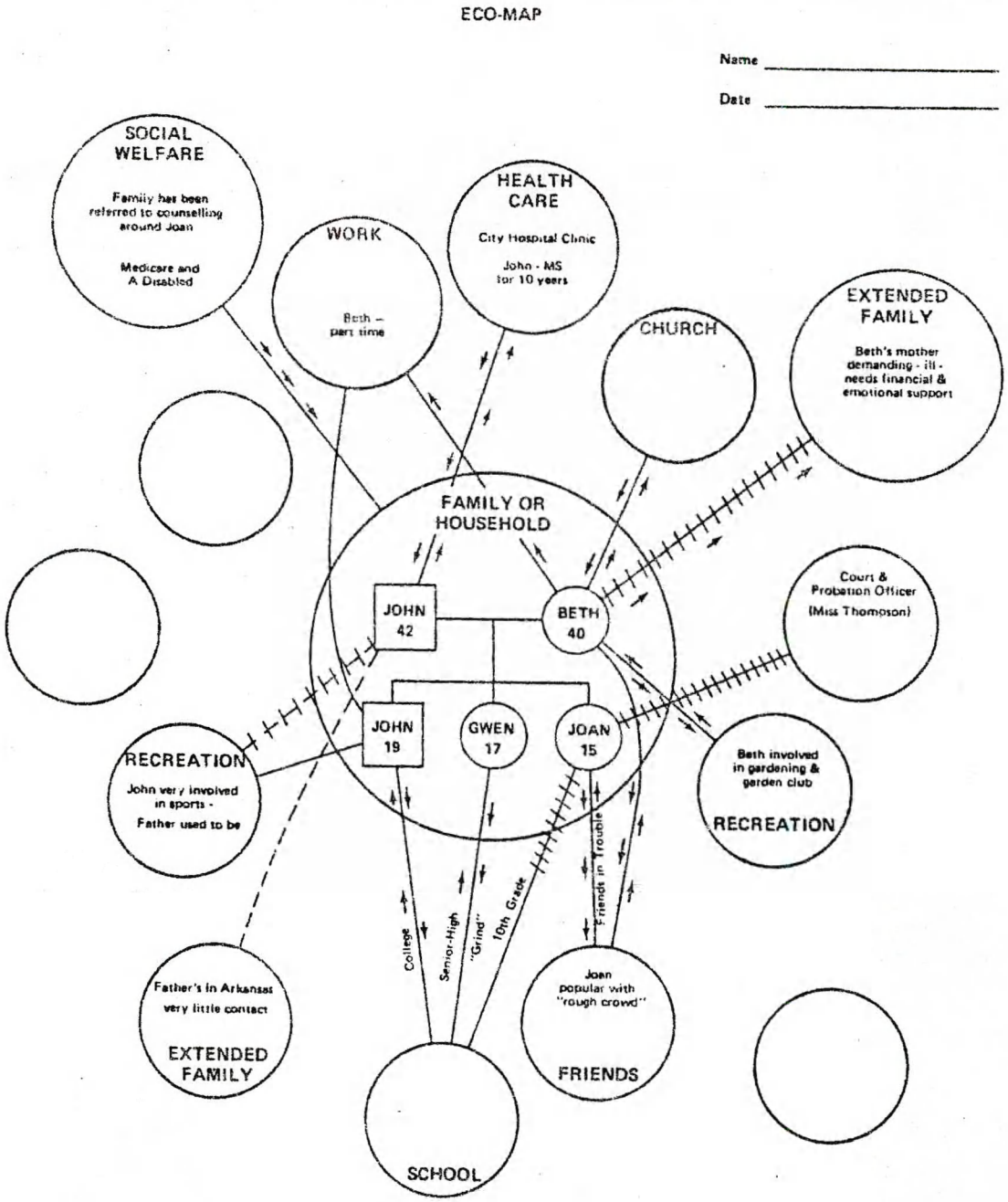

ECO-MAP
Name
Date
SOCIAL WELFARE
WORK
HEALTH CARE
CHURCH
EXTENDED FAMILY
FAMILY OR HOUSEHOLD
RECREATION
RECREATION
EXTENDED FAMILY
FRIENDS
SCHOOL
Fill in connections where they exist.
Indicate nature of connections with a descriptive word or by drawing different kinds of lines;
——— for strong, – – – – – – for tenuous, ////// for stressful.
Draw arrows along lines to signify flow of energy, resources, etc. →→→
Identify significant people and fill in empty circles as needed.

Figure 3



Fill in connections where they exist.
Indicate nature of connections with a descriptive word or by drawing different kinds of lines:
———— for strong, – – – – – – for tenuous, ++++++ for stressful.
Draw arrows along lines to signify flow of energy, resources, etc. →→→
Identify significant people and fill in empty circles as needed.

arrangements as the two tended to sit shoulder-to-shoulder, working together on the joint project.

Sharing the eco-mapping process also led to increased understanding and acceptance of the self on the part of the client. For example, an almost empty eco-map helps the client objectify and share loneliness and isolation. An eco-map full of stressful relationships showing all of the arrows pointing away from the family may lead a father to say, "No wonder I feel drained, everything is going out and nothing is coming in!" The eco-map has been extensively tested with natural parents working toward the return of their placed children through the Temporary Foster Care Project of the Michigan Department of Social Services.[13] Foster care workers noted that parents who were generally angry and self-protective following placement of their children because of abuse or neglect were almost without exception engaged through the use of the map. Workers were aware of a dramatic decrease in defensiveness. The ecological perspective made it clear to parents that the worker was not searching for their inner defects but rather was interested in finding out what it was like to be in the clients' space, to walk in their shoes.

In working with the eco-map, clients have responded in some unanticipated ways. Although it was expected that they would gain a new perception by being able to step outside and look at themselves and their world, the emotional importance of the maps to the clients was a surprise. One mother demonstrated this early in the project by putting the eco-map up on her kitchen wall. In responding to clients' attachments to the maps, workers have regularly arranged to have them photocopied or have used pencil carbon so that clients may have a copy.

Contracting and intervention

The eco-map has also been a useful tool in planning and has had considerable impact on intervention. Because it focuses attention on the client's relationship with his life space, interventions tend to be targeted on the interface, with both worker and client becoming active in initiating changes in the life space. Problematic conditions tend to be characterized as transactional and as a function of the many variables that combine to affect the quality of the individual's or the family's life.

In the Temporary Foster Care Project mentioned above, the worker and client moved quite naturally from the eco-map to a task-oriented contract.[14] They talked together about the changes that would be needed in the eco-map before the family could be reunited. They identified problem areas, resources needed, and potential strengths and planned what actions were needed to bring about change. Further, they established priorities and developed a contract describing the tasks to be undertaken by the worker and by the client.

The uses of the eco-map have multiplied in the hands of creative practitioners. For example, it has been used to portray the past and the future: In a rehabilitation program in a medical setting a social worker used eco-maps with clients to picture their world before their accident or illness; this helped clients to objectify what changes would be made in their lives following hospitalization. It helped them to mourn interests and activities that would have to be relinquished and also to recognize sources of support and gratification that would continue to be available. The mapping encouraged anticipatory planning and preparation for a new life, consideration of appropriate replacements for lost activities, and possible new resources to be tapped, all of which could expand the client's horizons. This technique was not only useful with the patient alone but was very helpful in conjoint work with disabled persons and their families.

Retrospective use of the map tends to highlight changes in a client's life space that

[13]See Gloria Thomas, "Final Report of the Temporary Foster Case Project," mimeograph (Lansing, Mich.: Division of Youth Services, Department of Social Services, 1978).

[14]The work of William Reid and Laura Epstein and their collaborators has been useful in this area. See William Reid and Laura Epstein, *Task Centered Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

could have precipitated current difficulties. When families and individuals seek help, a major question is always "Why has the client sought help now?" A review of the changes that have taken place in the previous months may well bring to light shifts of which the client was quite unaware.

Recordkeeping and measurements of change

A complete eco-map deposited in a case record is a useful tool to present and record a case situation. Not only does it tend to keep the total situation clear for the worker, it can also serve as a means of communication to others should a staff member have to respond to a client in the absence of the regular worker. A crisis walk-in center where case responsibility is shared by a team to provide extended coverage uses the eco-map this way.

Finally, eco-maps can be used to evaluate outcomes and measure change. For example, a ten-year-old boy on a return visit to a school social worker asked for the map. He had made a new friend and wanted to put him on the map. The mother who had hung the map in the kitchen called her worker after two months of considerable activity on both their parts. She wanted to come into the office to plot another map so that she and the worker could look together at the changes. A comparison of eco-maps done at outset and at termination can help clients and workers measure the changes that have taken place. As such the maps can become an important device in maintaining accountability.

