

A Solidarity Approach: The Rhizome & Messy Inquiry

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Introduction

A Solidarity Approach aims to hold all of the inquiry process to the ethics and practices of activist solidarity and in line with an ethic of justice-doing (Reynolds 2010a, 2011a). This writing illuminates this inquiry process which was created for my PhD dissertation. The approach calls on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome (2008) to describe the networked communities (Lacey 2005a) in which my activism and paid work occur. This writing begins with describing my work supervising and training community workers and therapists who work within contexts of social injustice alongside people who are marginalized and oppressed. Next, a description of the interconnectedness of these communities and the usefulness of the concept of the rhizome in activism, community work and a Solidarity Approach to inquiry is offered. A hopeful scepticism around inquiry and writing is made public, and I will show how these concerns were addressed. Some of the work from Clarke (2005), Lather (1993, 2010), and Law (2004) that supports this engagement with a messy inquiry, an ethic of justice-doing and a Solidarity Approach will be discussed. Some strategies for the Solidarity Approach are outlined and I illuminate an Expansive Inquiry in which my work and ethical stance are placed at the centre of the inquiry in order to resist replicating appropriation or exploitation of oppressed people and workers. This work is then re-situated back into the rhizome, where there are possibilities of expansiveness and de-centering my work which, while useful, is only a connected filament that is profoundly co-created, inter-dependent and may be the stuff that foments other useful work.

The context: Supervising community workers struggling in the margins

The context of this inquiry is centered in my work as a clinical supervisor and consultant with community workers and therapists working in the margins of society with oppressed people, many of whom are exploited, racialized¹ and colonized. We are responding to human suffering, which

is loosely talked about in medicalized ways as trauma or addiction. The context of our work is the realm of human suffering, which exists because people's human rights are not respected and because we have constructed an unjust society. I have supervised a center for survivors of torture (Reynolds 2010b) and supervise a rape crisis center, addictions teams and housing and shelter workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which is the poorest off reserve area in Canada. This work occurred alongside queer, Two Spirit, gender variant and transgender workers², and direct action activists addressing a multiplicity of oppressions. All of these workers, activists and clients have profoundly contributed to this work.

A Supervision of Solidarity (2010c), which is how I describe my work, encompasses an ethical stance for *justice-doing* which is a response to the suffering, indignity, and violations of social justice that is the context of much of this community work.

Dire need compelled me to create practices that can be of use to the workers I supervise. Teachings from activist cultures have informed me on this path alongside community workers and clients, and my engagement with these ideas has proven useful on the ground. At times I have felt an affinity with Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's character who states, "I can't go on: I'll go on"(1958, p.178). The absurdities faced by workers and clients within contexts of poverty and dislocation amidst great affluence and political apathy are often reminiscent of Beckett's austere and surreal landscapes. Despite not knowing what I was going on to, I found that something I dare to call a faith in solidarity helped me to go on.

Being of use has required immediate responses. This could not wait for better training, the arrival of the right teacher, or finding the right book. Taking what I have learned from activist cultures, from progressive therapeutics trainings (Waldegrave & Tamasese 1993; Anderson 1997; Sanders 1997; Bird 2000; White 2007; Madigan 2011) and from my family and culture, I responded to need with action. A teaching from American anarchist theorist Noam Chomsky informs this work:

"Social action cannot await a firmly established theory of man [sic] and society, nor can the validity of the latter be determined by our hopes and moral judgments. The two – speculation and action – must progress as best they can, looking forward to the day when theoretical inquiry will provide a firm guide to the unending, often grim, but never hopeless struggle for freedom and social justice" (2005, p.116).

Counsellors, shelter workers, and other community workers who had participated in a Supervision of Solidarity (Reynolds 2010b, 2011b) let me know that they found the solidarity practices useful and in line with fostering sustainability and addressing the spiritual pain they experience when they are forced to work in ways that are not in line with their ethics (Reynolds 2009).

A hopeful scepticism

Norwegian qualitative researcher Steinar Kvale's "hermeneutics of suspicion"³ has proven a useful practice for me in articulating and making public my ethical concerns with research, inquiry and publishing. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation which resists authoritative truths, and engages with multiple meanings from different voices. This hopeful scepticism requires that theorists' claims are held in abeyance until the practice can be shown to reveal the theory. With this phrase Kvale invites us to take a critical distance from the claims we make, and invites a hopeful yet sceptical position, open to the possibility that our practices may reveal something other than our intentions.

Histories of appropriation have made me sceptical about researching or writing anything informed by activism. I do not want to exploit clients or workers by writing exotic tales of torture and dramatic pain. I am also cautious about claiming knowledge that has been created by unnamed collectives of activists and putting my name to it. Work with survivors of torture and political violence taught me that engaging in research and publishing is not a neutral activity. Research on therapeutic work with survivors of torture has been studied at places such as the School of the Americas, where torturers are trained (School of the Americas Watch, 2009).⁴ I have been careful in selecting what will be revealed and what might be risky in all of my writing, trainings and teachings. I remain aware I am not the one at risk.

Maori researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, offers this caution on the legacy of research for colonized people:

" 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary...It stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful...The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity" (1999, p.1).

American Black critical pedagogy educator bell hooks writes about the risk of activists' work and knowledge being appropriated and subsumed by people working from academic frameworks, particularly in relation to early writings from feminist communities (2000). Publishing was a useful tactic to get feminist perspectives legitimized specifically in academic discourses. However, this knowledge became the property of academics and was distanced from the activist communities which developed it. According to hooks, feminist activists became less relevant and were not seen as qualified to speak of feminism when these feminist discourses were finally legitimized by academic institutions.

When I began my PhD I recognized and was attuned to these risks. At the same time, I was encouraged by many practitioner and trainer colleagues to make public the ethical positioning I had relied on as I developed some useful practices. As an activist I am always striving to change the social context in *just* directions. Making an offering to knowledge in an academic context is part of a diversity of tactics that aims to promote *just* social changes. I felt compelled and in some small and humble way collectively accountable to bring this work to a wider audience.

bell hooks evokes a spirited solidarity when she writes:

"I came to theory because I was hurting— the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then, a location for healing" (1994, p.59).

Imelda McCarthy (2001) from Ireland's Fifth Province team writes of the necessity to make public the privatized pain of clients that individualized practices, such as individual therapy, can contribute to. McCarthy describes how "public problems become private and privatized issues" in therapeutic practice:

"It is crucial that the private issues of clients need to be entered into the public arena if social change is to occur. This publication does not refer to the specific details of confidential material but of the themes and trends... The private and the public cannot be separated when one works with the poor; otherwise we are in danger of creating yet another arena for their silencing and further oppression" (2001, pp.271-272).

hooks and McCarthy's invitation to make public the privatization of suffering has accompanied me and encouraged me to engage with

making my work more public, with an aim to contribute in some way to the social change McCarthy envisions.

Bridging the worlds of activism and academia is at the heart of my work. Theorizing is not a neutral practice. I believe that theorizing holds the promise of *justice-doing* and that liberatory theorizing can engender liberatory practices. I have approached theory with an intention of excavating histories of both acts of resistance, and of acts of justice. Theorizing has been useful in my activist work by drawing links across differences, and making public acts of power that are often obscured in the mystification of media, and what passes for normal: the way things are. Theorizing informed by liberatory intentions can open up possibility: the way things might be. In this work I borrow on the hope of bell hooks, who believes in the possibility that theory can be liberatory in social justice work (1984).

The rhizome

Activists' understandings of the rhizome are informed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). They use the rhizome to describe horizontally linked, non-hierarchical forms of social organization, thought, and communication. In botany, a rhizome is a horizontal plant stem, which exists underground, and from which the shoots and roots of new plants can be produced. Growing horizontally underground, rhizomes are able to survive extreme weather. The rhizome has been picked up in activists' cultures for its usefulness in dismantling hierarchy and power structures, while inviting a form that is more organic, responsive, co-creative and alive (Smith 2010, 2011). New Zealand/Aotearoa narrative therapist John Winslade has investigated the usefulness of Deleuze's work in narrative therapy and conflict resolution (2009). Activist/scholar Anita Lacey illuminates the work of networked communities (2005a) and offers rich accounts of the multiple ways that the rhizome has informed activist networks and movements, including the riot girrrl network and the Anarchist Teapot Collective in London. The spirit of the rhizome is illustrated beautifully by Canadian anarchist and liberatory educator Scott Uzelman:

"Running bamboo often gives rise to unwitting bamboo gardeners. A single innocent shoot can stand alone for several years and then suddenly an entire field of bamboo begins to sprout. This leaves the unsuspecting gardener with a new bamboo garden that stubbornly resists attempts to get rid of it. While on the surface each shoot

appears to be an individual, related but separate from its neighbors, underground all are connected through a complex network of root-like stems and filaments called a rhizome. During the years the gardener watched a single bamboo shoot grow tall, underground the bamboo rhizome grew horizontally, spreading throughout the yard, storing nutrients in anticipation of a coming spring. Like the bamboo garden, social movements are often rhizomic organisms growing horizontally into new terrains, establishing connections just below the surface of every day life, eventually bursting forth in unpredictable ways” (Uzelman 2005, p. 17).



A Solidarity Approach

As an activist working and living in the rhizome of interconnected communities striving towards social justice I wanted to approach inquiry in line with my ethics of solidarity and justice-doing. Solidarity speaks to our hopes and practices that move us towards our collective liberation, and the belief that our paths towards something *just*, are woven together.

The ethics of solidarity require that I do not replicate exploitation or abuses of power in my work or the inquiry of it. Solidarity requires that I begin all of my work from a decolonizing place, trying to hold

myself accountable to my settler privilege on the unceded indigenous territories in which I live and work. I hold a decolonizing and anti-oppression frame for all of my activism and my paid and unpaid work (Dua & Lawrence 2005; Reynolds 2010a; Walia 2012). This requires an intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1995) that takes on oppression on all fronts attending to lines of power and disadvantage. My relationship to solidarity is imperfect, and I embrace an imperfect solidarity as an anti-perfection project (Reynolds 2010d, 2011c). And this makes it possible for me to go on without needing to be perfect, but knowing I can respond to oppression with action and engage accountability to repair imperfect actions.

Metis Response-Based therapist Cathy Richardson created a Metis Methodology for her PhD dissertation (2004), which held her entire process accountable to the cultural practices, traditions and ethics of her Metis culture. After consulting about my fears and concerns, Cathy inspired me when she suggested that what I needed was to create a Solidarity Approach that would help me hold all of my PhD process accountable to the ethics and practices of solidarity from my activist culture.

The engagement with solidarity is recursive, messy, and non-linear in this work. In fact, the same ethics that were the subject of this inquiry informed the inquiry process, the practice and the writing recursively. A Solidarity Approach became my response to the question of how I could hold all of my inquiry accountable to understandings and practices of solidarity that are at the heart of my work and activism.

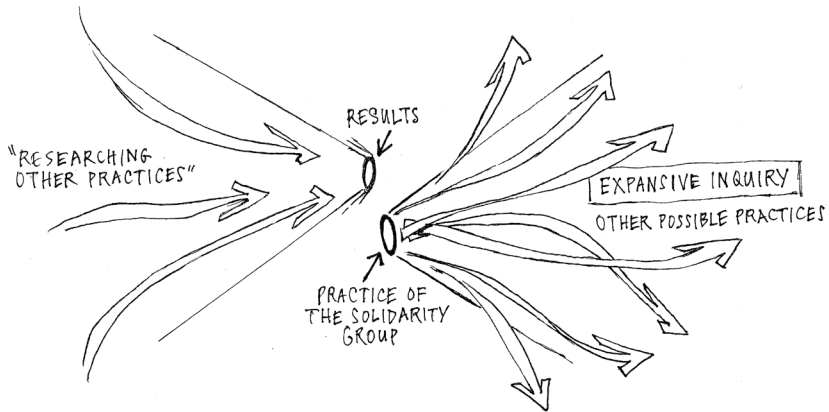
An Expansive Inquiry

Alongside other academic/activists I believe that “Social researchers should always be the most vulnerable – not those being studied or ‘left’ behind once the research is complete” (Fine, 2006, p. 88). Writing myself into the work, and examining my own theory and practice invited enough-accountability for me to engage in line with this ethic. I put the development of my own practice, and my ethical stance for my work forward as the subject of this inquiry. I was encouraged in this direction by my dissertation instructors, Sally St. George and Dan Wulff who speak of research as daily practice, where they encourage practitioners to “examine data from our own clinical work to more richly understand our practices and societal discourses” (2012).