The genogram

Families not only exist in space but also through time, and thus a second kind of simulation is needed to picture the development of this powerful relationship system. Not only is each individual immersed in the complex here-and-now life space, but each individual is also a part of a family saga, in an infinitely complicated human system which has developed over many generations and has transmitted powerful commands, role assignments, events, and patterns of living and relating down through the years. Each individual and each family is deeply implicated in this intergenerational family history.

Just as the eco-map can begin to portray and objectify the family in space, so can the genogram picture the family system through time, enabling an individual to step out of the system, examine it, and begin to gain a greater understanding of complex family dynamics as they have developed and as they affect the current situation.

Instructions for drawing a genogram

A genogram is simply a family tree that includes more social data. It is a map of three, four, or more generations of a family which records genealogical relationships, major family events, occupations, losses, family migrations and dispersal, identifications and role assignments, and information about alignments and communication patterns. Again, all that is needed is paper and pencil. For most genograms, a rather large piece of paper is usually required. It is important for the genogram to be uncrowded and clear to make visual examination possible.

The skeleton of the genogram tends to follow the conventions of genetic and genealogical charts. As in the eco-map, a male is indicated by a square, a female by a circle, and if the sex of a person is unknown by a triangle. The latter symbol tends to be used, for example, when the client says, "I think there were seven children in my grandfather's family but I have no idea whether they were males or females." Or, "My mother lost a full-term baby five years before I was born, but I don't know what sex it was."

A marital pair is indicated by a line drawn from a square to a circle; it is useful to add the marital date, on the line. A married couple with offspring is shown as illustrated in figure 4. Offspring are generally entered ac-

Figure 4

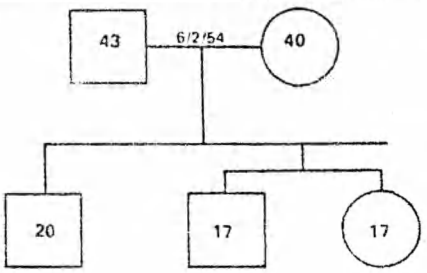
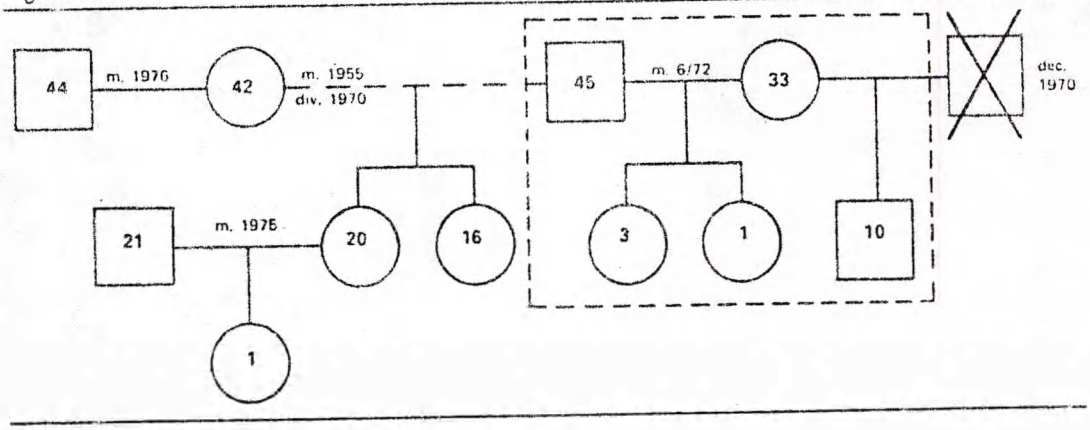


Figure 5



cording to age, starting with the oldest on the left. The family diagramed in figure 4 has an older son followed by a set of twins. A divorce is generally portrayed by a dotted line, and again, it is useful to include dates. (See figure 5.) A family member no longer living is generally indicated by drawing an "X" through the figure and giving the year of death. Thus, a complex, but not untypical, reconstituted family may be drawn as shown in figure 5.

It is useful to draw a dotted line around the family members who compose the household. Incidentally, such a family chart enables the worker to grasp who is who quickly in complicated reconstituted families.

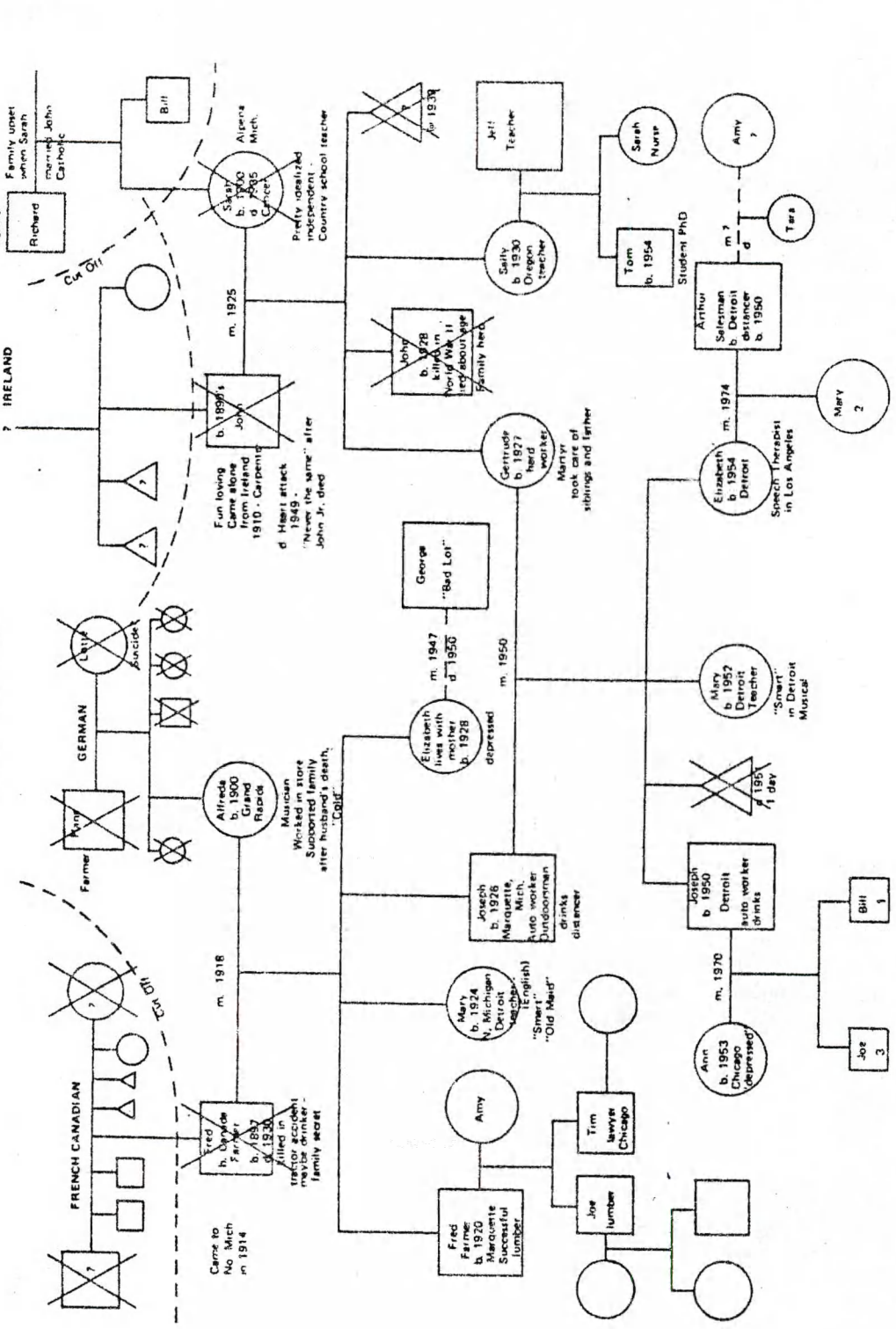
With these basic building blocks, expanded horizontally to depict the contemporary generation of siblings and cousins and vertically to chart the generations through time, it is possible to chart any family, given sufficient paper, patience, and information. (See figure 6, page 474.) As one charts the skeletal structure of the family, it is also important to fill this out with the rich and varied data which portray the saga of the particular family being studied.

Many different kinds of information may be gathered. First and middle given names identify family members, indicate naming patterns, and bring identifications to the surface. In understanding where a client may fit into the family and what expectations and displacements may have affected the sense of self, a first step is to discover who, if anyone, the client was named after. Once this person is identified, it is important to discover what he or she was like, what roles he or she carried, and, perhaps most salient, what the nature of the relationship was between the client's parents and this relative.