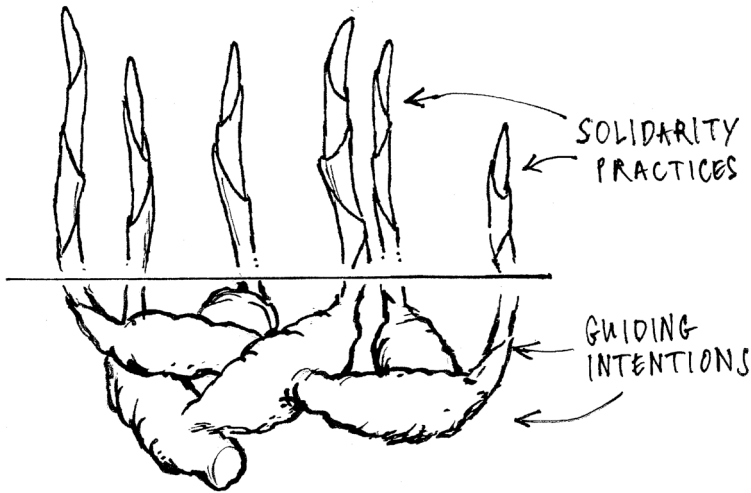
This Solidarity Approach led to an engagement with inquiry rather than research. This is important as inquiry allows for the messy, fluid,

emergent dialogues that I thought would be more generative and useful than categories, evidence or truth. Ken Gergen, an American Social Constructionist, describes collaborative inquiry as a process in which the interests of participants inform the direction of the inquiry (2005).

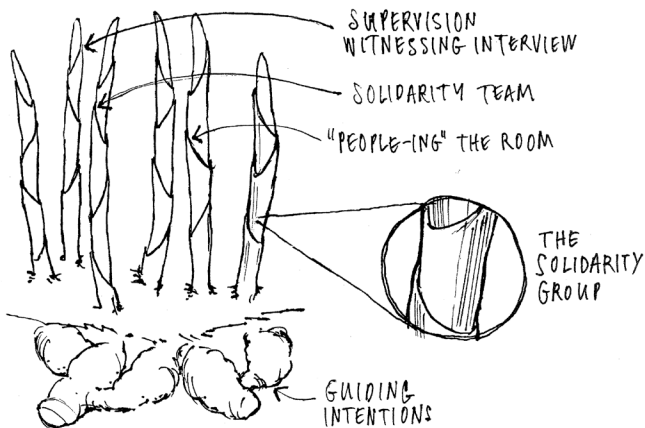
For this project I could have researched the work of other practitioners and evaluated and categorized the results to judge if they were in fact engaging ethics. Instead of researching the work of others and distilling it down to results (or truth), I invited people into my practice. I was not looking to deliver a perfect model of practice, or any manualized tools. What I was interested in articulating was my ethical stance from which generative practices emerged. I did not want to reify any of my practices, such as the Solidarity Group – I used it mainly to invite other workers to explore and co-investigate my ethical stance. My hope was that practitioners would respond by creating their own practices in line with some of our collective ethics for *doing justice*, expanding possibilities outwards from this experience. In consultation, my dissertation advisor Ken Gergen described my process as an Expansive Inquiry, and sketched a picture:



Solidarity Practices describe the practices I have developed as they all follow from a commitment to an ethical stance for justice-doing. The rhizome drawings illustrate that the Solidarity Practices emerge organically from the ethical stance, which is comprised of the Guiding Intentions:



The Solidarity Practices that arise from the Guiding Intentions include Solidarity Groups ⁵, Solidarity Teams, the Witnessing Supervision Interview, and *people-ing the room*, among others (Reynolds, 2011b). The Solidarity Group practice was chosen for use in this inquiry because of the energy, interest and usefulness which the group inspired in the community workers who participated in it.



The reflections and critiques offered by workers participating in Solidarity Groups became the stuff that contributed to articulating and describing the particular Guiding Intentions from which the practices grow.

Messy and fluid inquiry

The pragmatic approach to inquiry of Patti Lather, an American feminist poststructuralist social science researcher prioritizes action/activism. Lather speaks of catalytic validity, and asserts that the value of research should be based on how it can be used, not how it can be measured (1993). As anarchists say, 'talk-action=zero'. My work and activism is informed by anti-colonial struggle, feminist and queer theory and anarchist theory. The threads of this collective and possibly inconsistent theorizing (Newbury 2011) name power, address structural abuses of power and contest the construction of normal. It also requires a complex understanding of power, and acknowledges people's acts of both resistance and solidarity as acts of power (Reynolds 2010b; Wade 1997). I aim to respond to oppression and resistance to make social change in line with a decolonizing and anti-oppressive stance and direct action. I wanted my inquiry to attempt to do the same.

Queer theory has been inspiring for me in this process as it invites fluidity, which is movement from the fixed and certain to the confused and unstable, a privileging of flow and mutability, a refusal to be stable or static, and an ability to morph (Butler 1990; Jagose 1996). Engaging with fluidity helps us to resist constructing dialogues that are sedimented, reified, static, and immutable (McNamee 2008). Fluidity also offers a resistance to definition or explanation.

Working to discern the differences between description, understanding and explanation has been liberatory. Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein writes that, "We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place" (in Shotter 2008, p.13). Explanation is a finite process that claims to state what something truly means. Description, on the other hand, brings people closer to the experience and creates a space for the reader's own perspective. Norwegian therapist, Tom Andersen, critiqued his earlier claims to explanation in an epilogue saying, "If I had written the book today the words explain and explanation would have been replaced by understand and understanding" (Shotter & Katz 1998, p.81; Andersen 1991, p.158). I was not after a rigid stable explanation of my work, but a fluid and useful engagement with it.

Janice DeFehr, a Canadian social construction informed therapist, introduced me to compelling practices of dialogical approaches to inquiry that invite a messy and generative process to emerge (DeFehr 2008, 2007; Lather 2010; Law 2004). This excited me as I wanted to find a way to attend to outliers in my inquiry, reflections that were

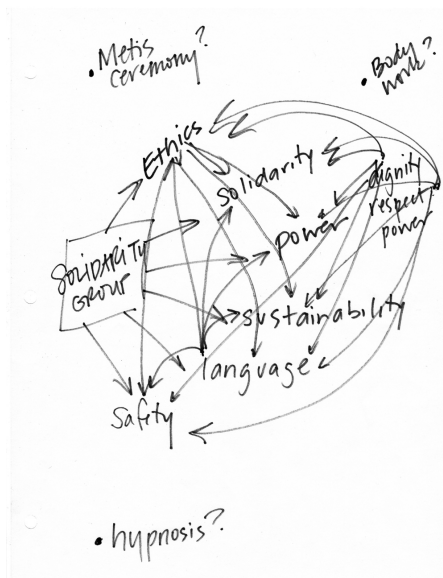
in the margins not the centre, as that is where activists are, as well as many people I know as workers and clients. Imelda McCarthy captured my interest speaking of her Irish informed understanding that “the illumination is in the margins” (personal communication, 1996). McCarthy credits her culture-informed reading of *the Book of Kells* with this teaching (Kearney *et al.* 1989). *The Book of Kells* is a precious copy of the gospels in which the text is surrounded by beautifully painted borders containing elaborate celtic knots. I wanted to amplify teachings from the margins that were evoked in my inquiry.

Outliers can be silenced in research, and I engaged a spirit of solidarity to resist producing normalizing, heteronormative research. I didn’t want to ‘prove’ anything. As Leonard Peltier, a political prisoner and American Indian Movement leader says, “We’re not supposed to be perfect, we’re supposed to be useful” (1999, p.10). I wanted to engage queer and anarchist space, “spaces of justice” (Lacey 2005b), and deliberately forged “spaces of inclusion” (Lacey 2010a). This required resisting the disappearances that result from using mutually exclusive categories. African-American critical race theorist Kimberly Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality problematizes categories as a taken for granted useful way to make meanings of information. Crenshaw contests the creation of separate identity categories such as race and gender, “The categories we consider natural or merely representational are actually socially constructed in a linguistic economy of difference” (1995, p.375). Categories are always influenced by power and always exclude. They can obscure more than they reveal as they silence outliers and dissenting voices, which I was finely attuned to as an activist in the current political climate of the criminalization of dissent.

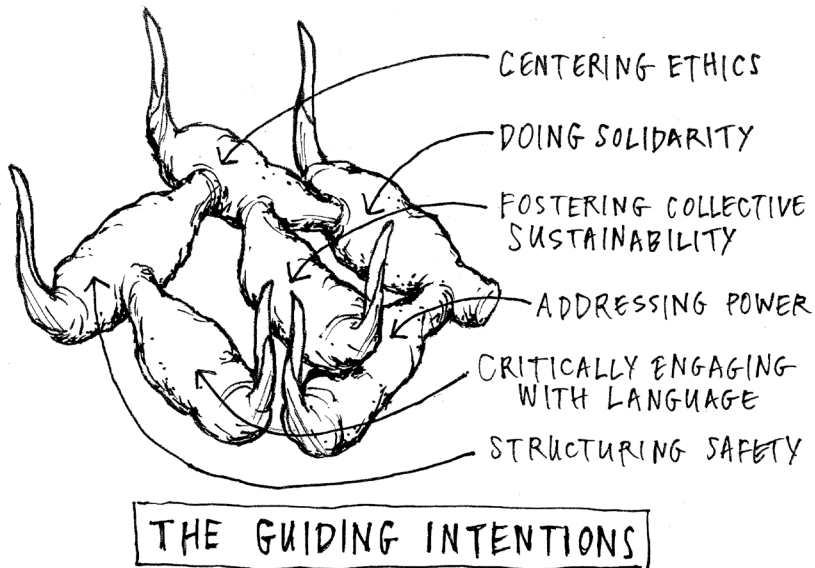
In response to these concerns and intentions for the inquiry process I engaged with Adele Clark’s postmodern response to Grounded Theory, which she calls Situational Analysis (2005). Clark resists analysis that delivers the truth of situations, and employs messy mapping to make space for outliers, complexity and divergent voices. Messy Mapping invites the person doing the inquiry to show up, not disappear, in the decision making process of deciding what will be attended to, what resonates and what is of use. From this lovely mess of responses a more ordered or understandable story of the experience can be told.

Messy inquiry allows for attending to what is of interest and what resonates. Over eighty practitioners who participated with me offered reflections and critiques of their experience from within the practice of Solidarity Groups. These groups were not homogeneous, and varied in the number of workers involved and the context of the work. Some

occurred as part of paid supervision work, others were hosted at conferences, trainings and team days. Questions were offered to evoke responses, but these questions changed in the process as better questions were offered to me, and as some workers responded by writing emails, or phoning, or catching up afterwards for dialogue in person. As well my interest and focus was transported by some of the experiences of the group, and I inquired about different aspects of the work. Engaging with a messy process allowed for continually redirecting the inquiry based on what participants found interesting and what they were paying attention to. I also attended to my own interests, reading, resonating thoughts, and emergent practices. These generative responses informed both the doing of the Solidarity Group and the attempts to describe the Guiding Intentions that grounded it.