Sometimes meanings and connections are not obvious and emerge only through careful exploration. For example, in charting a genogram with a young man who was struggling with identity issues and a complex tie with his mother, naming patterns were being discussed. The client's name was Tony; his American soldier father had met his mother abroad and, immediately after their marriage, the couple had moved to the United States. The move and subsequent political events resulted in the wife's being completely cut off from her family. The client, their firstborn child, was born a year after the marriage. When asked whom he was named after, he replied, "I wasn't named after anyone in the family—I was named after St. Anthony—the patron of lost objects." The symbolic meaning of Anthony's name to his mother became dramatically apparent: Tony was named after everyone in his mother's family!

Dates of birth and dates of death record when members joined the family, their longevity, and family losses. Birth dates indicate the age of family members when important events occurred. They indicate how early or late in a marriage a child came and the age of the parents at the birth. In a sense, birth, marriage, and death dates mark the movement of the family through time. In

Figure 6


SAMPLE GENOGRAM
? IRELAND
FRENCH CANADIAN
GERMAN
Came to No Mich in 1914
Farmer
Fred b. Upside Farmer b. 1897 d. 1930
Killed in tractor accident - maybe drinker - family secret
Alfreda b. 1900 Grand Rapids
Musician
Worked in store
Supported family after husband's death
Cold
m. 1918
Fred Farmer b. 1920 Marquette Successful lumber
Amy
Joe lumber
Tim lawyer Chicago
Mary b. 1924 N. Michigan Detroit teacher (English) "Smart" "Old Maid"
Joseph b. 1926 Marquette, Mich. Auto worker Dunkoonman drinks
Elizabeth lives with mother b. 1928 depressed
m. 1947 d 1950
George "Bad Lot"
m. 1950
Gertrude b. 1927 hard worker
Martyr took care of siblings and father
Fun loving Came alone from Ireland 1910 - Carpenter
d Heart attack 1949 - "Never the same" after John Jr. died
b. 1898 John
m. 1925
Sally b. 1900 d 1945 Cancer
Alpena Mich.
Pretty idealized independent Country school teacher
Richard
Family upset when Sarah married John Catholic
Bill
Cut Off
Prescher Farmer
Sally b 1930 Oregon teacher
Jail Teacher
Tom b. 1954
Student PhD
Sarah Nurse
Arthur Salesman b. Detroit distancer b. 1950
m. 1974
Elizabeth b. 1954 Detroit
Speech Therapist in Los Angeles
Mary 2
Amy ?
Tess
Mary b. 1952 Detroit Teacher
"Smart" in Detroit Musical
Joseph b. 1950 Detroit auto worker drinks
m. 1970
Ann b. 1953 Chicago depressed
Bill 1
Joe 3

working with a client's genogram, it is helpful to discover all of the events that took place around his birth. Major losses experienced in the family around that time can be of particular significance. The tendency to use newborn family members as replacements for lost members seems almost universal and has even been institutionalized in some culturally proscribed naming patterns.

Birth dates also identify each individual's place in the sibship. This brings to the surface such potential roles as "older responsible," "firstborn son," or "baby." It is also relevant to discover who else in the family has occupied the same sibling position. Sibling position can be a powerful source of intergenerational identifications.

Place of birth and current place of residence mark the movement of the family through space. Such information charts the family's patterns of dispersal, bringing into focus major immigrations or migrations and periods of loss, change, and upheaval. Such information may also point to the fact that generations of a family have stayed within a fairly small radius except, perhaps, for a particular individual in each generation who moves away. If a client happens to be this generation's "wanderer," that could be a valuable piece of information.

Picturing the family's movement through space may communicate a good deal about family boundaries and norms concerning mobility. Is this a family that holds on or lets go? Further, the impact of world history on families often becomes evident as responses to war, persecution, westward migration, depression, industrialization, and even climatic or ecological changes are often seen in relocations.

Occupations of family members acquaint one with the interests and talents, the successes and failures, and the varied socioeconomic statuses that are found in most families. Occupational patterns may also point to identifications and can often portray family proscriptions and expectations.

Finally, facts about members' health and causes of death provide overall family health history and also may say something about the way clients see their own future. These predictions may well have some power of self-fulfillment.

This demographic data can take a worker a long way toward understanding the family system. However, gathering associations about family members can add to the richness of the portrayal. One can ask, "What word or two or what picture comes to mind when you think about this person?" These associations tend to tap another level of information about the family as the myths, role assignments, characterizations, or caricatures of family members come into the client's mind. Characterizations such as lazy, bossy, martyr, beautiful, caretaker, are likely to be offered, bringing forth reminiscences or stories that have become a part of the family biography and mythology.

Finally, certain aspects of the family's communication structure can be indicated. Parts of the family that have been cut off become quite obvious because the client generally has very little information about them. Cut-offs can be portrayed by drawing a fence where the cut-off exists whereas tight communication bonds can be demonstrated by drawing a line around portions of the family that form close linkages. It helps to keep things clear if a colored pencil is used to indicate communication linkages and cut-offs so as not to confuse these with the basic genealogical structure. Cut-offs are of particular significance as they are usually indicative of conflict, loss, and family secrets. Cut-offs generally develop to protect family members from pain and conflict, but they are usually indicators of unfinished business and may leave the person out of touch with important aspects of family and perhaps of self.

It is often found that a client doing a genogram will have considerable information about one section of the family, for example, the maternal grandmother's family, and almost none about other relatives. This uneven distribution of knowledge is significant in assessing communication and relationship patterns.

Uses of the genogram

The genogram is a classic tool for gathering and utilizing family data in any family oriented practice. No matter what the setting, if the individual is to be understood in the context of the total family system, the geno-

gram can portray that system and move worker and client toward an understanding of the impact of that system and its relevance to the issues at hand. In counseling regarding marital and parent-child conflict, the routes or prototypes of these conflicts may well emerge. The use of the genogram in conjoint marital counseling can increase empathy between the marital pair and help each to identify the old family issues that have been displaced in the marriage.

In working with the aging, the genogram is an invaluable tool in life review. Elderly people can reminisce and organize memories but also, in working with the genogram, can experience themselves as a central link between the past and the future. This process expresses continuity and the generative process and illustrates that, although the individual's life span may be brief, the family's life reaches back into the past and on into the future. One residence for the aging encourages staff to meet with family members to teach them how to build genograms and help their aged relatives reconnect with their family saga. This sharing of the genogram has been an important experience for both the aged person and the younger family members.

Genograms have also been used in child welfare agencies. As part of an adoptive home study, for example, the genogram may clarify why a couple experiences their family as incomplete and also brings to the surface considerations and plans concerning who an adopted child is intended to be. Charting a genogram with natural parents insures that, should family ties be legally severed, there will be a full family history available to the child in the future. One child care agency that regularly makes use of the genogram in adoption practice has found that often the experience of doing the genogram has been very meaningful to natural parents who see the process as giving something of themselves to the child. The issue of open adoption has yet to be settled but, in the interim, the genogram can gather and keep available the kind of information adopted children often want.

In a hospital setting, a genogram can be used to gather an expanded health history. Such a history provides information about patterns of illness and health in a family: for instance, a paternal grandmother may have died of heart disease at thirty-eight while the maternal grandmother lived an active life to age ninety-four. Further, patterns of illness as well as attitudes toward illness and ill people may appear.

Summary

The eco-map and the genogram are paper and pencil simulations that can organize and objectify a tremendous amount of data about the family system in space and through time. Such objectivity and visual portrayal can lead to new insights and to altered perceptions, of the complexity of human systems. Such altered perceptions may point to new ways of bringing about change, ways that relate to the complexity of human existence.

A Dialogue on Diversity and Pedagogy in the Social Work Classroom

By Miguel Ferguson, Ph.D., University of Texas-Austin, Scott Harding, Ph.D., University of Kansas, and Lori Holleran, Ph.D., University of Texas-Austin

Using a critical classroom incident as a platform for discussion, the authors engage in a dialogue over a range of topics related to controversial issues in Social Work education. The dialogue focuses on a concern that various customs, practices, and assumptions made by schools, faculty, and students act to "sterilize" instruction in social policy and cultural diversity courses. Readers are encouraged to respond to this article via a web-based survey at ***www.diversilog.org.***

Introduction

Almost every social work educator has experienced a contentious or divisive moment in the classroom: a statement taken out of context or misunderstood, a thoughtless comment, a slip of the tongue, or an outright inflammatory incident. Educators experiencing an unsettling event in the classroom often struggle to understand their own response to the event and the incident's overall impact on the students and the class environment. In the hands of an experienced and knowledgeable educator, such unexpected classroom events can open doors to greater learning, prompting students and instructors to critically analyze biases or deeply held feelings that ultimately promote honest inquiry and reflection. Conversely, such moments can also fracture classroom cohesion, engender widespread distrust and animosity, and subvert the overall learning goals of the course.