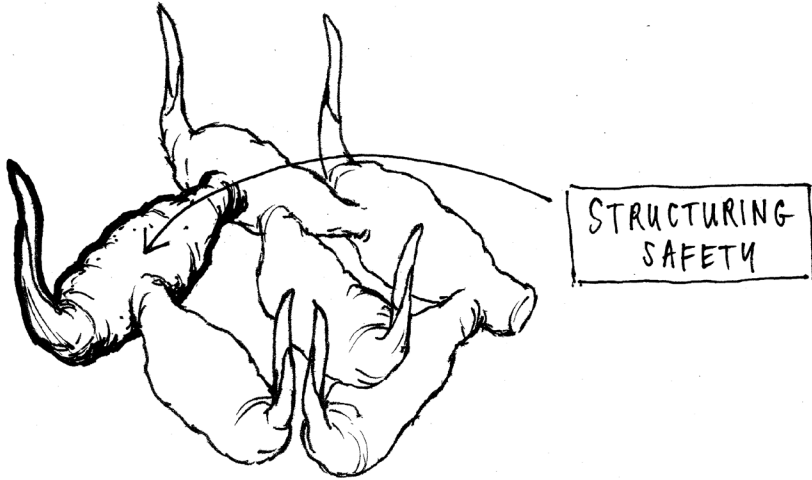


The diagram above is a skeletal retelling of the messy map created from practitioners' responses to what they thought were the ethical underpinnings of my practice and our collective experiences in the Solidarity Groups. Using this messy map, I discerned six Guiding Intentions. Committing these Guiding Intentions to writing required that I order them in some way. Despite using letters instead of numbers I couldn't get outside of rank ordering in the writing. To destabilize the notion that these Guiding Intentions exist in a hierarchy I used Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome to illustrate them, allowing for more fluidity and mess.



Like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions were rough around the edges, disorderly, not of equal size, and resisted mathematical precision. They defied mutually exclusive categories, and grew into and out of each other. The Guiding Intentions that emerged in the inquiry were: centering ethics, doing solidarity, fostering collective sustainability, addressing power, critically engaging with language, and structuring safety. (See Appendix 1 for a description of the Guiding Intentions. For a rich description there is a chapter on each Guiding Intention in the dissertation [Reynolds 2010a] *Doing justice as a path to sustainability in community work*).

Guiding Intentions coexist in relationship with each other, much as the filaments of a rhizome. They are linked, overlapping, living, and fluid. For example, all of the Guiding Intentions are inextricably linked with Structuring Safety, and yet Structuring Safety is itself considered a Guiding Intention. Taking one Guiding Intention out of the rhizome for investigation is required, but artificial, as they exist relationally, and need to be re-connected in the rhizome, with the other Guiding Intentions in order to be useful, much as an ethical stance requires intersectionality, solidarity, and is immensely inter-dependent.



The writing of this ethical stance and the six chapters which offered rich descriptions of the Guiding Intentions which comprised it can be read in any order. They could have been organized in different ways, as the rhizome can be entered onto at any point and defies a static order. The Guiding Intentions are differentiated under six headings to provide clearer understandings, but there could have been ten headings, or four. These six Guiding Intentions identify the main threads of my ethical stance, and they also flow well into the themes that I follow in practice. For the purposes of clarifying the Guiding Intentions I differentiated them from each other. In practice and in action, however, it is not possible, nor required, to completely separate one Guiding Intention from another.

These Guiding Intentions differed from principles in that they had fluid boundaries and were not mutually exclusive. Guiding Intentions were more slippery to operationalize than a set of principles. Practice is messy, and people do not actually engage with linear principles. The Guiding Intentions were offered as an heuristic, which is a possible way of moving towards a goal (Moustakas 1990). This differs from principles which may comprise an algorithm which is a set of specific steps that will lead to a predetermined and known end.

This ethical stance is not finite or fixed, but always in flux, expanding in width and depth with changes in texture and tone as experience, community workers, and clients inform and transform me, and as we counter influence each other, our communities and our environment. This reflexive process of examining and re-creating my ethical stance

follows critical educator Paulo Freire's teachings of praxis (1970). Action is followed by reflection, which informs actions which are more *just*, which rolls into further reflection, and so it continues. Popular Education teaches that acting without theorizing can be unsafe and ineffective (Fanon 1961; Freire 1970). Without this understanding of theorizing as a reflexive exercise I could replicate oppressive practices, or more simply, use power in unethical ways.

In consultation John Winslade offered this insightful critique of my use of the term 'theory' in the Solidarity Approach, particularly as it denotes a "level of abstraction" when my inquiry is alive and practice-based. He suggests Deleuze's understandings of 'concepts' as a more useful description:

"Deleuze talks in one place about the task of the philosopher as being to generate 'concepts' that people can use (the rhizome is an example) and it seemed to me that this is in part what you are doing. Working to identify from the discourse at the local level expressions that can be treated as useful for doing meaning-making around and doing justice with" (personal communication, 2012).

Strategies for a Solidarity Approach

Many strategies were engaged to promote the spirit of solidarity throughout this inquiry. Some of the most useful ones are outlined here. (They are not rank ordered.)

1. Not researching people who are exploited

The centre of this inquiry was my work, which I invited workers I supervised to critique and reflect upon as an accountability practice.

2. Resist contributing to dead knowledge

It was important that this work matter, that it could possibly make a contribution to social change and that I did not engage with inquiry primarily to earn a higher degree. As Lather says, this work tries to do something, not say something.

3. Frontline worker consultant and reader

An intention of the work was to welcome all workers, including those unfamiliar with social justice language and therapeutic language into the work. To serve this purpose a new community worker, Jaime Wittmack, served as an outside reader and a cultural consultant (Waldegrave &

Tamasese 1993). Jaime read all of the drafts and offered a critique to encourage clear-enough writing, accessibility, and promote the purpose of the writing, which was to engage and invite, not marginalize. This consultation was generative in multiple ways. For example, Jaime encouraged the use of footnotes not merely as references, but to expand the text while keeping it uncluttered. She reflected that extensive references inside the writing distracted her from the ideas, and left her feeling ‘stupid’. Jaime suggested that the people being referenced be introduced, and I took the opportunity to identify their profession and culture to give newer readers some context and possible connection to the knowledge. Jaime taught me to write in ways that honoured and welcomed the workers I was most trying to be of use to.

4. Networked communities of cultural consultants

Cultural consultants from anarchist and activist communities, queer and transgendered communities, as well as refugees and survivors of political violence and torture played an important role in this inquiry. These cultural consultants offered critiques of this writing and my work and analysis with an aim towards more accountability and resisting the appropriation of ideas. The qualification for these consultants was not their academic certification but rather their life experiences and positionings. These generative critiques freed me from being paralyzed by guilt, and helped me resist a false humility that could have silenced what I do know and have done. This inspiring and committed collection of folks served as my Solidarity Team (Reynolds 2011b) for this inquiry.

5. Referencing widely

References are a gift to the reader and, to invite more accountability, I identified my references in terms of their multiple cultural locations. Referencing widely, and attributing cultural knowledges to more than published works, helped historicize the knowledges of communities that could otherwise be disappeared. The history of the ideas and practices is as important to hold in collective memory as the more accessible published accounts of the ideas. This use of extensive referencing invited more history-making from the communities which have informed this work.

6. Resisting appropriation

While my ethical stance was fully my own and I held myself accountable to its claims, I acknowledge that it was co-created in important and meaningful ways. The teachings of the people I worked alongside who are refugees, activists, and survivors of torture and political violence are

central to this stance. It is important to acknowledge the differential price extracted from people from the global south and racialized and minoritized people from the global north. I recognized the generosity which has enabled them to teach me and for me to benefit from their lived experiences. Part of this writing was a testament and witnessing of these ideas, offering an invitation into the rich histories of these ideas and practices in activist cultures and social movements. This stance of accountability, which is a teaching from activism, embodied my resistance to appropriation, which is always a risk for persons and groups holding non-academic and alternative knowledges.

7. Co-writing

This inquiry, like all of my work, was profoundly collaborative, so I worked to make the collaboration public by referencing widely, inviting reflections and co-authors, and weaving my relationships with real people into the scholarship, honourings and acknowledgments. Co-writing some of these stories helped bring the ideas from the academic realm into practice. Negotiating permission for this storytelling required slowing down the process and extensive back-and-forth dialogue. As part of this co-writing I engaged with real-time storytelling in hopes of offering a retelling that was close to the experience. This also allowed a person's own voice to carry their wisdom, as opposed to me interpreting and possibly appropriating their knowledge. I was invited into real-time storytelling by Arden Henley (1994, 1992), who credited the idea to the work of David Epstein (1989) and most particularly David's inspiring story of *Dory the Cat*.

8. Public domain and free access

Because this inquiry was so profoundly collaborative the book is available for free download. Other writers have registered their work as Copyleft. Anyone can use it, morph it, and copy it, as long as they don't capitalize on it – sell it. In this sense it, like much activist collective wisdom, becomes part of the commons we hold collectively.

9. Engaging inconsistently with anonymity

In order to fully credit and name people's contributions and not subsume their ideas into my voice I resisted ideas of total confidentiality. The mixed approach to confidentiality was not smooth, and I reluctantly participated in the marginalizing of some communities by perpetrating the use of pseudonyms. The aim in doing this was to avoid putting workers at risk for sharing their knowledges. For example, in relating

the story of Tina, who identified herself as an Aboriginal transgendered woman, I had the choice to steal her voice, silence it, or participate in making her knowledge sharing *safe-enough* by using a pseudonym. I have not resolved my ethical struggle and discomfort in relation to Tina, and my response to this is to work towards justice alongside other allies so that in a possible future she may use her own name and experience that as a *safe-enough* thing to do. A consistent use of confidentiality would smooth over this discomfort, but would also mask important differences in access to power that were made public by this messy and inconsistent use of pseudonyms and names.

10. *Liberatory language practices*

An important solidarity strategy was to commit to using language in ways that resisted the social construction of pathologizing and marginalizing identities. The possibilities created by language practices that assist people in being seen in ways they experience as liberatory inspired me. With this in mind I invited people participating in this inquiry to self-identify their gender, culture and orientations.

American queer theorist Judith Butler problematizes the binary of gender, man/woman, especially as it denies queer identities and alternative possible spaces (1990). I used androgynous language constructions such as ‘them’, ‘they’, ‘our’, and ‘this person’. My purpose was for people to self-identify, or choose not to identify their gender. Some participants who self-identify as differently gendered people struggle to live and be seen outside of the binary of man/woman. The point is not to use inclusive and space-making language only when speaking of people who exist outside of the gender binary, but to use it everywhere to expand possibility for everyone’s preferred and liberatory identities.⁶

11. *Making discomfort and fear public*

The ethical tensions experienced in the inquiry process were not smoothed over, but made public. This was of course flawed because my awareness and analysis is imperfect. Part of the aim was to invite more critique and generative engagement with the ethical struggles the inquiry engendered.

Emerging transformations: Holding onto a fish that is morphing into an octopus.

The reflexivity of this inquiry process has greatly informed my approach to the work and changed the practice itself. The participants engaged

in the Solidarity Group served as witnesses for my work and for the Guiding Intentions that inform my practice. Several practitioners have caught me up on the value of participating in the process, an ethic that Tuhiwai Smith speaks of in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999).

Engaging in this process has contributed to the emergent creation of new practices in my work with community workers. This inquiry has invited generative conversations with colleagues which are unlikely to have occurred without this project. The critiques made by the cultural consultants, and the dialogues these consultations fostered, have been expansive and illuminating. I experience all of these unexpected developments as nourishing support for my own sustainability. My experiences in this inquiry have transformed me in terms of holding a more enriched and useful critical analysis. The experiences of activism and community work recursively transform and counter-inform each other as we bring learnings across domains of practice.

The collective dialogue from inside the practice is breathing new life into the doing of the Solidarity Group. In response to this still-continuing collaborative transformation, I experience writing up this work as akin to holding onto a fish that is morphing into an octopus.

Unsettled fears and discomforts

Inquiry does not exist without risk despite our *just* intentions. In a Solidarity Approach, like all anti-oppression activism, we strategize to hold our work accountable to our collective ethics. As American activist/musician Ani DiFranco says, “Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right” (1993). I believe that the Solidarity Group can be used in harmful ways if it is picked up in a mechanistic or formulaic way divorced from the ethics for justice-doing on which it is rooted. If the ethical stance is read or presented as finished, fixed, correct and righteous it can also be used oppressively.