This article begins with a description of an actual classroom incident that involves complex issues of racial identity and cultural sensitivity. The incident then serves as a platform for the authors, in the form of a dialogue, to share thoughts and reflections about diversity and pedagogy in the social work classroom. The paper is intended to act as an entré into a needed but overlooked discussion in the social work literature. It is also hoped that the discussion will help facilitate continuing dialogue on the subject. Readers are encouraged to complete a web-based survey regarding their own experiences with classroom incidents, issues of diversity and cultural awareness, and reactions to the paper. The web-site address is www.diversilog.org.

The Incident

In the spring of 1999, in a large social work program with a national reputation, the following episode took place in a course on community organizing. The course instructor asked one of the authors of this article to recommend a guest speaker who could address interactions between race and class. A personal friend who was a well-known activist in the community, an octogenarian with over sixty years of experience as a labor organizer and civil rights activist, was recommended. The speaker had previously made presentations to the School of Social Work and was known for his vibrant and often evocative style.

The guest lecturer began the presentation by describing his background. Born in Brooklyn in 1916, he had come of age as an activist in his teens by fighting landlords who had evicted tenants during the Great Depression. He became a member of the Communist Party because, as he put it, "the Communists were the only ones doing

something about the suffering and unemployment" created in the aftermath of the stock market crash. During the 1930s, he helped organize labor unions and participated in protests to demand relief from government agencies. Some of these experiences involved violent confrontations with police. He also shared with the class that he was a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a group of Americans who volunteered to fight in defense of the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War.[1] He discussed his experience as a community organizer in Mississippi in 1964. The speaker thus clearly identified himself as a person of action who had literally put his life on the line in defense of his beliefs in social justice and racial equality.

Returning to the purpose of his presentation, the speaker said that he would like to address the complex intersection of class and race by recounting an event that had occurred in 1936 while he was participating in a labor strike in the "low coal" country of Pennsylvania. During the United Mine Workers strike, members of the National Guard had demonstrated great hostility toward the strikers. Tensions were mounting, and the risk of a violent encounter between the two groups was escalating. At one point, a National Guardsman grabbed an African-American striker and was seriously threatening him in an effort to incite a violent confrontation. Responding immediately to this situation, one of the strikers, a white male from the Deep South, pulled a gun, pointed it at the Guardsman, and said, "If you don't let that n***** go I'm gonna blow your head off."

As soon as the speaker said this, several students, but one in particular, verbally and through gestures let it be known that they were extremely upset that the "N" word had been used. The speaker responded by saying that he had not used the word, and that he was only recounting a historical incident in which the word had been used. Though several of the students were still upset, the speaker continued with the story in an effort to make his point. He continued by saying that later that night, when tempers had calmed, a union organizer approached the white southern striker and told him that he had done something very brave but also very offensive. The striker was puzzled about what he had done wrong. The organizer told him that he had rightly come to the aid of a fellow union member, but that he had wrongly called his union brother an offensive name. "What," said the striker, somewhat incredulously, "he ain't no white man." Upon hearing this interaction, the African-American striker, who felt that his life had been saved by the actions of his union colleague, put his arms around the white southerner and said, "That's okay brother, 'cuz them was the sweetest words I ever heard."

A few of the students reacted even more vehemently upon hearing the rest of the story. The speaker was somewhat puzzled by their reaction and again maintained that he himself had not personally said the word but that he was only retelling a historical event as it happened in order to make a larger point. One of the students who seemed to be the most visibly upset identified herself as an African-American. She responded that he did not have to use the word, that the story could be told just as forcefully without using the word, and that the word was bigger and more profoundly negative than any moral that could be drawn from the story. Several students seemed to agree with her.

In response, rather than attempting to explicate the moral of his story, the speaker continued with another story. He said he had spent nine months in Mississippi in 1964 living with a radical, African-American civil rights activist named Hartman Turnbow. Mr. Turnbow had been the first African-American to register to vote in the county since Reconstruction. During his time living with Mr. Turnbow, the speaker indicated that the KKK

had blown up the speaker's car and that he and Mr. Turnbow had engaged in numerous gun battles with the local police. On the day he was to leave Mississippi, Mr. Turnbow looked him in the eye and said, "You know, even though you white on the outside, on the inside you a nigga just like me." As he said this, the same members of the class literally erupted. Some of them physically turned their backs to the speaker. He almost had to shout the rest of his story, which was to say that what Mr. Turnbow had said was "the highest compliment anyone had ever given me." He then sat down angrily and the professor tried to restore order as the students, one of the authors included, heatedly debated different issues that the speaker's remarks had elicited.

There are two caveats to the story that must be included to understand the full nature of the issue as it presented itself to the class on that day. First, the instructor of the course, a tenured, Anglo professor close to retirement, had several weeks earlier also used the "N" word in describing a historical event in which he had been involved. After one or two students reproached him for using the word in historically recounting what had been said, he began the next class with a profuse apology for saying the "N" word.[2]

The second event involved another guest speaker and took place after the professor's apology, one week prior to the speaker mentioned above. In that class, an African-American minister from the community used the "N" word when describing how he greeted young African-American males in his church's neighborhood. After saying this, he paused for a moment but quickly said that his use of the word was simply the way things were said in his neighborhood. No students acknowledged that they were offended in any way by his casual use of the word.

The Dialogue

MIGUEL: I recommended the guest speaker and witnessed firsthand the series of classroom events described above. My first reaction was one of shock. I could not believe students were responding in such a way. I was also stunned to see students in their early to mid-twenties so rudely treat the guest speaker (one or two of them made rude gestures while he was trying to finish his story). Although I am a personal friend of the guest speaker, I believe I would have felt the same way about any speaker with such an illustrious and extensive history of activism. Other things ran through my mind. I mentioned to the class that I had just completed research that documented a strong correlation between African-American infant mortality and hospital closure rates in Chicago. Literally, black folks were dying as a result of the striking number of hospital closures that have taken place in Chicago since 1970. In the heat of the moment, I accused students of being more concerned about words than life and death issues facing African-Americans.

LORI: Miguel, thanks for the powerful account and your honest reaction of shock at the students' reactions and "rudeness." I do not think that your reaction of accusing the students of being more concerned with words than life and death issues is inappropriate. However, when I imagine myself, a Jew, hearing someone tell the story if "kike" had been the word, I'm sure my heart would have pounded into my throat and that I probably would have felt an obligation to somehow demonstrate disapproval or disdain for the word as a responsibility to my group, so small in number. On another level, I am surprised that a student would want, or even expect, a recounted historical event to be altered to omit an "offensive" word. I am immediately

reminded of an issue that occurred while preparing for my doctoral dissertation defense. My study was an ethnographic analysis of aspects of the ethnic identity of Chicano/a adolescents. I was advised by my committee chair to avoid the use of the word "wetback" even when quoting the informants, so as not to run the risk of offending members of my audience. Not only was this term crucial to the narratives of the participants, it was a word used readily in the culture that I was attempting to describe. In fact, there is a gang that calls itself "Wetback Power." I did decide to use the "taboo" word when quoting the informants, and no negative repercussions followed. Perhaps I should have called it the "w" word!?

SCOTT: Well, should we be surprised about anything that happens in the classroom anymore? In particular, given the ongoing polarization that exists (both on campus and off) regarding issues of "race," the type of student reactions that occurred in Miguel's class will continue. For example, last semester I used a memoir *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie* (MacDonald, 1999), in a course I taught on Human Behavior with Groups, Organizations and Communities. The book offered an excellent practical example of the way in which communities influence and shape people's behavior. It focused on life in one of the poorest neighborhoods (South Boston) in the United States, a community populated largely by low-income whites. Covering the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, the book also described the turmoil that engulfed Boston when school desegregation was mandated via busing of black and white students to surrounding neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, the book had numerous references to the "N" word. During a class discussion about the text, one African-American student interrupted a white student discussing the book to voice her discomfort with the use of the "N" word, and strongly asked that we use a different descriptor. To the credit of both students, there was no direct confrontation, no defensiveness, and no fault or blame assigned. Both were able to articulate their points of view about the use of the "N" word. Class continued, and our discussion went well. (As an aside, another African-American student later told me that she had no problem with the use of the "N" word, especially since it was an integral part of the text and thus could be seen as part of the historical record.) Clearly, my circumstance was different from Miguel's. But the question I have regarding both situations is this: could we/should we, as instructors, have done more in the heat of the moment to take advantage of these (all too infrequent) "teaching moments?" In other words, thinking toward the future, what can we do to help students feel safe in talking about issues of race that clearly generate strong emotional responses? How can we ensure that, rather than creating divisions in the classroom, content on race, diversity, and multiculturalism provides an avenue for thoughtful, honest, and productive dialogue?

LORI: It is a relief to hear anecdotal evidence that there may be more student willingness to tread where few have gone before. Scott regarded the stances as race-related polarizations, and this is a testament to the either-or tendency of students. I, too, find that when students feel passionate enough to take the risk of speaking up in class, it is often "for" or "against." Students who have not explored these issues before tend to sit quietly, afraid of stepping on their own tongues. I have talked with my students about this and they report that they are not only afraid of offending their classmates, but also afraid to "not sound like a social worker." Does this mean that they are afraid of discovering their own biases, which are counter to social work values? In my Master's program, in a course on racism, we read D.T. Wellman's *Portraits*

of White Racism (1993) and wrote a paper on our own racist beliefs and actions. The provocative dialogues that followed were terrifying and enlightening and were my first experience of the "spiritual stretch" that it takes to honestly confront racism. Clearly, books such as this and *All Souls* are a powerful springboard for crucial teaching moments. Self-disclosure in class regarding my own journey-in-progress from color blindness to cultural competence has also been a useful tool for creating what Satir (1964) refers to as a "safe holding environment." Are there other ways to set the stage for the sharing of spectrums of experiences rather than the polarizations we seem to be witnessing in class?

MIGUEL: We seem to find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. There is a real tension involved in promoting thoughtful, honest, and productive dialogue in a safe and non-divisive classroom environment. I doubt this tension can be resolved easily, if at all. At a basic level, what one student considers a thoughtful comment or honest reflection may be considered by another to be offensive and insulting. Further, my concern is that most instructors will tend to value the latter issue ("safety" or "non-polarization") above the former ("thoughtful dialogue"). For example, when I spoke with the instructor of the class after the critical incident took place, it was clear that, in the future, provocative guest speakers would be avoided. I suspect that for many instructors it is simply not worth it to expose students to certain ideas, readings, and speakers. The end result is an impulse to redirect the focus to another, less polarizing context, avoid certain subjects altogether, or sterilize class content in other ways. Even using Scott's more benign example, I wonder how many instructors would be inclined to continue using the book in question, for fear that a more controversial debate would ensue.

Writing on the subject of cultural diversity and social work pedagogy, Garcia and Van Soest (2000) suggest that faculty develop (and be ready to apply) guidelines to deal with contentious issues in the classroom. For my part, I begin each course by informing students of my desire that the class become a safe haven for the free expression of any and all ideas, except those that are meant to intentionally harm or be cruel. Although this is an admittedly vague guideline, I do not believe use of the "N" word in historical context or the example Scott mentions come close to crossing over these criteria.

LORI: I've been thinking about what Miguel said: "Most instructors will tend to value the latter issue ('safety' or 'non-polarization') above the former ('thoughtful dialogue')." I can't help but wonder why. If, perhaps, we were to gain awareness about the impediments to "thoughtful dialogues," perhaps we could begin to explore viable solutions. I suspect that barriers include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

(1) The peaceful nature of helping professionals that leads to a desire for democratic or mediated environments often resulting in oppressive, superficial pseudo-discussions;

(2) A lack of insight into the complexity and richness of issues of power, privilege, race, ethnicity, diversity, and, most importantly, one's own biases and blind spots;

(3) Grandiosity and a lack of personal "teachability" leading to pedantic lectures about diversity;

(4) Fear of repercussions, primarily political (i.e., I need good student evaluations, I don't want any complaints while I await the tenure process, etc.); and/or

(5) Ignorance regarding how to manage conflict in the classroom.

One more thought. I know that many minority students are, as one of my students

powerfully articulated, "sick and tired of representing entire cultures, especially ones I don't even belong to." I think this is an important caveat to our discussion.

SCOTT: Based on my experience teaching and interacting with university students and faculty for more than four years, I agree with both of you on a key point. Many (if not most) instructors in social work seek the relative safety of non-confrontation in the classroom, often at the expense of passionate and engaged dialogue (especially regarding issues of diversity/difference and oppression). I link the two concepts of passion and engagement because I believe we cannot fully engage social work students on these topics without bringing our own passion about them to the classroom.

And herein lies the rub. Based on conversations with numerous students, as well as personal observation and interaction with other faculty, the lack of passion by instructors is a significant impediment to thoughtful classroom dialogue on critical social issues. While I grant that ignorance over how to manage classroom conflict, and the "peaceful nature" of the helping professions, may indeed contribute to this, I suggest that larger forces are at work. Specifically, given the middle-class nature of the profession, and the elitism that is higher education, in particular, the granting of Ph.D.s to a chosen few, most of those charged with the task of teaching are a largely homogeneous lot. Thus, the diversity that we so desperately seek among our students, and that we earnestly wish to confront and discuss in the classroom, is largely lacking among those of us in the academy who teach.

As the bi-racial son of a single mother who worked as a secretary for nearly 25 years to raise three sons, and as someone who has spent considerable time working (both paid and volunteer) on social justice issues, I bring a unique perspective to the classroom. I, and others with shared or similar backgrounds, *do* bring (to quote Lori) "insight into the complexity and richness of issues of power, privilege, race, ethnicity, diversity...". In fact, for me, it is precisely those issues, and the realization that social justice is still a long time coming, which has led me to the classroom. In my teaching, I bring passion and a sense of outrage at the way society is structured to reproduce inequality. The problem is, in my opinion, most of my colleagues *do not* share either a similar background or history that would help provide them crucial (personal) insight into these issues. Hence, while most can appreciate and address such issues on a largely theoretical level, few have little in the way of passion around these issues. Thus, if these issues are addressed, they are often done in a "safe" manner so as to avoid offending anyone's sensibilities.

While this may sound like a generalization, information about the relative lack of diversity (economic/class, racial/ethnic, sexual orientation, etc.) among university professors is well documented. Perhaps less understood, and hence more in need of inquiry, is the composition of those who teach classes specifically devoted to diversity issues or the extent to which these topics are truly integrated into our curriculum. In short, I'm suggesting that the lack of personal knowledge of oppression and diversity issues by many faculty members contributes to an often widespread reluctance to address these topics. It would only make sense that such tendencies would be reinforced when the inevitable classroom conflict arises when we do struggle with these themes.

MIGUEL: After ruminating on Scott's response, I tend to agree that the lack of diversity (in its plural forms) among Social Work faculty may be the most robust correlate of sterilized instruction. Other related factors also come into play. For example, in my own doctoral experience, the professors primarily

responsible for teaching social policy courses were tenured, white males who owned expensive homes in all-white neighborhoods. In their housing decisions they had moved themselves, consciously or otherwise, far away from the low-income populations whose concerns they sought to illustrate in the classroom. Since I was living at the time in a predominantly low-income African-American neighborhood, it was clear to me that most of

the issues discussed in class were derived from readings, not real-life experience. Indeed, the one professor who did have experience working directly with low-income populations relied on experiences working as a social worker some thirty years earlier. I mention this not to deride past experience as ineffectual but to provide anecdotal information from personal experience to support Scott's contention about passion in the classroom.

The other issue that Scott rightly addresses is doctoral education. For the most part, the composition of social work academics (to say nothing of their competence) will be only as diverse as the pool of candidates graduating from the 60-plus social work schools with doctoral programs nationwide. For example, although my own doctoral program is nationally ranked, it has graduated only one African-American woman in the 25 years of its existence. The pool is further limited by the significant number of international students in social work doctoral programs who have no intention of teaching in the United States and by the large number of students who choose to pursue clinical, research, or administrative careers rather than tenure-track academics. The stark reality is that those who have a personal knowledge of oppression and diversity (not to mention other important characteristics) have, for the most part, been winnowed out long before a divisive issue erupts in a classroom.