A lesser fear is that the work could be de-contextualized and de-politicized. Activists have seen this happen to many of our tactics and practices. For example, *Adbusters* magazine was initially a fresh voice of deconstructing capitalism’s hegemonic advertising system (*Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment*). Over time, however, anti-ads became trendy and *Adbusters* finally became an unofficial textbook for advertisers, ultimately becoming a tool of selling (Heath & Potter 2004). The potential for liberatory tactics to be de-politicized or co-opted (Hayden 2008) is not paralyzing for me. As activists we know that our tactics of resistance are anticipated and their effectiveness over time will

be purposefully minimized. In a spirit of solidarity we respond to this with creative ways of being that bring forth our ever emergent resistance and the next liberatory tactic.

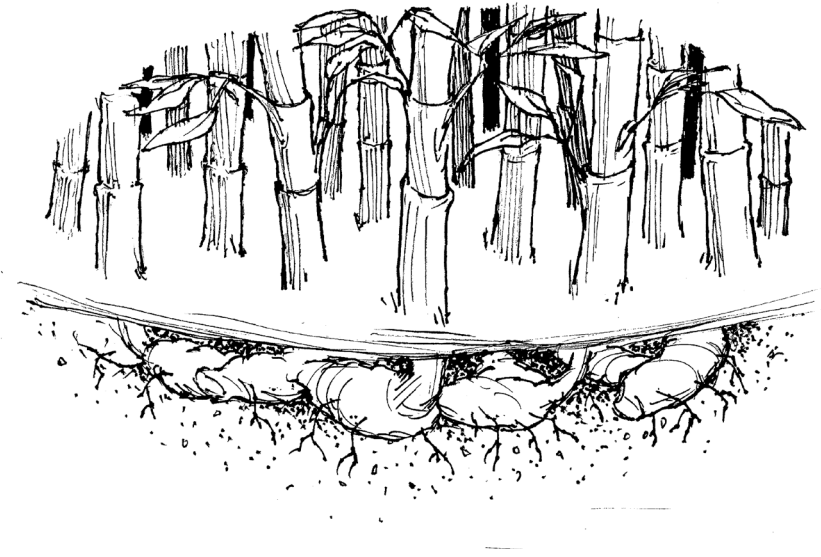
In contrast, the fear of my participation in the appropriation of activist culture is paralyzing. To this end, I have referenced widely, invited, pursued and sought out critique from diverse people who have the moral courage to confront me as a practice of solidarity. This is not based on righteousness, but on my experiences of being the person who has transgressed, and who others have needed allies against (Reynolds 2010d).

This inquiry has occurred at the cost of my engagement with more direct forms of activism in terms of time and resources. I will probably not be able to smooth over my discomfort regarding the elevation of my status and the undeniable privilege that comes with academic qualification. This discomfort is not the same as guilt, as Chomsky invites us to not posture with false modesty, but acknowledge that in a diversity of tactics there are roles some of us accomplish easier and more usefully, and that we are less suited to other pieces of the work. Like many social justice oriented activist/academics I plan to be accountable for this academic privilege.

Re-situating the work back into the rhizome

Part of a Solidarity Approach requires that the work that is held up for consideration be re-situated within the rhizome, returning to the networked communities who fostered it. From here it might decompose and possibly nourish other work, or it could be morphed, changed, or reused.

Here the work settles as a re-connected piece of something far greater, something Lacey describes as contributing to spaces of justice (2005b). It becomes part of, another node of social justice activism and liberatory theorizing: No more and no less.



The value of the ethical stance described in the Guiding Intentions and of the practice of the Solidarity Group lie in how they are used. In bridging decolonizing anti-oppression activism and inquiry my hope is that practitioners will take up this invitation to join in a collaborative inquiry, and contribute multiple and generative responses to the Guiding Intentions and develop new practices. It has been increasingly sustaining for me to hear back from community workers who have taken up this invitation and furthered the diversity of possible practices that share a spirit of solidarity. Like “rhizomic organisms growing horizontally into new terrains, establishing connections just below the surface of every day life, eventually bursting forth in unpredictable ways” (Uzelman 2005, p.17).

Dedication

For Arden Henley, Cathy Richardson and Allan Wade, who encouraged me back to the academy, and continue to feed my hungry hope for liberatory pedagogy that does more than make room for direct action activists, but meets us in the rhizome.

This writing took place on Indigenous land which has never been surrendered.

Acknowledgments

This work is profoundly collaborative, and co-created by diverse fellowships of activists, workers, clients, teachers, colleagues and family who have inspired, critiqued and taught me across time. Thanks to Gail Simon for finding value in my solidarity inquiry, affinity in the rhizome with her ‘underground writing’, and fostering our lovely and imperfect solidarity. My advisors at the TAOS Institute, Ken Gergen and Sallyann Roth allowed room for a Solidarity Approach, without which I could not have completed my academic writing. Other faculty, Sheila McNamee, Sally St. George, Dan Wulff and Imelda McCarthy, were generous with their expertise, time and critique. Fellow students, Christine Dennstedt, Aileen Tierney, Ottar Ness, Janet Newbury and Janice De Fehr continue to shoulder me up in the work, offering excellent and generative critique. Jeff Smith, John Winslade, Sheila McNamee, Mr. Peaslee, and Ken Gergen served as my Solidarity Team for this project. Their solidarity has been more important to me than they can know. Thanks to Marie Hoskins, who invited me to lecture her graduate students at the University of Victoria. The expansive critique which followed contributed to this writing. Finally, my appreciation for the creativity and talent of Kent Peaslee for the diagrams, and Yvonne Hii for layout.