LORI: I write this response upon my return from a week-long national research training institute on "Minorities and Substance Abuse." A well-respected academician made one poignant comment. She essentially expressed that the problem with social work education is that the profession is primarily composed of middle-class white women who are ignorant about issues of race and oppression. In response, I would never deny the structural barriers and inequities of dominant white culture. I know that I, and other white people, will never know "death by one thousand nicks" (i.e., the everyday comments, prejudices, stereotypes, racist reactions in the dominant culture). But I must note that it would be erroneous for our discussion to imply that professors from the white majority cannot bring insight into the complexity and richness of issues of power, privilege, race, ethnicity, and diversity. Miguel referred to the importance of real life experience. Clearly it is an oversimplification to assume that the profundity of life experiences and subsequent capacity for empathic connections can be defined by whether or not someone is a person of color. I have worked in the addictions field for over a dozen years. I have witnessed, in white and ethnic clients, a depth of desperation and despair that cannot be denied as a quintessential transformative experience. I believe that the self-hatred and personal self-destructive actions that I have witnessed strike a chord and resemble the reactions that I have come to understand as internalized racism.

I am not a woman of color. I would not for a minute make the grandiose assumption that I know the experience of being a woman of color. But, along with passion for cultural competence and continuing exposure to the issues we educate around, I would add two more key ingredients in effectively teaching

"un-sterilized" versions of diversity in social work education: humility and teachability. As a professor, I can impart my knowledge and also recount the times that I took a risk to get to know someone of another culture and stuck my foot in my mouth. For example, after several months conducting an ethnographic study of Mexican-American adolescents in the Southwest, I asked the group of teens that I had spent time with, "So, do you know a lot of kids in gangs?" They looked at each other and burst into laughter, clarifying that they were *all* gang members. The teens proceeded to shower me with stories of their gang experiences.

There is distinct value in taking the role that Hammersly and Atkinson (1995) refer to as "acceptable incompetent." From this place, I am able to publish sensitive works that contribute to the knowledge base about this population. My students benefit from the balance between my professional knowledge and expertise as well as my imperfect humanness. I can celebrate these moments of profound connection that came from my distinct knowledge that I was *not* the expert in someone else's life experience. One layer of our discussion is the "micro" view (e.g., relationship of teacher and student, need for passionate classroom discussion of diversity, and fear of classroom conflicts) and the other is the broader "macro" view (e.g., societal/ structural barriers leading to a lack of heterogeneity and diversity of doctoral students and professors.) Don't the solutions lie in both arenas?

MIGUEL: I'm not sure there are solutions per se, but informed responses to meet the issues we raise here certainly must come from multiple arenas. However, for the sake of argument, here I would like to interject a different point. From the beginning of this dialogue, we have focused on the characteristics, attributes, and experience of social work *instructors*. The fundamental assumption is that faculty biases, shortcomings, comments, or (re)actions are the source of cultural conflicts in the classroom, or at least what is most in need of attention. This parallels the focus of numerous studies regarding classroom issues and diversity (Chesler & Malani, 1993, Garcia & Van Soest, 1999; Garcia & Van Soest, 2000; Van Soest, Garcia, & Graff, 2001).

To be sure, these are important aspects of the equation, and it goes without saying that what an instructor brings to the classroom is an integral part of the learning experience. But I think we can assume that social work instructors are, in general, culturally competent. In the vignette that began this dialogue, it was a student who disrupted classroom learning on an important subject (the intersection of class and race). Thus, contrary to a statement Lori made about students being tired of representing entire cultures, in this instance (and others I have witnessed) it is clear that "in-group" members of a minority are often only too willing to speak as self-appointed representatives of the whole. When this happens, most non-members of the group don't feel they have a right to respond and even members of the in-group may hesitate to share an opposing view for fear of being labeled an "Uncle Tom" or "proving" the extent to which they have internalized oppression.

SCOTT: Miguel asks what of students? It would be a generalization to suggest that minority group members routinely act as self-appointed representatives in the classroom, though clearly this does happen. Of perhaps more interest is Miguel's other point: that this behavior often silences other such group members, in particular those with opposing points of view. Clearly this latter behavior *is* common and reflects larger tensions and contradictions within various "minority" communities on certain issues (such as affirmative action). Going back to where we

started this conversation, such behaviors challenge us as educators to provide space for all viewpoints to emerge and for students to feel safe in taking risks when they express their opinion, ask questions, or dialogue with each other. I would also suggest that this silencing is not exclusive to members of racial/ethnic groups. That is, social work students with strong "conservative" or religious points of view are routinely silenced in the classroom in a variety of ways. The biggest fear of such students, from my teaching experience, is of being attacked by other students for not thinking the "right way" or not rigidly holding social work values as understood by most students.

To address a different point made earlier by Lori: Yes, it would be "an oversimplification" to assume that one must be a person of color to have *deep* understanding of issues of power, privilege, race, etc. As both Lori and Miguel note, the opportunity for real life experience is often key to this process. In this respect, both students and instructors have a valuable role to play. While race/ethnicity is most often the focal point of issues of oppression and privilege, social work educators must be able to foster recognition of and discussion about the multiple identities we all hold. Thus, while white women may obtain privilege based on their "racial" status, their gender is often a source of discrimination and inequality. Conversely, young black men, historically the target of multiple forms of oppression, *may* enjoy privilege due to their sexual orientation, gender, age, income, or physical ability. Consciously or not, these multiple and often interchangeable identities construct our behavior and the way others view us (for example, as someone who does or does not have power). A conversation of the multiple identities we all hold, how this informs our interactions with others, and the implications this has for social work practice and for challenging oppression is key to bridging the divide inside (and outside) the classroom. This dialogue can provide an opportunity for students and instructors to find common cause in the struggle to achieve social justice and to recognize that in different ways we all suffer and benefit from different forms of oppression. There may be no more important task for social work education.

In addition, a crucial question remains: how do our largely white, middle-income colleagues (social work educators) relate to these topics without some personal connection beyond the task of engaging in research? One could suggest that the individual attributes of social work educators and researchers should not matter, that we have some special ability to understand the struggles of diverse and oppressed populations or empathize with the victims of structural inequality. From this we are thus empowered to fight with and on behalf of "the wretched of the earth." Yet, based on the history of our profession and the overarching course of social welfare policy, one could just as easily argue that social work has maintained its professional status by perpetuating (or at least failing to adequately oppose) a system that reinforces class, racial, and gender hierarchies. This extends to the process of social work education, which is more concerned with training "professional" practitioners than challenging structures of oppression. Until we in the academy begin the process of honest and critical self-reflection about our activities both inside and outside the classroom, I'm afraid the status quo will remain our primary product.

References

• Chesler, M., & Malani, A. (1993). Perceptions of faculty behavior by students of color. *Michigan Journal of Political*

Science (16):54-79.

• Garcia, B., & Van Soest, D. (1999). Teaching about diversity and oppression: Learning from the analysis of critical classroom events. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 18 (1/2):149-167.

• Garcia, B. & Van Soest, D. (2000). Facilitating learning on diversity: Challenges to the professor. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work 9* (1/2):21-39.

• Hammersly, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

• Hemingway, E. (1940). *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. New York: Scribner.

• MacDonald, M.P. (1999). *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie*. Boston: Beacon Press.

• Satir, V. (1964). *Conjoint Family Therapy: A Guide to Theory and Techniques*. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books.

• Van Soest, D., Garcia, B., and Graff, D. (2001). Sensitivity to racism and social work professors' responsiveness to critical classroom events. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 21 (1/2):39-58.

• Wellman, D.T. (1993). *Portraits of White Racism*. 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Footnotes

[1] The Abe Lincoln Brigade is memorialized in Hemingway's classic *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

[2] The authors are not satisfied with the professor's response to the students' concerns. We believe he should have acknowledged the concerns the students raised and used the topic as a point of class discussion. Instead, his abject apology deprived the class of an opportunity to discuss the issues in depth and signaled to the rest of the students that no other point of view would be tolerated.

FILM REVIEW: *THE HOURS*

By Agathi Glezakos, Ph.D., California State University, Long Beach

The Hours, which received multiple accolades at the 2003 Academy Awards, (including a best actress Oscar for Nicole Kidman), has recently been released on video and DVD.

This is not a film for those seeking light entertainment or laughter. *The Hours* is filled with sadness, human misery, misunderstanding, hopelessness and self-destruction. The film leaves one, however, with a deep appreciation of the multiple forms that art, human ingenuity, and creativity can take. The relationships portrayed and explored are nuanced and complex. The viewer is forced to consider questions about social norms and expectations, and a person's right to make free choices – choices which might ultimately lead to personal destruction, or even death.

The film focuses on the defining moments in the lives of three women: Virginia, Laura, and Clarissa (played respectively by Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep). The women are of three different eras; we are presented with a day in each of their lives as it unfolds during their different chronological periods.

Virginia, the author, has been exiled from the fast-paced London of the early 1920's to a quiet suburb for mental health reasons; she is in the painful early development stages of a novel which she will eventually title *Mrs. Dalloway*. Laura, a 1950's-era Los Angeles homemaker, is the mother of a young son and pregnant. Her challenge for the day is to bake her husband a birthday cake; we, and her intuitive and sensitive son, watch as Laura struggles to meet the expectations of her roles as a wife and mother. In New York City, Clarissa is frantically planning a party for her close friend Richard, a poet who is dying of AIDS.

In the course of the movie, a series of back and forth movements – between Virginia's preoccupation with writing a novel that centers on one day in a woman's life, Laura's desperate attempts, years later, to immerse herself in reading that very novel, and the modern-day Clarissa's planning of a party as did the fictional Mrs. Dalloway - can be confusing. Familiarity with Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* would almost certainly enable the viewer to follow the unfolding events more easily.

The personal, relational and ethical issues and dilemmas that occur in the socio-cultural contexts of the 1920s, 1950s and the beginning of the new millennium, seem to be more similar than different. In three relational sets—Virginia and her husband, two upper-middle class Britons, and the Euro-Americans, Laura and her husband and Clarissa and her friend Richard—we witness similar intrapsychic conflicts, expression of caring, interpersonal misunderstandings, and self-annihilation of will. It is neither lack of material goods nor inability to access external resources that lead these women into crises. Rather, it is an intrapsychic war with the self that leads them to a state of Durkeim's *anomie*, in which no amount of support and caring from loved ones is powerful enough to alleviate their despair and hopelessness. The ravaging effects of Virginia's clinical depression interfere with her creativity; the need to continue to write, coupled with the expectation to manage her household, and to maintain her relationships with her husband, sister, niece and nephews, threaten to eventually overpower her. The efforts that Laura's husband makes to help make her daily tasks as the mother of a young son and pregnant woman less taxing and to assure her

of his love for her, are not sufficient to stem her despair and desperation. And Clarissa, despite her frantic attempts to elevate her dear and long-time friend Roger's spirit by celebrating his literary and poetic accomplishments, is unable to deter him from his course of self-destruction.

The socio-political atmosphere during each of the time periods that the protagonists' lives evolve are different. Nonetheless, their intrapersonal and interpersonal issues do not differ qualitatively. It is these issues, the caring attempts by loved ones to help with their resolution, and the choices each person makes which have implications for mental health professionals.

The movie's implications for competent practice are multiple. The clinician's ability to listen carefully in order to connect with the client's indirect verbal messages as well as with the client's unspoken words is underscored. The importance for the clinician to empathize with and validate the client's subjectively felt predicament and to respect the client's ultimate right for autonomy and self-determination is demonstrated clearly. There are events which reflect the inherent limitations of mental health practice and from which the clinician can learn to view client self-destructive behaviors, not as a reflection of his or her lack of skill or knowledge, but instead, as possible characteristics of human nature which, in some situations, can lead the client to self-annihilation. Witnessing how the individuals are the ultimate decision-makers in their life's course is simultaneously an empowering, as well as a humbling experience for the mental health professional.

The film has also implications for social work curriculum content and for the two opposing camps in the profession of social work which have fought to define the profession's mission. On the one hand, direct practice courses in social work focus on helping MSW students learn how to conduct biopsychosocial assessments, how to develop clinical diagnoses and treatment plans, and what choices to make about treatment interventions. Students are instructed to use their knowledge and skill in their direct practice with clients from all walks of life. The mission of the social work profession, from this perspective, is to assist individuals in need of material, concrete services as well as individuals in need of clinical services. On the other hand, in their exchanges with both instructors and practitioners, the same students also hear that the mission of the social work profession is to help the poor, the disenfranchised, the discriminated against, the oppressed; clinical practice takes second place.

More than once I have engaged in lengthy conversations with students trying to jointly understand who is a "legitimate" social work client and who is not. During my 30 years of social word practice, I have worked with destitute and disenfranchised clients. I have also worked with privileged and affluent clients. In both cases the clients represented diversity in the areas of culture and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief systems, disability, and age. I have come to believe that while their needs and problems might be different, they all deserve our services equally. If we teach our students the knowledge and skills of direct practice, they should be expected to use these in their work with all who might benefit from that knowledge and those skills. Clients who struggle to meet basic human needs might not, in the end, suffer more than do clients who fight relentless intrapsychic torment – a lesson that the film makes vividly clear.

The Hours is skillfully directed and magnificently acted. The metamorphosis of Nicole Kidman as Virginia Woolf is truly astonishing. The film well deserves the critical acclaim that it has received, and I recommend *The Hours* to the readers of *Reflections*.

Call for Narratives

SPECIAL ISSUE:

THE WORKER WITH THE GROUP

A Special Issue Focusing on Group Work Practice

Reflections is seeking narratives that explore workers' experiences with groups in a wide range of settings and with diverse populations.

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES, ORGANIZATIONS, CHILDREN, AGING RESEARCH, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND OTHER FORMS OF GROUP WORK THAT AID PERSONS.

Mail manuscripts to: Paul Abels, Ph.D. Special Editor
CSULB Dept. of Social Work
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90840
pabels@csulb.edu

Manuscripts are due by September 30, 2003

SENSEMAKING: WHAT IS OUR PROFESSION SELLING?

By Paul Abels, Ph.D. with comments by Chauncey Alexander, M.S.W.

We were reminiscing the other day, Chauncey Alexander and I, about the good old days of social work. Chauncey was the Executive Director of NASW for 15 years, and introduced a number of important ideas into the organization. Well, anyway, as old timers are used to doing, we talked about some of the current policies that were about to add more sorrow to poor of our country. You know how we social workers often carry "the weight of the world" on our shoulders, and talk social justice at the drop of a hat or cap (nowadays). He mentioned that the last copy of the National NASW news had some good stuff in it. I stared at him oddly, and of course he knew what was on my mind because we had discussed the issue a few times before.

"Did you count the number of pages of ads?" I asked? "There were 11 pages of ads in a 20 page newspaper. That's a little over 50%. You must admit that there is something wrong if we can't find enough issues to deal with that we end up with more ads than news. And I'm not even counting the pictures, which may be important but don't add much to bringing about social change," I added with my usual sarcasm. In reality, I don't mind the job ads, because that is a valuable contribution, but that other stuff is just "business." I knew I had him in a tough spot, because there isn't another person I know who is so dedicated to NASW and our profession. "Yes", he admitted, "its true." I spared him the discomfort of further discussion on this particular subject, but this is the way I see it.

Ad counting? You would be right to say "Who cares, there is much more important stuff for our profession to worry about," and I certainly agree. But that's my point! The ads are just a metaphor for our profession's changing priorities. My not-very-scientific-study indicates that for about two years now, the ads are taking up more and more room as our social problems are becoming more and more severe. The last couple of year's issues are about 50% ads. Two years ago, the Oct. 2001 California NASW news had 11 pages of ads out of 28 pages, about 40%, and an article about 9/11. Perhaps things were going to improve.

Does a crises make much difference? The national NASW News: Oct. 2001, headline: "NASW Responds to Terror Attacks." Ads - 65%. Perhaps they didn't have enough time to write more because of their early deadline? The next month, Nov. 2001, headline: "Social Workers Heed Call After Attacks." Ads - 57%. Let me say at this point that since ads are social constructions, other counters might not see ads as I did, and may get a different count.

Okay - enough statistics. I believe that a newspaper is supposed to have its major purpose to inform, but commercial newspapers count on ads for economic survival. Some people enjoy reading ads. Woody Allen once joked about reading the Sunday paper because of the lingerie ads. I can appreciate that, but in a professional newsletter, providing information about the profession should be its major purpose. (Trumpets sound a fanfare).

I did not intend to count ads - it was a fluke. I was disturbingly interested in the speedy growth of businesses aimed at preparing people to pass their exams for California licensing and to acquire CEUs to maintain their license. I have found the ads

varied and fun, but crowding out the news I believed was important for us to know about. Then I began to see that the California NASW was getting into the business on a large scale. The current June issue includes three pages related to home study courses and a "CE Fair" (see, I told you it was fun). In fact, the last State conference was almost all related to taking courses for licensing credit. I am not sure if there was even a keynote speaker, and I think the luncheon speaker was a magician or something. Two full days of courses.

Now I am not against courses; I have been teaching them for over forty years. But I always thought a major function of a professional conference was to share ideas, and to have a keynote speaker who frames the issues and sparks us on to greater efforts. Well, at least that's what it used to be like, but not so this time around. Maybe next year.