APPENDIX 1 An ethical stance for justice-doing

My ethical stance for *justice-doing* is comprised of six Guiding Intentions:

A. Centering Ethics

The centre of my supervision is our relational ethics and ethical positioning as we respond to clients’ varying needs from within contexts of power. When practitioners cannot act in accord with our ethics we experience spiritual pain. Spiritual pain speaks to the discrepancy between what feels respectful, humane, and generative, and contexts which call on us as community workers to violate the very beliefs that brought us to this field. I centre my inquiry on the ethical stance of the practitioner, our collective ethics, and how these ethics are revealed in practice.

B. Doing Solidarity

My understandings of solidarity are derived from time honoured activist traditions of looking for points of connection and weaving people together. I attend to both practices of resisting oppression and promot-

ing social justice. This spirit of doing solidarity acknowledges that our struggles to promote social justice are interconnected.

C. Addressing Power

Addressing Power speaks to witnessing both resistance and acts of justice-doing. It also invites cultural and collective accountability. Accountability requires a complex analysis, in which the multiplicity of sites of both power and oppression are acknowledged and addressed.

D. Fostering Collective Sustainability

Sustainability refers to aliveness, a spirited presence, and a genuine connectedness with others. It requires more than resisting burnout, more than keeping a desperate hold on hope; and yet it encompasses both of these capacities. We are sustained in the work when we are able to be fully and relationally engaged, stay connected with hope, and experience ourselves as being of use to clients across time. Sustainability is inextricably linked with an alive engagement with a spirit of social justice, and openness to our transformations as practitioners across time.

E. Critically Engaging with Language

Language can be used to serve or resist abuses of power. I hold an overt intention of utilizing language in liberatory ways. Critically engaging with language also acknowledges the dialogue that exists outside of words, and invites languaging the body.

F. Structuring Safety

Co-creating relationships of *enough-safety* outside of the binary of safe and unsafe helps to structure safety (Bird 2000). All conversations across difference are risky, and are of greater risk to some than to others. The possibility of doing harm by replicating some kind of oppression is one potential risk. I am also aware of the limitations of accountability. Social justice is better served by creating contexts in which the transgression is less likely to occur. This requires Structuring Safety (Reynolds 2010c).

Notes

- 1 The terms *minoritized* and *racialized* are used for the purpose of naming the power and intention required in the racist and colonial project of re-constructing the majority of the world's people as a collection of minorities.
- 2 "Queer" has been adopted by groups of people I work with, both workers and clients, who do not identify as strictly heterosexual. Using queer as an

umbrella term to include folks who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, Two Spirit, questioning and queer, is problematic for many reasons (Fassinger & Arsenau, 2007). Primarily people who self-identify as lesbian, for example, may not resonate with queer theory or politics at all, and be subsumed by that term. As well, some folks who do identify as queer mean specific things by it, such as resonating with queer theory in ways that do not align them with gay or lesbian identities, and find using the term queer as an umbrella term mystifies and erases the queer politics and ethics that are at the heart of their preferred ways of identifying (Aaron Munro, personal communication, 2012). People I work alongside who identify as queer may be in any of these groups, but primarily identify outside of heterosexual normativity, which refers to discourses which promote heterosexuality as normal. People who I work alongside who self-identify as Two Spirit refer to their cultural location as Indigenous people who do not identify as heterosexual: Two Spirit refers to rich cultural knowings as well. People who I work alongside who identify as transgender or trans do not identify strictly with the gender they were assigned to at birth, and may transition culturally, socially and/or physically to a gender in which they feel more congruent, which could be something other than male or female (Nataf 1996; Devon McFarlane, personal communication, 2011). Many people do not identify their gender in any way, and others identify as gender variant, gender non-conforming or gender queer, meaning something different than trans and outside of the normative gender binary (Janelle Kelly, personal communication, 2011). All of these terms are problematic, contested and evolving. I am using these terms for clarity and because groups of folks I work alongside have settled on this imperfect phrasing for now (Reynolds 2010b).

- 3 Kvale (1996 p.203) borrows the term “hermeneutics of suspicion” from the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1970). “His hermeneutic is always informed by both a suspicion which makes him wary of any easy assimilation to past meanings and as hope that believes in complete appropriation of meanings while warning ‘not here’, ‘not yet’. Via suspicion and hope, Ricoeur plots a hermeneutic course that avoids both credulity and skepticism” (White 1991, p.12).
- 4 “The School of the Americas... is a controversial U.S. military training facility for Latin American security personnel located at Fort Benning, Georgia, made headlines in 1996 when the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion and execution.” Consult the School of the Americas Watch website for a critique of this military project (School of the Americas Watch, 2009).
- 5 The Solidarity Group is described extensively in my dissertation (2010a) and in an article entitled A Supervision of Solidarity (2010c). The Solidarity Group emphasizes our collective sustainability with a specific aim to build solidarity and an orientation for justice-doing. At the center of the conversation are themes connected to centering ethics, doing solidarity, addressing power, fostering collective sustainability, critically engaging with language, and structuring safety. This is different than organizing therapeutic supervision around specific problems and individual workers. The Solidarity Group is only one component of the necessary supervision of therapists,

with an emphasis on collective sustainability of the therapeutic community and their relational ethics. In the Solidarity Group the supervisor is not the primary resource, this role is played by a community of workers. Although one person is interviewed, the centre is the whole group. In Solidarity Groups the therapeutic community is being supervised collectively. In many ways, it does not matter who is speaking as the entire group is at the center. As the supervisor I look for themes that resonate with the principles of a Supervision of Solidarity. I attend to emergent experiences which hold meaning for the therapeutic community, not necessarily the individual being interviewed. These experiences may be acts of justice, ethical struggles, startling successes, painful losses, or other occurrences which hold meaning collectively. As the supervisor it is my task to ensure that all participants are witnessed in the conversation, and that people are woven together.

- 6 An excellent example of binary busting language is the adoption of the term *pomosexuality* by some members of some queer communities. "Pomosexuality lives in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity reside — a boundary-free zone in which fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can't be fenced in. It challenges either/or categorizations in favour of largely un-mapped possibility and the intense charge that comes from transgression. It acknowledges the pleasure of that transgression, as well as *the need to transgress limits that do not make room for all of us.*" (my emphasis) Queen & Schimel (1997), p.23.

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