In all fairness to the California and national NASW News editors, there may not be all that much news for social workers to get excited about. Let's see.... In California how about the lack of Foster Homes for kids? Old hat (or cap).... Financial misconduct by agencies that are supposed to be overseeing Foster Care Homes, but used the money for cars and trips to the tropics?...Too legal for us to understand the nuances. Thirty percent of children in California in poverty? So what's new?...Unemployment rate in California of 6.7%? Could be worse.... Increased tuition of 30% for state college students; closing Junior college programs.... The educators should deal with that. There was a major push for "title protection." A good idea which I would support if social workers would agree not to call themselves therapists.

Okay, so there aren't issues for us to deal with in California, how about the national picture?

Let's see...the homeless? That's a problem for HUD.... Cuts in education? None of the programs work anyway.... What about attacks on Head Start? Fuzzy research, and the states could do it better.... Many states revealing deaths and abuse in Foster Care? Well, the *N.Y. Times* covers that stuff, what could we add? Maybe there just aren't any problems left for us to be informed about and organized to help change.

But let's get back to the real problem: the ads issues. NASW has joined the CE business. Is it a service we need, or is it a fundraiser? I appreciate their book publishing business, because it can fill the gaps that other publishers might avoid. But are they better teachers than some of their competitors? Are they more sensitive to how people learn? What is NASW's expertise? Just what should they be selling? Now there is an interesting question (I think). Someone else might ask where is the money going? Have we done more "good" with it?

At this point you might suggest that I just ignore reading the ad pages. Well, I want my money's worth. I paid for 20 pages and I want 20 pages, and besides, just in case you don't read the NASW news, it isn't that there isn't anything to be learned by looking at the ads. I must admit I learned a lot. For example, a lot of social work practice is related to body parts. I can earn CEUs by studying practice on the whole person, eye movements, the palm, the heart, the balanced brain (I am not sure where to fit in the soul).

Social workers can broaden their horizons as well as their multicultural understanding through travel. I can earn CEU's by going to Cape Cod, taking a sea voyage, a trip to Hawaii, or Alaska. One might assume that the return trip would provide the social workers in Hawaii and Alaska for credits for courses in California. Makes sense to me. If you get sea sick, or need to recover at home from burnout or overcome stress you can get credits while watching TV or reading a journal article. One ad shows a person lying in a hammock listening to a tape for his CEU's. Now that's for me. Oh, by the way,

would you hand me my "True Social Work" comics?

Makes sense to me.

(For the sake of fairness I have asked Chauncey to comment on the above).

Chauncey Alexander

Paul Abels has a great ability to analyze problems and issues in social work policies. We "Old Timers" are conditioned to habitually examine those social work programs for their utility and "talk about social justice at the drop of a hat."

However, when Paul enunciated his "ads versus news" theory for the *NASW News*, it set off the four-alarm fire signal in my head. As the NASW Executive Director for about 13 years, I knew the financial and copy problems that the news staff wrestled with regularly and admired their commitment to professionalism standards and to the NASW members. I was also used to the content analysis techniques of the newspaper industry.

To be certain, I checked the June and July issues of the *NASW News*. Paul was correct for his general position. The June issue had 11 out of 20 pages that we would label as "news," the rest being ads. But nine out of that eleven I would label as "community organization" or "political".

The July issue had 9 out of 20 pages of "news" that Paul had differentiated from "ads". But eight out of those nine pages were write-ups of community organization or political news. Consequently, I was correct in recognizing the news articles, after a finer analysis of them, as being related to the business of the Association: community organization, political action, professional and public education.

Hooray! I hope we cleared up that difference! Oh, yes, there is another worthwhile clarification. The content of the *NASW News* is also related to the time of the year of publication. Paul's examples are taken during the time of the annual Fair; educational events were paramount in that month. A more equitable analysis could be gained by study of a year's publications.

Let's get back to the ad business, as Paul says. Obviously, ads are serving a purpose by making special areas of knowledge available to practitioners. They don't compete with the action components of the profession. Ads are part of the professional education responsibility of the profession: to make known the availability of necessary knowledge. And they have the advantage, if done properly, of convincing the practitioner of the importance and necessity for professional action.

With the Bush administration in control, it's easy to pick an issue that needs attention. He is cleverly pushing programs of the right-wing, global corporation, and anti-poor, health, environmental, organizations. So, the problem is not the "ads versus the news." Give us more news, which has as its purpose defending our organization against the anti-social, anti-welfare, anti-civil liberties programs now underway. Give us more pages!!!

That makes sense to me.

SUBSCRIBE TO REFLECTIONS:

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Read articles by leaders in the social work field as well as other helping professions. Published quarterly.

$40 per year or 2 years for $60*

Name _____

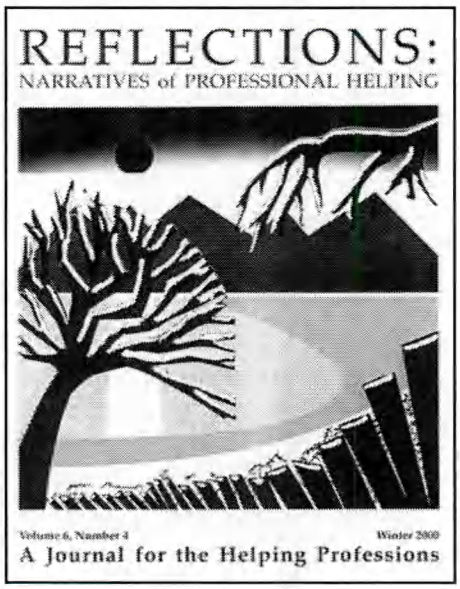
Address _____

_____

Phone Number _____

Check or Money Order enclosed

Credit Card Number & Expiration date _____



Make checks payable to REFLECTIONS

Mail to:

REFLECTIONS
CSULB Dept. of Social Work
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90840

*Individual subscriptions within the U.S.: $40 per year. Libraries and institutions: $65 per year. Outside the U.S.: Add $15.

REFLECTIONS

NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING

Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping (ISSN 1080-0220) is published quarterly by the University Press at California State University, Long Beach under the auspices of the Department of Social Work. Annual Subscription Rate: individuals, $40.00; libraries and institutions, $65.00; outside USA, add $15.00. Single copies: $10.00. Payment: check, money order, or credit card (Visa or MasterCard, please include number and expiration date). Please send to **REFLECTIONS: CSULB; 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840-0902.** We remind subscribers to please immediately notify Reflections of address changes, providing both new and old addresses. Please allow six weeks for address changes to take effect.

The purpose of ***Reflections*** is to publish narratives, personal accounts that describe and explain the process of helping others and shaping social change over time. The journal seeks to build a literary tradition for critical study. It encourages stories that convey a sense of immediacy, portray practice across diverse populations and capture the range and variety of strategies and systems within the helping professions. The journal publishes stories of professional helpers such as ethicists, psychotherapists, community organizers, case and group workers, policy makers, family and child practitioners, health and mental healthcare providers; educators, researchers, and administrators in the helping professions. Historical and contemporary narratives are encouraged.

Narratives should give readers a fresh perspective about the practice of change. Narratives explain and describe events, results, conflicts, complicating actions, and how, why, and what was done. In narratives, the writer evaluates the experience, whether or not there is a resolution, and explores the meaning of the experience. Some narratives end with a coda; a perspective on what occurred.

Writing Instructions and Submission: Manuscripts are peer reviewed. Articles appropriate to the journal's purpose are reviewed anonymously by members of the Executive and Editorial Boards. Publication decisions require about two to four months. All articles are copyedited before publication.

1. Authors are expected to use APA format.
2. The manuscript length depends upon the temporal sequence of the event.
3. Include, on a separate page, a brief abstract (no more than five lines) written in the same style as the narrative.
4. Place identifying information such as name, affiliation(s), title(s), address, and phone/fax numbers **only on cover page.**
5. Send three (3) printed, double spaced hard copies of the manuscript, **set in 12 point Times New Roman** to the editor.

Upon Acceptance of the article for publication, please supply your manuscript in rich text format (RTF) on a 3.5" Windows or MS-DOS floppy disk along with one additional hard copy.

Names of persons and organizations mentioned in the articles published in Reflections have been changed to protect their privacy. *Reflections* disclaims responsibility for statements, either fact or opinion, made by contributors.

REFLECTIONS: Narratives of Professional Helping
California State University Long Beach
Department of Social Work
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90840-0902
(562) 985-4626
http://www.csulb.edu/depts/socialwk/reflections

PRINTED QUARTERLY BY **THE CSULB UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Periodicals postage paid at Long Beach, CA.

Reflections: NARRATIVES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH
Department of Social Work - 111194
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, California 90840-0902

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED