DOING JUSTICE AS A PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY IN COMMUNITY WORK

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SUMMARY: *DOING JUSTICE* AS A PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY IN COMMUNITY WORK

I believe that it is possible to stay alive and useful in community work that takes place in contexts of social injustices. Sustaining ourselves in this difficult and sometimes spiritually painful work becomes more possible when we are able to work in accord with our ethics, embrace a spirit of solidarity, and see our collective work as *doing justice*.

In the frame of this writing, I describe the paths that have led me to this work from social justice activism. The clients I have worked alongside have impacted my work, particularly survivors of torture and political violence, and people of the downtown Eastside of Vancouver who are subjected to social injustices and extreme marginalization. I am the supervisor for counsellors, community workers, and practitioners who work in these contexts of social injustice, and it is my task to shoulder them up to be useful for the long haul.

In Part I, I outline my ethical stance for *doing justice*. This stance is comprised of six Guiding Intentions. Centering Ethics helps us put our shared ethics at the center by taking positions against neutrality and for justice. Doing Solidarity means that we see all of our work towards justice as inter-connected and that we act collectively. Naming Power requires identifying injustices and taking positions that address abuses of power. It includes witnessing peoples' resistance to oppression, addressing privilege, and creating practices of accountability. Fostering Collective Sustainability acknowledges that we are meant to do this work together. We resist individualism, and invite collective social responsibility for a *just* society without putting the burden of an unjust society on the backs of individual workers. Critically Engaging with Language acknowledges the power of language, and commitments to using language in liberatory ways. It welcomes the language that occurs outside of words. Structuring Safety creates practices that invite safety into our work, informs us to act as allies where we are privileged, and to honour collaboration.

In Part II, I outline the Solidarity Group practice that I created in response to both the contexts of injustice I worked in, and my longstanding commitment to this ethical stance for *doing justice*. The Solidarity Group promotes collective sustainability by nourishing workers connections with an ethic of doing justice in their work and their lives. It brings forward a spirit of social justice, and invites us to act in solidarity with the aim of creating an experience of community while contesting isolation and individualism. The center of the Solidarity Group is collective. I invite participants into group work that holds the entire group at the center as the resource. The supervisor is not the resource. The dialogue is organized around experiences which may include acts of justice, ethical struggles, startling successes, or painful losses. This is a different emphasis because we do not organize around "cases" or problems of individual workers. Solidarity Groups are inspired by Collaborative and Narrative therapies and are influenced by the innovative history of Reflecting Teams.

In bridging activism and community work my hope is that the ethical stance of *doing justice* can make a contribution to our collective sustainability. As with clients, we do not want to be merely survivors of this

complex work. We want to be of use, acting in accord with the ethics to which we are committed and fully alive across time.

For

David Walton

1959 -2005

Whose integrity, unapologetic-earnestness, and ethical ways of being continue to humble and inspire.

And whose solidarity accompanies me on many paths to liberation, and in this writing.

I have worked alongside survivors of torture and political violence and community workers in New Zealand, Australia, Dharamsala (India), Chile, and Canada. In Botswana, Africa, I worked and lived with political refugees. These good people are the heart of this work.

Doing Justice as a Path to Sustainability in Community Work

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THE FRAME
i. Introduction

This writing illustrates a particular ethical positioning for *doing justice* in community work, one that is informed by a philosophy of solidarity and social justice activism. I am interested in the challenges in supervising community workers who work alongside clients who are subjected to social injustice and extreme marginalization. How can we support community workers in doing this difficult work in the margins in ways that are in accord with our collective ethics for social justice? How can we experience sustainability and transformation collectively across time?

I offer a hope-filled response to these questions. First I describe my path to this work and this particular ethical stance and its connection to the context of the clients and community workers I work alongside as a frame for the work. Then I elucidate my ethical stance for *doing justice* in community work. This ethical positioning is illuminated through a group of Guiding Intentions which are the scaffolding of all of my efforts to sustain community workers. The development of this particular ethical positioning for *doing justice* is a part of my response to the suffering, indignity, and violations of social justice that is the context of much of the community work I am involved in. The Guiding Intentions include: Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Addressing Power, Critically Engaging with Language, and Structuring Safety.

To illustrate the Guiding Intentions in action I will describe the specific practice of the Solidarity Group. This practice follows from a commitment to the Guiding Intentions.

My aim in this writing is not to offer a static model, nor a set of tools, but rather an ethical stance that can be acted upon differently to suit particular contexts. I hope that practitioners will engage with the ethical stance for *doing justice* described in the Guiding Intentions and create or re-create practices that fit the needs of the communities in which they work.

ii. "Here We Are, Amazingly Alive, Against Long Odds"[1]

In the early nineties I was giving a speech in Washington State on behalf of Amnesty International. We were protesting an execution. The original agenda was for me to educate activists around international issues regarding the death penalty and to speak of global moves towards its abolition, which is the direction of the planet, if not the United States. To the surprise of the organizers, the audience consisted primarily of elders. Some of these folks had been part of resisting the execution of the Rosenbergs in the 1950s. I put my agenda aside and invited the elders into a conversation. Instead of delivering the speech I had intended, I proceeded to interview them around their history of resistance against the death penalty in particular, and in promoting human rights in general. I was moved by their ability to sustain themselves collectively over time. It seemed arrogant for me to presume that I had anything more useful

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[1] This title is borrowed from a poem, *Amazingly Alive*, by Bud Osborn (1999), pp. 7.

to say in the context of this community of elders who held much of the wisdom of a social justice movement. As Steve Earle sings, they were "still willin' ".[2]

Naïvely, I asked them how they could still be there because they hadn't won anything. An old wizened gentleman looked at me and said, "Who told you we didn't win anything? We have won tons of things". His speaking invited me into a faith in change, and a more expansive vision of what change could be. All of my activist life I had been told that we were up against unbeatable foes. These claims fell to the floor as I realized that my involvement in human rights movements came from my desire to do the right thing, but not from a solid belief that things really could be different. I had a sinking feeling that my principles alone would not sustain me as an activist over the long haul. In that moment I realized that I needed to change my ideas about what it meant "to be of use",[3] and that I needed a community. These elders were not there because of naïveté or boredom, or because they lacked a life. Their continual presence within this struggle was grounded in their connections with each other, their experience of the usefulness of their resistance, and by the many small successes that would not have been noticed or celebrated without their finely tuned attention. I held on dearly to the spirit of these elders, and became fascinated by the practices of *doing justice* while collectively fostering sustainability.

Through all the years of my involvement in community work and counselling, the spirit of this community of elders has accompanied me. I still borrow on their hope, as I visualize being effective, *doing justice*, and staying alive in the work well into my nineties. At the heart of my work is my desire to bridge the worlds of community work and activism. I identify myself as political, but of course all helpers are political because we deal in relationships of power. I have never been neutral about torture, violence or poverty. I know that identifying as neutral is a political act.

At times our work as community workers can replicate the kinds of dominance we hope to alleviate; accommodating people to lives of poverty, and participating in practices that can serve as social control. Some workers sign on to cynicism; throwing up their hands at institutions and bureaucracy instead of rolling up their sleeves and working to change policy; and maligning other workers and programs, like dogs under the table fighting over the bones. As an activist, all of these tactics were familiar to me, and disheartening.

As I taught and trained other workers they recounted experiences of being "whittled away", exposed, and judged in some case consultations where expert talk de-humanized clients and mechanized their work. Counsellors have told me that showing vulnerability and asking questions has sometimes been met with negative judgments. Conversely, many community workers and counsellors work in extreme isolation, and have no one following their work closely, accompanying them and inviting a welcome accountability, although case notes and paperwork are tracked. Particularly discomforting to me were invitations and expectations that I would speak as an expert on other people's lives. This expectation was painful to me

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[2] Steve Earle, an activist folk singer, covers this Little Feat song (Lowell, 1971).

[3] This phrase is taken from the title of a poem by Marge Piercy (1982, pp. 106). This poem resonates with many activists, and it is often quoted and referred to, particularly in feminist movements.

because it amplified my power and voice at the cost of the people I had hoped to serve. My work has been elevated, and my reputation esteemed at times, mainly because the people I have worked with endured suffering such as torture.

Our community and counselling work is often a frontline response to acts of violence, abuses of power, and other acts of oppression that clients struggle against; it is part of our collective resistance to an unjust world. Despite the fact that our work is not innocent, or fair, I began to puzzle over what *just practice* could look like in a society which is more just to some than to others. I began to wonder what could promote our collective sustainability as community workers.

Most workers have told me they expect to experience burnout from working in the margins at some point in this work. I believe that what gets called burnout says more about our society collectively than it says about us as workers individually. The problem is not in our heads or in ourselves; it is in the real world where there is a lack of justice. The people I work alongside don't burn me out and they don't hurt me: they transform me, challenge me and inspire me. We're not burning out, we're resisting being blown up! What is threatening to blow me up is the inability to work in line with my ethics. It is also my frustrating failure to personally change social contexts of injustice that people wrestle with and live in.

The practices I have developed and write about here follow from my commitments to develop work that can sustain community workers by increasing their sense of collectivity as they work to do justice with people in the margins of our society. My best resources for dealing with despair, hopelessness, and what gets called burnout derive from activist cultures. I believe that this work is profoundly collaborative: We do this work on the shoulders of others and we shoulder others up. I love Bud Osborn's description of this joint action[4] in a dedication, "Since no human being accomplishes anything alone, I dedicate this collection of poems to the many people who literally kept me alive through the years when I had lost all caring for myself. In a very profound sense, this book is a collaboration".[5] Borrowing from my community of activist elders I envision our collective work as both doable and sustainable.

My hope is to foster a knowing-in-the-bones that our work matters, because too often it is left to us as workers to witness each other. In this difficult work we can be connected with each other across differences despite being on separate paths. We can go on somehow, fortified by knowing that others are moving in similar directions with shared hopes that we are "establishing connections just below the surface of every day life, eventually bursting forth in unpredictable ways".[6] Activism, and my community of elders, teach me that ongoing commitments and engagement with ethics can sustain us collectively across a lifespan of *doing justice*.

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[4] Shotter (1993a, 1984)

[5] Osborn (1999)

[6] Uzleman (2005), pp. 17.

iii. The Frame: The Clients, the Community Workers, the Supervisor, a Supervision of Solidarity

The Clients

All of the clients that I have worked with have informed and transformed me, my relationship to my work, and the work itself. I am going to speak here of two groups of clients who have been most influential in the development of the ideas and practices of this writing; survivors of torture and political violence, and the people of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

Survivors of Torture and Political Violence

The teachers who have had the greatest impact in my work have been refugees who have survived torture and political violence. [7] (I prefer the word victim to survivor, for reasons of linguistic clarity regarding responsibility for violence. I use the word survivor because that term is used by many to self identify). While I do not think it is useful to compare hierarchies of traumatic pain, I have been informed and transformed in my work alongside survivors of torture and political violence whose experiences of isolation, deprivation, lack of safety and access to dignity are extreme. It is, however, not the oppression which has transformed me, but witnessing the acts of resistance. My work alongside survivors has drawn me towards a profound faith in change. At great cost to themselves, and to my benefit, survivors of torture and political violence have also taught me to hold tenaciously to a faith in hope.

> Davoud is facing a refugee hearing that will determine whether he can remain in Canada, or will be forcibly returned to Iran, where he was tortured for eight years in prison, and survived the executions of his comrades. His lawyer thinks a letter from a counsellor will help him to prove that he has a mental illness, which would strengthen the argument that he was actually subjected to political violence. That is if the marks on his body are not enough, but his lawyer tells him they haven't been for other claimants. Therapy does not make sense politically to Davoud, a committed Marxist, and he is adamant in conversations with himself that he is not mentally ill. His trouble, he believes, is not "in" him, but in the political acts of violence perpetrated against him. In fact Davoud's profound resistance to losing his mind under torture is what keeps his picture of who he believes himself to be intact. In moments of torment, when his fear for his family still in Iran is paralyzing, remembering his own small acts of resistance opens space for him to hope. One of

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[7] The United Nations convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment describes torture as any act by which severe pain is intentionally inflicted on a person for political purposes, such as silencing dissent. To be considered torture the violence must be condoned by the government or state agent and impunity to the violators assured (Amnesty International, 2000).

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Davoud's many resistance strategies was this: He played a fabricated TV talk show every night in his imagination, viewing the same segment repeatedly, in which he is being interviewed for winning a gold medal. A medal for loyalty. Davoud is creating and rehearsing a counter story to the number of stories that have been imposed on him; inscribed on him. His acumen for being politically strategic helps him hold his own counsel on all of these thoughts. Davoud has a photograph of his youngest child; it was taken long ago in the life that has been ripped away from him. In it she is wearing the all knowing and faraway smile of an old woman. He thinks of her and his boys now, wondering what expressions they are wearing, and his own face softens. Davoud's identity as a father has been ripped away from him and thoughts of his children allow him to hold on to his job as their parent despite his physical absence. He drags his focus back to the work of the present, putting together a strategic plan for presenting a useful story of himself at his intake meeting at the clinic tomorrow. [8]

My work has been informed by the extreme isolation of survivors of torture and refugees. I have been moved to respond to this isolation by asking questions of survivors that bring forward their stories as persons who are part of communities and have families behind them. My resonance with the totalizing isolation of torture's story of the person has moved me towards communalizing practices. I aim to help those whose identity stories have been stolen from them to recover them, hold them, and have them respected and recognized. Much of what follows in this work comes from a necessity to respond to the extreme isolation and stolen identities of survivors.

For many survivors of torture and political violence the torture never ends. They continue to fear for loved ones still at risk or actually in the hands of their own torturers. Many are torn from their families, their children; an experience one man told me was akin to trying to live with your heart outside your body. Some live in extreme isolation, dislocated into a culture not their own. There is no one to share a meaningful greeting in their language, or touch them in kindness. Despite Canada's international legal obligations to both offer refuge and financially support refugees, many survivors of torture live in poverty, and struggle to meet their basic needs, such as housing. Most refugees long to be home, holding their babies to their hearts, catching familiar turns of phrase or well-worn tunes, and breathing in the fragrance of a family dish. Reasonably enough, many statused Canadians, (by which I mean Canadians who have citizenship or legal immigration status), expect refugees to be grateful for the privilege of being in Canada. They appreciate being in Canada: they want to be home. Refugees must navigate systems which are complicated and can be incomprehensible. Many survivors of torture are unable to trust members of their own communities because their trust has been broken, and their bodies tortured by people from their own culture. Fear of government informants in this faraway land of refuge is very real. In these contexts, responding to the horrors they have witnessed and experienced is confounding for many survivors.

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[8] Unless full names are given all personal vignettes come from composites of real persons I have worked alongside, including both clients and community workers. My intention is to offer richer descriptions and participate in practices of accountability in relation to confidentiality and safety.

The People of the Downtown Eastside

The people who make up the community of the notorious Downtown Eastside of Vancouver are another population of clients who have informed me in developing this work.[9] These are among the most marginalized people in this nation. Poverty is a common denominator, and many are plagued with substance abuse, HIV, and Hepatitis C. The criminalization of drugs has led to the inscription of criminalized identities. Of those who have seen a psychiatrist many have been diagnosed as mentally ill. Many of the women, some of the men and transgendered people, have been involved in what is called prostitution, but what some sex trade workers themselves call survival sex trade work – that is work taken up out of necessity, if not desperation.[10]

> *Mary is 48 years old; because she has no teeth people often see her as an elder. They don't treat her as an elder, because she is addicted to crack, often smells of urine, and asks for money or whatever else she desperately needs from every person she meets. The euphemistic jargon "health compromised" does not touch her experience of physical pain and daily torment. A loss she hasn't moved away from is the loss of her two boys taken by child protection workers over 25 years ago. Mary has survived breast cancer against all odds, and smokes as many rollies as she can squeeze out of the butts she collects curbside. Thanks to a committed social worker, she continues to mostly live indoors, one positive consequence of her HIV status. She is in and out of housing because it is harm reduction housing and she continues to smoke crack. It is hard to follow her stories, and hard to know what to believe. When she speaks of the violence and indignities she has suffered the stories seem real, believable and threatening. She is not interested in counselling and does just enough to keep the housing she has. Mary alludes to outrageous and continuous acts of sexualized violence threaded together in the all-encompassing- fabric-of- fear that makes up her life. She's most afraid of the people she has crossed in drug deals. She is open about having been violent on both sides of the trade. If I can supply her with a can of Ensure she gives me her defiant smile, chin jutting out, sunken cheeks pulled in. Bedbugs be damned, I return her hugs in these rare moments of invitation.*

All of these people work to stay alive in a context of extreme violence, where life is precarious, and death is ever near. Few have contact with their families. Children have often been apprehended or lost in custody battles. Trust is a scarce commodity. Many of these people, but certainly not all, were neglected and abused at the hands of family and community members. Most have been abused in one way or another in the precarious life of their present community. The stories of resistance are often hidden, sometimes not fully articulated to themselves, almost always hidden from others, and sometimes meted out sparingly in the rare counselling conversations that are not crisis driven. Collectively people suffer from being under-housed or homeless, living from shopping carts and struggling for shelter while subject to police repeatedly seizing and destroying their tents and all of their belongings.[11] One young couple, who we

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[9] I am using the terms client, community worker, and supervisor for the sake of clarity. By community worker, I mean an inclusive description of all people, regardless of academic qualifications, doing relational change work in relationships that dignify and help the client make preferred changes.

[10] People who identify as transgendered do not identify strictly with the gender they were assigned to at birth, and transition to a gender in which they feel more congruent, which could be something other than male or female. They may or may not transition physically to their preferred gender identity (Nataf, 1996).

[11] In 2006, the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights made a strongly worded recommendation to Canadian federal and provincial governments to address homelessness and inadequate housing, as the UN considered it a national emergency. The UN strongly suggested reinstating housing programs and increasing welfare. In Vancouver, the most expensive city in Canada and home of our greatest homeless population, full time work at minimum wage does not provide an above poverty level income. In October 2007, the United Nations sent another envoy to the Downtown Eastside, Miloon Kothari, and antipoverty activists begged him to render UN assistance to their community. With a

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helped house in a cheap hotel, returned to their tent as they found the hotel rats and bugs more impossible to accept than life on the street. A homeless man told me his dog was taken because, "The animal guy said it was inhumane for an animal to live like that". He actually agreed, but wondered why it was no problem for a person to do so.

These clients have informed this work by inviting me inside experiences I have not lived. They have helped me learn a different landscape of despair, hope, and resistance. Safety and respect sound like such ordinary and simple qualifications for work alongside all people: if only that were true. I acknowledge with sadness and regret that many of the teachings I have learned come at a cost to clients, as my missteps have had consequences for them. Truly our work is not innocent. These clients have schooled me to be of more use to the community workers who work alongside them.

The Community Workers

The myriad of community workers, therapists, counsellors, and street workers I have worked alongside as trainer and supervisor have also informed this work. These community workers (everyone doing this difficult relational change work in these contexts) have also expanded my practice through their teachings, crises, epiphanies, ethical dilemmas, sometimes passionate questioning, and fellowship.

Some of the teachings from community workers have come from walking alongside them as they navigate problems of oppression similar to the problems facing clients. It is important not to collapse the significant distinctions between the problems of clients and counsellors, and yet it is also important to resist invisiblizing the connections.

> *Mei works as a family support worker primarily with people who are immigrants struggling with what gets called family violence. She balances her parenting work (raising her kids), her full time work (at a just-above minimum wage job), and her school work (completing a master's degree). Mei's mother patiently awaits her daughter's precious visits, understanding the pressures behind her frequent cancellations. Born in Canada, Mei is too often referred to as an immigrant by both her co-workers and fellow students. Mei finds it hard to be taken seriously in some team meetings when she challenges ideas about herself and her clients –*
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> *yet she steadfastly holds on to her belief that her clients, primarily sole parent mothers and their children, do not come from "violent families" and "violent cultures", but rather struggle with the violence of men. When she recalls uttering the words "men's violence" aloud in a case consultation she re-experiences the sensation*

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provincial budgetary surplus in 2007 of $4.1 billion this province is expected to double its homelessness by the year 2010, when we host the Olympics (Johal, 2007). Shame.

of her heart beating loudly and alone in a quiet room full of teammates. Since then Mei has been feeling isolated with these ideas, and with her intimate knowledge of the ways that poverty, displacement and racism are a big part of clients' pain. Simultaneously, Mei respects her co-workers, because they are committed to the nonprofit organization they work for, and struggle to find ingenious ways to squeeze dollars to keep the doors of under funded programs open. In one class she took a risk and asked who was not an immigrant to this Native land. It wasn't a rhetorical question. The professor ignored her question in order to "get back on topic". Her prudent resistance to all of these acts of silencing takes the form of holding her own counsel. Her protests against the problems facing her clients and her community are made invisible. Moments of doubt about her usefulness to her clients take over her picture of herself more often of late. She's hoping no one asks to view her session; she fears she will be revealed as a fraud. An ongoing inner debate is being staged between the future of her family, which she is pinning on her academic certification, and her newly chosen silences which have her feeling inauthentic – and dirty.

The communities I have been invited into in a supervisory and training capacity are diverse both in terms of cultures and the problems their work is organized around. These include:

➔ Trauma therapists working alongside survivors of torture and political violence in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and India.

➔ Therapists and youth counsellors working in residential programs with youth and their families who struggle with substance abuse, sexualized exploitation and violence in their lives.

➔ Transition home workers, rape crisis counsellors, and stopping the violence counsellors.

➔ Teams of substance abuse counsellors, mental health therapists, medical clinic staff, and addiction treatment, detox, and housing and shelter workers in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

➔ Counsellors working in queer (which I will use to speak inclusively of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirited, and queer identified people) and transgendered communities. [12]

What these practitioners most desire is to be of use to clients. Many suffer from a cold fear in the belly that incompetence or a lack of knowing on their part may result in devastating consequences for clients. Isolation invites workers into stories of their own identities as incompetent, disconnected and ineffective. In a combat metaphor, a doctor in a Downtown Eastside clinic described his office as a foxhole, in a row of isolated foxholes. Losing clients to suicide and violent death is a reality. Experiences of being overwhelmed are not uncommon. Job titles, such as support worker, shelter worker or addictions counsellor, offer only thin descriptions[13] of the complex demands of their work; and do not honour the

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[12] What is important in differentiating these terms is discerning issues of gender identity from issues of sexual orientation. Queer has been adopted as an umbrella term by some people who do not identify as strictly heterosexual. I will use this term to speak of lesbian, gay, bisexual, two spirited, and queer identified people. People who I work alongside who identify as two-spirited refer to their cultural location as Indigenous people who do not identify as heterosexual: Two-spirited refers to rich cultural knowings as well. People I work alongside who identify as queer may be in any of these groups, but primarily identify outside of heterosexual normativity, which basically refers to discourses which promote heterosexuality as normal. Transgendered people do not necessarily identify as queer, depending on their sexual identity they may identify us heterosexual. All of these terms are problematic, contested and evolving (Butler, 1990; Queen & Schimel, 1997). Again, I am using these words in these particular ways for clarity, and not as an attempt to offer definitive meanings or render these meanings fixed. For a useful introduction to queer theory see Jagose (1996).

[13] In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), American anthropologist Clifford Geertz introduces his notion of thick description within ethnographic work. In *Reflections on Narrative Practice: Essays & Interviews*, (2000 b, pg.84) Australian narrative therapist, Michael White notes that it was likely the philosopher Gilbert Ryle who first introduced

magnitude of trauma, violence and exploitation that shape the identities of clients. Many community workers must resist being beaten down by waitlists, which act as *weight lists* due to scarce resources in the face of overwhelming need. In these contexts, workers struggle to bring the possibility of hope to the helping relationship.

> *Gregory is a family counsellor who works in a residential program that has a mandate of family integration — a term he has never had successfully explained. He works with kids who are labeled "street entrenched", which he understands very well as a euphemism for exploited. Gregory is aware of the locations of privilege that he holds, being a white married man with a lot of schooling, who owns a house and takes his family on yearly trips abroad. In particular, he is appreciative of the privileges that have kept his children safe, while the kids he works alongside share nightmarish tales of trading their bodies for what they need, a place to sleep, ways to stop the pain. The parents he works with speak in small voices of the poverty that haunts them and their gut wrenching and shaming inability to provide for their families. Gregory, a longtime activist, cut his teeth on the anti-nuclear movement in the UK in the '70s. He sports a riveted punk belt, his wide black watchband is also suspect, and riffs from The Clash blast out from under his office door. Gregory is committed to ongoing learning, and has a personal library that exceeds that of the program he works in. His superiors let him know it is time for him to move up, take on the role of supervisor. Everything looks right, but Gregory has a deep humility which sometimes collapses into his idea of himself as an imposter. This identity has him wondering how he could be of help to other counsellors, when he secretly fears he is not really helping his clients. He harbors unspoken and unspeakable questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of his life's work. He despairs that other counsellors hold the same isolating secrets. Ironically, his own life has turned out far better and more affluent than his violent and wanting childhood would have ever led him to think possible. Despite the appalling social contexts of the lives of his clients, Gregory is doing just fine. But at 52, he wonders if there is still time to make a difference, maybe doing something else…*

Despite the diversity of work they do, what connects these good people is a struggle to practice in line with their ethics, and to help their clients keep a finger hold on dignity. Teachings from these community workers have informed this work from the inside, pushing me to be of use because of their own determination to stay alive and effective in their work. The humble competence and slogging patience of community workers accompanies me in this writing, and shoulders me up.

The supervisor

In my work as the supervisor I am linked to these community worker*s* and the clients they work with. Our learnings from each other are reflexive and reciprocal.

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the concept of thin/thick narrative description, and this was further elucidated by Geertz re: ethnographic description and narratives of *other* cultures. In *Narrative Practice and Exotic Lives*, White uses this concept (without a reference) in his chapter, *Narrative practice and the unpacking of identity conclusions* (2004, pp.126). (Sanders, personal communication, 2007)

SUPERVISOR

When I began to work with refugees and people who had survived torture and political violence, many caring and well-intentioned folks echoed a very powerful story that I would burnout. The prescriptions for burnout were pervasive, presented as common wisdom, and scarce on hope. I found this collective fear of how I would be hurt trying to be of use to such irrepressible people, curious – but I also gravely respected it. I wondered why these cautionary tales of burnout were absent in relation to much of the family work I had done in which children were raped by family members who loved them. Why was I hearing these warnings now?

In the heart breaking work of the anti-death penalty movement in the United States, spirited connections and loving fellowship were the keys to my resistance to becoming immobile in the face of extreme spiritual pain. Pain caused by situations which I and others considered to be outside of human understanding. Activism had reminded me to always honour resistance. More importantly, human rights work had given me unshakeable faith that resistance is always present in the face of abuses of power. Actively bringing forward these sites of resistance in work alongside survivors of torture and political violence always made more sense to me than investigating the horrid details of what had been done to them. "Most people die under torture but you're still alive, how do you make sense of that?" Making sense of the persons' acts of resistance, as opposed to making sense of the perpetrators' acts of violence, helped my clients teach me to listen to collective folk wisdom about resistance.

The community workers I supervise are being asked by society to deal with the lived experiences of people whose human rights are consistently ignored and abused. The cost of these societal injustices falls on the impoverished. The people who work alongside them bear witness to suffering that most citizens have the privilege of choosing not to see. These ugly, not ready for prime time scenarios, are the locations in which these practitioners work. As a supervisor, my ethical obligation is to bring hope to both community workers and the clients they work alongside. This continues to be a great challenge in these voids of dignity and justice.

> I have been called in late in the day, because a residential staff team I supervise is in a crisis, at odds with each other, and stuck. Jake, a young First Nations man from an impoverished family in an isolated reserve, has faked a pee test. His urine screen is positive for marijuana. Jake was home for Christmas while the program was closed. Some team members think he should stay because of the desperate situations he faces on the reserve. Jake was not straight up about faking the test or using pot. This has some other team members thinking he needs to take time out of the program, take a more accountable position, and that there have to be some consequences for using substances and lying because that is an expectation for

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everyone in the program. The team does agree that Jake has experienced extreme exploitation and is in a life-and-death struggle with substance abuse. I am immediately struck with the injustice of the structures. The program has begun closing down during Christmas in response to pervasive funding shortages, and I am angry that Jake may be the next young person to pay the price. 14 I am afraid that time out of the program will be risky, and that there might be some complex and not so complex reasons why Jake was not what we are calling "straight up" about using pot. It is not unlikely that he has a problematic history being straight up with people from the dominant culture. My struggle is with my own power and influence which can have great pull here. I do not want to use power- over with this team; I do not want to start to think I know better than they do. At the same time I have an itchy belly feeling that is very familiar, because I believe that pot, alcohol and violence have Jake by the throat. I desperately want to make this kid safe. I feel an urgency to hold the team together. I slow myself down, amplify my listening, and prepare to lean in towards the fractured team and Jake, looking for a window to crack open that will let a wisp of hope drift in.

My best supervisory skills for keeping hope alive come from loving communities of activists, understandings of resistance, and the transformations I have witnessed and lived. By activist I mean everyone who takes action to make changes in society directed towards social justice. [15] My hope is fed by the fact that there are continuous appearances of many small and amazing successes made around the planet by committed groups of folks. My work is fueled by my desire to be of use to the community workers I supervise.

A Supervision of Solidarity

This writing explores my approach to supervision with community workers who work alongside people whose experiences of marginalization are extreme. As a supervisor I need to respond to the desperation, risk and isolation experienced by the people we see. I want to help community workers be more accompanied and less alone when working with people suffering life threatening problems which are worsened by experiences of social and political injustice. I want to make myself more available to community workers struggling with despair, paralysis, or feelings of incompetence in the face of grave problems. I also want to find ways to unite them within a community of others who share a spirit of concern working within similar frameworks of injustice. My interest in building community and creating rooted and fortifying connections has to do with my belief that, over time, isolation looms as one of the greatest threats to sustaining ourselves in this work.[16]

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[14] Budget shortages euphemistically obscure the reality of *budget cuts.* The amount of funding does not keep up with the increase of costs, and cuts to helping people are both imminent and unnamed.

[15] It is important to differentiate social justice activists from activists with other agendas. The word activism describes people who take action to make changes in society. Activism does not necessarily have any committed connection to issues of social justice. Activists who have a conservative agenda that fit with the structures of power are well covered by media (Chomsky, 1989).

[16] (Reynolds, In press a)

SUPERVISION OF SOLIDARITY
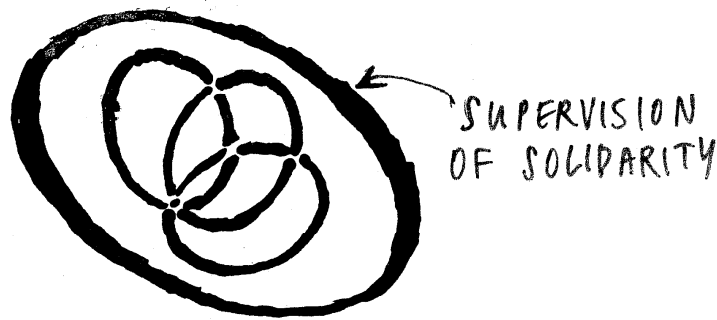
For me, sustainability refers to an ongoing aliveness, a genuine connectedness with people, and a presence of spirit. How can we be connected with this aliveness? How do we hold on to our collective integrity and dignity? What can sustain us; clients, therapists and supervisors alike, and enable us all to go on in our lives?

> *A compassionate doctor and nurse once entreated me to promise them that we would not take a desperate client home with us. This client, an older man, was going to be put on the street when the clinic closed. We were already an hour over time. There was no detox bed that would take him; the ambulance workers assessed that he didn't require emergency services; support workers were unable to assist because there was a warrant for his arrest; the police said they had a warrant for him but would not arrest him at this time; and there were no shelter beds. Armed with a load of clean secondhand clothes, which he did not want to put on until he was able to have a shower, I walked alongside his sketchy shuffle up to an emergency shelter where he could line up outside for four more hours to possibly get mattress space on the floor. I returned to the clinic: I will never forget the moment of turning around, physically turning my back on him, and returning to the safety and companionship of the doctor and nurse who acted as my brothers that day, as we kept each other from taking this man home. I still look for him.*

When real practical material necessities, such as an indoor bed, are not available for clients, how can I, as the supervisor, engender hope in my work alongside community workers? The desperate lack of resources, access and hope which is where our clients live and we work, is very much the stuff of our struggles. We are sometimes called on to behave as agents of social control in contexts which lack social justice. A *socially just society* is one in which all groups of people, regardless of background, are included in the political, economic and social decisions of that society.[17] There is pressure on us to influence people into acceptable social norms and structures that don't fit with a *just society*.

Spiritual Pain

One of my most disheartening moments as a counsellor was a time when I was required to certify that a sole parenting woman was an acceptable mother and had met my standards of parenting or face having her children taken by the state. Following the abandonment of her husband, this woman raised five children on welfare. He had raped and beaten her in front of the children, and was violent towards them as well. Her 16-year-old son was beginning to get involved with the police. I was asked to give him anger

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[17] Orlowski (2009). Social justice includes all domains of social life, which is beyond the more narrow scope of human rights and *justice systems* which primarily uphold laws.

management training in order to allow him to continue living with his family. I did both of these things, despite never having been a parent myself, having no idea how to stretch a welfare cheque that far, and being committed to the idea that this young man's anger was *just*. I experienced great spiritual pain, alongside a new and shaming understanding of myself as a fraud.

This spiritual pain I am referring to is the discrepancy between what feels respectful, humane, and generative, and the numerous calls on me and those I supervise to violate the very beliefs that brought us to this field. When we feel that our work alongside exploited people asks us to accommodate people to poverty and violence, we can easily become exhausted, isolated and spiritually pained. Some of us respond to this pain by getting out and doing something else. Others move to work with people who have more access to money, to a place where they feel less discomfort.

Many desolate community workers don't recognize the underlying social and institutional structures that promote or support problems. They blame themselves in the way that many clients who don't see such structures often blame themselves. Clients think they're failing, workers think they're failing because of the mystifying invisibility of the structures supporting the problems. We know we're working hard, and working harder is not working. The smell of a particularly individual incompetence begins to creep into the sullied identity of ourselves as community workers. This is the dirty work of isolation.

Sustaining our identities as practitioners of use in the face of this spiritual pain is difficult, and can be a limiting idea if it is approached as the primary goal of supervision. The point is not to keep on keepin' on. Fostering sustainability is difficult when the unjust conditions of clients' lives do not improve, and when community workers experience their work as shoveling water. To shift this stagnancy it is important to name the structures and contexts that support the problems people experience. For example, being ascribed an identity such as drug addict mystifies all of the parts of a person's life that have contributed to the pain they are suffering. When the contexts that support the problems of substance abuse are named there is room for us to bring to light the problems the construct addict shrouds with its totalizing picture of persons. Being a person who struggles with substance abuse is a very different way to identify, and leaves room for experiences of trauma, abuse and poverty to be named. This also leaves space for a person to be more than an addict. These people are parents, workers, citizens, and artists as well as people who struggle with substance abuse.[18] People can take responsibility where they have choices. They cannot be held accountable for the structures of inequity that are mystified by problematized identities. Naming the underlying structures makes visible the way that these problems are created and kept alive. Room is created for different meanings to be understood. This way of working can contest the magnitude of all of the things clients believe they are responsible for, and we as community workers imagine ourselves responsible for.

This was brought home to me when I met with a despondent family enhancement worker who was in a crisis of spiritual pain. Four children from a family she worked with had been removed by the state. The

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[18] Colin Sanders' critical engagement with language is directly connected to these issues, and begins in the title of his article *Re-Authoring Problem Identities: Small victories with young persons captured by substance misuse* (1997, 2007).

father of these children was bereft, heartbroken and utterly alone. He left an angry phone message holding her directly responsible. The worker was questioning her ability to do her job, to be of use to any family, and to tolerate this level of despair. Her ideas of her identity as a worker were diminished, and her relationship to competence was fleeting. Our supervisory conversation named the structures that contributed to her spiritual pain. The mandate of the organization dictates that workers close the family file when children are no longer present in the home. This means that when children are removed by the state, the helping relationship ends abruptly without a closing meeting. Referrals are made to other services which are funded to meet with parents who have had children removed. These services have wait lists. This leaves the families in isolation, cuts out the worker, and severs relationships. Locating the role of the unjust structure in her spiritual pain allowed this worker to move forward. However, this analysis, useful as it was to the worker, did not address the desperate situation of this family.

Individual experiences of failure are most often understood as personal events. Such descriptions leave no place to go. Stepping away from an individualistic perspective makes room for the social construction of a larger perspective, one that reaches beyond the limiting idea of the individual worker as responsible for institutional and systemic failures. [19]

Witnessing

I embrace a witnessing metaphor to describe my stance in both community work and activism.[20] There are many traditions that merge in the rich history of witnessing. I am informed by activist practices of witnessing, where defenders of human rights hold governments and other bodies to account for abuses of power. These include executions, torture and other violent strategies to silence dissent and terrorize populations into submission. Witnesses confront these human rights abusers, call for accountability, and resist the disappearance of activists. Many former political prisoners and survivors of torture have given testimony that attests to the power of witnessing to address human rights abuses. These life changing teachings have fortified my faith in the usefulness of witnessing in all community work that responds to abuses of power.

Witnessing speaks to an experience of being held up collectively with others who share our ethical responsibilities. For community workers, a witnessing stance invites a connection alongside clients, but says I am in this struggle with you as well. The worker is not an audience to this person's individual struggle, but relationally connected to it.

The helping professions' connections to ideals of neutrality and objectivity can invite us to accommodate clients to private lives of hell, which is nothing any of us aspire to.[21] Many progressive front-line workers

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[19] This particular reading of social construction ideas has been influenced by: Burr (2003), McNamee & Gergen (1999), Anderson (1997), and Sampson (1993).

[20] In earlier writings I have engaged with the articulation of witnessing in relation to my work with survivors of torture (1997), young women struggling with the influence of substance abuse and exploitation in their lives (2000), and in the creation of Cultural Witnessing Groups (2001).

[21] Cushman (2007)

have spoken of the activist and feminist analysis of private pain/public issue.[22] For example, a woman is judged as an unfit mother and held responsible for the squalor of her children's lives. This judgment ignores poverty, the level of men's violence in their lives, and the contexts of racism and colonization in which they live. Witnessing invites us to name and contest unjust problems and not make up a story of the person as if they were the problem. In these ways witnessing practices aim to open our work in hope-filled and *just* directions.

Solidarity

A witnessing stance for community work configures helping relationships as sites of belonging for the client, community worker, and supervisor, which can promote connections of solidarity.[23] Solidarity is fostered by a community of feelings, shared interests and responsibilities.[24] A spirit of solidarity is created when we act in accord with each other and we unite around shared commitments to collective ethics, and intentions.

While the language of solidarity may be new to many community workers, the spirit of solidarity is alive and well in our work with each other and with clients. I am borrowing this term from social justice movements and bringing it to this writing as part of my hope in bridging the worlds of community work and activism. Using the language of solidarity here is not loose language, posturing, or an attempt to alienate less politically located folks! I am purposefully inviting community workers to engage with the rich traditions of solidarity that hold us together.

Solidarity speaks to the interconnections of our collective movements towards social justice, and in resisting oppression. I believe that we can be a great resource to each other in this work. This spirit of solidarity has been beautifully articulated by Lily Walker, an Australian Aboriginal women's leader, speaking to non-Aboriginal activists at a land rights protest: "If you come here to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you come here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us begin." [25]

I call my practice a Supervision of Solidarity.[26] In all of the work that I do; activist work, consulting work, counselling work, supervision work, community work, I aim to forge a sense of solidarity. I position myself alongside the community worker. Together we are in unity with clients and with the broader community. In this work our pre-existing unity, shared hopes, and commonly held ethics speak to the fact

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[22] I have been influenced about this analysis in therapeutic contexts most especially by the Just Therapy group from New Zealand, (Waldegrave *et al.*, 1996), and the work of Imelda McCarthy and The Fifth Province Team from Ireland, (1995, 1998, 2001).

[23] The word *solidarity* is contested and problematic. Like much language from social justice movements, solidarity – in some situations – has been appropriated and used as a tool of oppression, rather than liberation. Given this, however, I am loath to surrender the term, and certainly unwilling to surrender the practices and rich histories and traditions of solidarity. Here I will align myself with Wittgenstein's (1953) idea that the meaning of the word is in its use, and in this present writing I engage the term solidarity to mean that our collective liberation, our ways forward towards something *just*, are woven together.

[24] Diani (1992), Larcombe (2000).

[25] Walker cited in Sinclair (n.d.)

[26] Reynolds (2008)

that we are already doing solidarity with each other. A position of solidarity invites us to work alongside other workers to serve people better, and not to compete or diminish the work of others, as that does not serve clients. This makes space for the dignity of other workers, housing workers, doctors, mental health workers. From this position of solidarity a conversation that includes useful critique can emerge.

A Supervision of Solidarity is informed by a group of Guiding Intentions that uphold Solidarity Practices. In Part One of this writing, I expand upon the six Guiding Intentions which comprise my ethical stance for *doing justice*. These include Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Addressing Power, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Critically Engaging with Language, and Structuring Safety.

In Part Two I engage in re-tellings of the Solidarity Group. The Solidarity Group is one of many Solidarity Practices which follow from a commitment to the ethical stance described by the Guiding Intentions. The structure of the Solidarity Group is borrowed from Reflecting Teams.[27] Here one worker is interviewed and others in the community are invited to witness and offer reflections. The person interviewed then talks with the Interviewer, with an aim to witness the witnesses. In Solidarity Groups the community of workers is supervised collectively. As the Interviewer, I look for themes that resonate with the Guiding Intentions. I attend to emergent experiences which hold meaning for the 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 collective meaning. As the Interviewer, it is my task to ensure that all participants are witnessed, and woven together in a community of solidarity. My purpose in writing about the Solidarity Group is to get inside of the practice, and to reveal the Guiding Intentions for *doing justice* in action.

Teachings from activism inform me that a group is almost always more useful than powerful individuals: more people more better. I want to contribute to workers' abilities to stay alive in the oppressive contexts of our work by creating opportunities for training and supervision to go beyond individual crises and pain. I envision transformative dialogues that "bear the lightning of possible storms".[28]

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[27] Andersen (1991)

[28] This quotation of Foucault's comes from a poetic and spirited interview on critique (1994, pp. 176).

PART I.
AN ETHICAL STANCE FOR *DOING JUSTICE*: THE GUIDING INTENTIONS

"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. [29] 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."[30]

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[29] The rhizome metaphor comes from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). They use this rhizome metaphor to describe horizontally linked, non-hierarchical forms of social organization, thought, and communication. The rhizome metaphor is illuminated in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[30] Uzelman (2005), pp. 17.

1. Introduction to an Ethical Stance for *Doing Justice*: The Guiding Intentions

The Frame for this writing has described the paths that led me to this work, and introduced the community of activist elders that back me up. The Frame described the contexts of the community work I'm involved in, and connects clients and the settings they struggle in; community workers I work with; my position as a trainer and supervisor of community workers; and the practices of consultation and supervision I have developed. I have developed my particular way of working, a Supervision of Solidarity, in response to the challenges of helping these community workers sustain their efforts to be effective and engage in practices of social justice across time – and, not incidentally, to sustain myself.

The work described here derives from my immersion in both social justice activism and community work, and my determined striving toward social justice. It builds upon the work of others – activists, colleagues, writers, and clients, who share my passion for social justice.

In Part I, I describe my ethical stance for this work and set out the theories and ideas that form the foundation from which I engage in my practice. This particular ethical stance, which I have found useful and couldn't work without, recognizes social justice as central. By ethical stance, I mean the theories and ideas that serve as the foundation for my practice with community workers and clients, and embody my response to the question of how we might do justice. My ethical stance for *doing justice* 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 promoting 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

I attend to language as it 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.[31] 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.

These Guiding Intentions form the heart of my ethical stance, a stance that drives, sustains, and invites continuing development of the work described here. My ongoing attention to a group of challenging, compelling, and ever-transforming questions also shapes the stance in this work. Each of these questions grows from the commitments described above:

- ➔ How can we do justice working with people who struggle in the margins of our communities?
- ➔ How can we act in solidarity to keep the spirit of justice alive in our collective work and in our lives?
- ➔ How can we be connected with this aliveness?
- ➔ How can we hold on to our collective integrity and dignity?
- ➔ What ways can we find to sustain ourselves as community workers?
- ➔ How might work that develops richer understandings of social justice, and follows from commitments to social justice, be more sustaining than work that does not?
- ➔ How can we change the unjust structures that oppress people?
- ➔ What could *just* practice look like in a society which is more *just* to some than to others?

These and other compelling questions inform me, and continue to resonate with me in my practice alongside community workers. I respond, struggle and reflect on these questions, but never solve or completely silence them. Holding these reflexive questions invites me to re-examine my ethical stance and reminds me to work in accord with my ethics. From this stance I work to promote change and to be of use to community workers and clients.

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[31] Bird (2006)

It is important for me to know my ethical stance, and to know the ground I am standing on, before I can begin to act with integrity. My 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.[32] Action is followed by reflection, which informs actions which are more *just*, which rolls into further reflection, and so it continues. I am informed by the ideas and practices of popular education that acting without theorizing can be unsafe and ineffective.[33] Without this understanding of theorizing as a reflexive exercise I could replicate oppressive practices (or more simply, use power in unethical ways).

While my ethical stance is fully my own and I hold myself accountable to its claims, I acknowledge that it has been co-created in important and meaningful ways. I acknowledge the teachings of the people I have worked alongside who are refugees, activists, and survivors of torture and political violence. I want to acknowledge the differential price extracted from people from the global south and racialized and minoritized [34] people from the global north.[35] I recognize the generosity which has enabled them to teach me and for me to benefit from their lived experiences. Part of this writing will be a testament and witnessing of these ideas. I offer an invitation into the rich histories of these ideas and practices in activist cultures and new social movements.[36] This stance of accountability embodies my resistance to appropriation, which is always a risk for persons and groups holding non-academic and alternative knowledges.

As I will also discuss, I do not offer my ethical stance as necessarily correct, or based on the right ideas or true ideas. The holding of this ethical positioning has, however, allowed me to engage in the work of trying to do justice over time in a relationship with sustainability. I also hesitate to offer my work alongside community workers as a model because, as Ani DiFranco says, "any tool is a weapon if you hold it right".[37] Rather than a prescribed set of tools and techniques, I offer instead a particular ethical stance

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[32] Freire (1970)

[33] My knowings of popular education come from community work alongside activists informed by this praxis, most often referenced to Paulo Freire (1970) and Franz Fanon, whose writings, most especially *The Wretched of the Earth*, offer some of the scaffolding for post colonial theory (1961).

[34] People of colour (also a problematic term) are the majority of the people in the world. Using the term *minoritized* names the power and intention required to re-construct the majority as a collection of minorities.

[35] The terms global north and global south came to popular usage following the release of *The Brandt Report: North-South: A Programme for Survival*, commissioned by the United Nations. It tracked the global divide: the prosperity of the north at the expense of the south's ability to survive. "North" and "south" refer to economic development status, not geographic location. (Independent Commission on International Development Issues, 1980)

[36] New social movements began around the mid 1960s, and differ from other branches of activism, which are more specifically geared towards economic change and public policy. New social movements focus as well on social changes as they relate to identity, collective action, and culture. The Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico and the global peace movement are examples of new social movements (Buechler, 2005).

[37] DiFranco (1993)

that promotes *doing justice*. My ethical positioning attempts to navigate between the worlds of community work and activism, drawing them closer together.

In Part I, I will step back and look at the ethical stance that provides the underpinnings for the Solidarity Group and other practices. All of these practices follow from a commitment to this ethical stance. Later, in Part II of this writing, I will look closely at the practice of Solidarity Groups through many rich accounts of the practice drawn from actual Solidarity Groups in order to bring the practice and its spirit to life.

Guiding Intentions differ from principles in that they have fluid boundaries and are not mutually exclusive. Guiding Intentions are more slippery to operationalize than a set of principles. Practice is messy, and people do not actually engage with linear principles. These Guiding Intentions are offered as an heuristic, which is a possible way of moving towards a goal.[38] This differs from an algorithm which is a set of specific steps that will lead to a predetermined and known end.

Committing these Guiding Intentions to writing requires that I order them in some way. Despite using letters instead of numbers I am participating in rank ordering. To destabilize the notion that these Guiding Intentions exist in a hierarchy I engage with Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome.[39] 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, "spreading throughout the yard, storing nutrients in anticipation of a coming spring".[40] The rhizome metaphor 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.[41] Like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions grow into and out of each other.
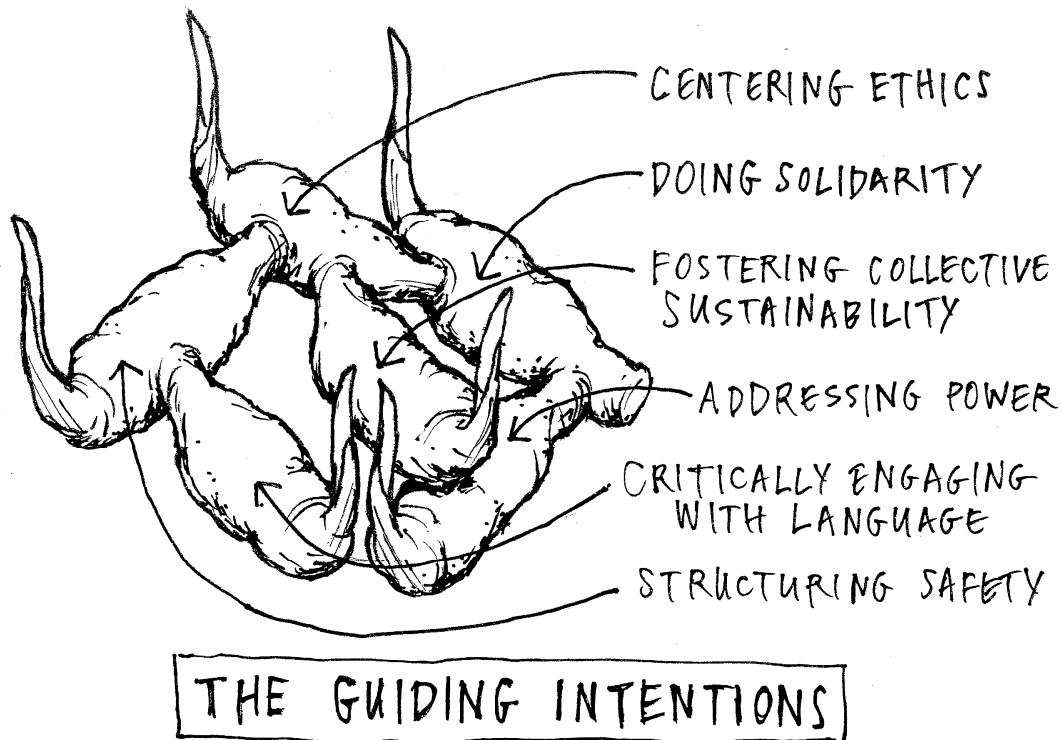
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[38] See Moustakas's useful text *Heuristic Research* (1990).

[39] Deleuze & Guattari (1987)

[40] Uzelman (2005), pp. 17.

[41] Lacey (2005a) gives a rich account of the multiple ways that the rhizome metaphor has informed activist networks and movements, including the riot grrrl network and the Anarchist Teapot collective in London.

CENTERING ETHICS
DOING SOLIDARITY
FOSTERING COLLECTIVE SUSTAINABILITY
ADDRESSING POWER
CRITICALLY ENGAGING WITH LANGUAGE
STRUCTURING SAFETY

THE GUIDING INTENTIONS

Here I describe each of the six Guiding Intentions separately, and offer a thick description as an invitation into the flavour and possibility each Guiding Intention engenders.

From academic and activist cultures I will bring forward some writings, knowings, and theorizing related to each Guiding Intention. The purpose of using these textual resources[42] is to invite a fuller understanding of each of the Guiding Intentions. Some of these knowings are subjugated knowledges[43] which come from non-academic settings. The term subjugated knowledge comes from the writings of critical philosopher/historian Michel Foucault.[44] It speaks to the ways in which power influences what is accepted as knowledge, and how some ways of knowing are marginalized. Subjugated knowledges, some of which I will bring forward as they inform the Guiding Intentions, can be thought of as low ranking knowledge, disqualified knowledge, or knowledge and ways of knowing that come from people who have

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[42] Gergen (personal communication, 2008)

[43] Foucault (1980), pp. 81-82.

[44] Foucault did not accept the label philosopher, and contested positions of his ideas as post structuralist and post modern, which is confusing, as his writings are some of the primary texts for these paths of thought. Sheridan's *Michel Foucault: the Will to Truth* provides a solid overview of Foucault's work (1980). *The Foucault Reader* by Rabinow welcomes readers into Foucault's writings in an organized and contextualized way (1984). For a more accessible and creative invitation to Foucault's ideas read the documentary comic book *Foucault for Beginners* (Fillingham, 1993).

less access to power. These marginalized or alternative knowings are often silenced, or appropriated, in academic settings.

My work here is to bridge the worlds of activism and academia. Theorizing is not a neutral practice. I believe that theorizing holds the promise of *doing justice* and that liberatory theorizing can engender liberatory practices. I approach 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, a black feminist theorist, who believes in the possibility that theory can be liberatory in social justice work.[45]

While there is much to be said about the Guiding Intentions, I am going to focus my description on how each Guiding Intention is relevant to my work of supporting community workers in hopes of *doing justice*. I tell many stories here — clients', community workers', and my own — that resonate with different domains of community work and activism, to breath life into an experience of the Guiding Intentions. I end my descriptions with a story from activism or community work that resonates for me. The aim of the stories is to bring the spirit of each Guiding Intention to life.

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. Like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions are rough around the edges, disorderly, not of equal size, and resist mathematical precision.

This writing of my ethical stance and the Guiding Intentions which comprise it can be read in any order. They could have been organized in different ways. I have differentiated the Guiding Intentions under six headings to provide some clearer understandings. I created these six Guiding Intentions in response to reflections from practitioners who have experienced being inside of the practices I engage with, as well as my own experiences of inviting practitioners into the work through training, supervision and writing. 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 have 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.

From here I begin the descriptions, one by one, of the six Guiding Intentions, which comprise my ethical stance for practice which offers a hope of *doing justice*.
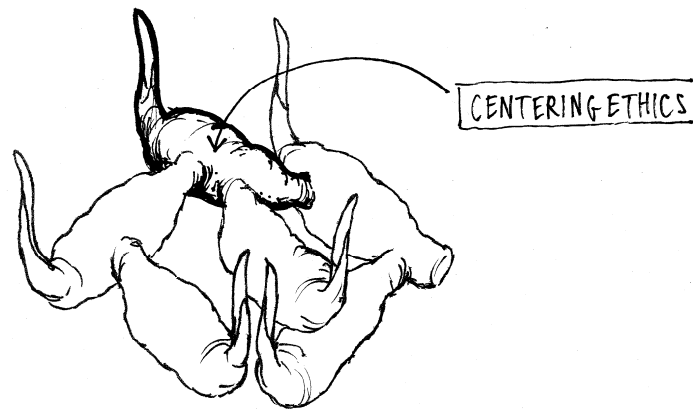
2. The Guiding Intentions

A. Centering Ethics

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[45] hooks (1984)

In this writing I illuminate the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics. Like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions are hard to separate and distinguish, as they flow into and out of each other. Centering Ethics both informs and requires an engagement with the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power, but also in relationship with all of the other Guiding Intentions. I am beginning my description of my ethical stance for *doing justice* with Centering Ethics, but I do not mean to rank it higher than any of the other Guiding Intentions.

The Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics describes my invitation for an inquiry into the practitioner's and the groups' relationships with ethics in all facets of our community work. By ethics, I mean the values that we hold close, and a particular relationship with the ideas and practices we are committed to that are in line with social justice. This commitment to an ethical stance provides us with some map of how to move forward in a good way, as we try to figure out what is an appropriate response right now, and how to do it. To invoke Spike Lee, how do we "Do the right thing"? [46]

Ethics

Ethics are not fixed and static, but are fluid and living. We breathe life into our ethical engagement by continually being open to new learning and new possibilities, while holding on to important teachings from historical contexts and our lived experiences. I am engaging with an understanding of ethics that is less connected with philosophical and hypothetical judgments of right and wrong, and more attuned to the immediate demands of circumstances in the social context of the lives of clients. I am concerned with the extent to which, as community workers, our theories and practices assist us in actualizing our ethical stances. This engagement with ethics is more practical than abstract.[47]

In the helping professions this engagement with the term ethics may differ from other meanings people may be accustomed to. For me, the term ethics is useful because of the possibilities its history and theory

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[46] Spike Lee's movie *Do the Right Thing* (1989) offers a rich landscape which we as audience are outside of and that we can reflect into and critique. The film deals with the politics of life in the poor inner-city set against the backdrop of struggles with American racism. Almost everyone in the film does the wrong thing at one point or another for complicated reasons. The film offers a rich engagement with the complexities and vicissitudes of what comprises ethics for people in different locations.

[47] Australian narrative therapist Alan Jenkins' (2006) use of Deluze's (1981) readings of Nietzsche's philosophy have informed these ways of articulating ethics.

and practice across disciplines offers in terms of building solidarity and keeping ourselves alive in the work.

Codes of Ethics exist so that there is a clear and measurable understanding about what type of behavior is acceptable within professions. Codes offer "aspirational goals rather than an enforceable standard of conduct".[48] Despite the usefulness of Codes of Ethics, when the word ethics comes up in relation to community work, it is usually followed by the words dilemma or problem. Because of the complexity of our work and the abundance of need in the lived realities of clients' lives, it is reasonable that ethics have been sidelined to be addressed in times of crisis or legal necessity. In this particular usage, the term ethics is often connected to corrective and possibly disciplinary action.

Our Codes of Ethics are helpful to us in terms of creating parameters within which we work, but they do not always provide a path for navigating complex situations alongside of clients and fellow workers. This is where a rich engagement with our ethical stance becomes not only important in the work, but may be crucial in our ability to sustain ourselves in this work, and to experience ourselves as behaving with integrity and dignity. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher who wrote in the early 20th century, argued that everyone is an organic intellectual.[49] By this he meant that all people are intellectuals and philosophers who take knowledges from their lived experiences and use them to address the problems of their societies. Traditionally, ethics is the work of academically accredited philosophers, so I feel supported by Gramsci's writings and borrow on his faith that people are competent to create their own ethical stance. I accept his invitation for all of us to engage philosophically with ethical challenges.

An ethical stance is a position that community workers create in relationships alongside clients, co-workers and through their broader lived experience. This ethical stance I speak of refers to the kind of practitioner the worker wants to become, or be more of. In my work alongside community workers I often invite them to investigate their ethical stance, and this is usually met with great humility and some trepidation. I invite practitioners to write an Ethical Stance Paper that I reflect upon, and that we may read to each other or our group in a witnessing practice. The purpose of this Ethical Stance Paper is to generate a rich critique of our individual relationships with ethics, and also to formulate and articulate some of our collective ethics and some of our important ethical differences. One of the questions I use to frame the Ethical Stance Paper is, "What is it about our relational ethics that draws us to this work?" Andrew Larcombe, a practitioner I supervise, responded by saying, "The question is not so much what ethics drew me to the work, but more what is it in the work that draws me to ethics".[50] Andrew's reflection speaks to the recursive nature of relational ethics.

My purpose here is to engage with practices that make public our theory and practice, in relationship with ethics. In our collective work, we often discuss our affinities and differences in relationship to theories and

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[48] Kakkad (2005), pp. 296.

[49] This work of Gramsci's was part of his writings from prison which were originally written in Italian (1971). I have accessed selected writings from *An Antonio Gramsci Reader* (1988). While there are multitudinous readings of Gramsci's work, the interpretation offered here has been informed by Grattan, a Participatory Action Researcher (2008).

[50] Larcombe (2009, personal communication)

practice. Often our ethical engagement is held private, or not invited into the dialogue. In some ways my work is a response to this prioritizing of theory and practice over relational and collective ethics.

I am using the term theory to mean a system of ideas that explain something. Theory can be as dynamic and relational as the engagement with ethics I am describing in this work. Theory can be generative and dynamic and collectively defined. Like an ethical stance, theory can be changed through reflection and revision. Theory that is informed by practice is reflexive, emergent, and active. In Centering Ethics, I do not mean to ignore or reify theory as dead knowledge, but to center an engagement with ethics, which is also a generative part of theorizing.

Contesting Neutrality

In Centering Ethics in community work I am taking a position that contests neutrality. Community work, social work, therapy and counselling share rich and diverse traditions of resisting neutrality, despite the impact and undeniable power neutrality and objectivism still hold in all of our work. There are teachings in every thread of the rich fabric of the helping professions which advocate for workers to take overt stances to challenge the status quo and to address the political issues of our times.[51] Martiniquean Psychiatrist Franz Fanon unmasked the myth of neutrality in psychiatry in his earliest writings, and was part of a tradition of anti-colonial theorists who always addressed the power of the helping professions.[52] Radical/critical social workers have historically advocated practicing in line with the values of resisting neutrality, attending to ethics, holding critiques of helping systems, and working to change the social context of problems.[53] When we centre ethics in our work we are not in new territory, but are weaving ourselves into these rich and divergent histories; although these histories are not always told, taught, or honoured.

American psychologist and historian Philip Cushman invites community workers to take a collective ethical stand that would move even further than resistance to neutrality.[54] Cushman advocates actions beyond naming oppression and deconstructing power.[55] He advocates using the power that we do have in

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[51] I am thinking here of American psychologist/philosopher William James' impactful 1910 article, *The moral equivalent of war* (James, 1995). Of course there would be other divergent and resistant voices making space for James' more privileged voice to be heard, which have been lost to public record, as no one creates these resistance spaces in isolation.

[52] Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist from Martinique who worked in France and fought in the Algerian war of independence. His writings are critical in the formation of anti-colonial and decolonizing theories. As a psychiatrist he wrote specifically of the psychopathology of colonization (1967). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon addresses the psychological impact of torture on Algerians by the colonizing French military forces.

[53] This analysis comes from the writings of Australian social worker, Mark Furlong (2008), and Furlong & Lipp (1995).

[54] This invitation came in the form of a keynote address (2006), entitled *Where do psychotherapy narratives come from? Avoiding the arrogance of monoculturalism and the dead-end of relativism*. I asked Philip for reflections on my engagement with his ideas in which I had written that community workers must "abandon any vestiges of neutrality". He invited me to be more hopeful and open to the other saying, "I'd like to think that what I suggest is possible, given our human imperfections" (personal communication, 2007).

[55] Cushman (2006) critiques Heidegger's work, for being monocultural and ignoring power relations; and Foucault's writings for collapsing all of our work into a reading of power. Cushman critiques both thinkers for being silent in relation to the moral and ethical project of therapy, while honouring their contributions to our work.

our work to take on what he refers to as the moral project of psychotherapy. Offering a critique of practices that do not address or name power is an easier thing to do than to focus the critique inward and look at the work of those of us who make claims to Addressing Power. Cushman, and many justice oriented practitioners, takes the position that Addressing Power is not enough.

If we are to accept Cushman's invitation, and see our work as *doing justice*, we will use our power as community workers to transform the social contexts of oppression. By this I mean work to change the real conditions of people's lives rather than helping them adjust to oppression. We problematize and critique the constructs of neutrality, objectivism, and disengaged professionalism. Deconstructing power and reading power relations is a brilliant contribution to *just* practice, but we also hope to create something new and liberatory: As German philosopher Karl Marx said, the point is not just to interpret the world, but to change it.[56]

The adage private pain/public issue comes from various activist traditions. When I speak of the individualization of injustice and the privatization of pain, I am connecting with these rich histories from both activist and practitioner traditions. In community work, Kiwi Tamasese of the Just Therapy team from New Zealand speaks of "private issues, public problems".[57] Imelda McCarthy, from Ireland's Fifth Province team writes of how "public problems become private and privatized issues" in therapeutic practice.[58] These multiple voices call for an ongoing move to action, to continue the practices of resisting neutrality, and to work for change in the social world where clients and practitioners live.

McCarthy writes,

> "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."[59]

I am accompanied by these practitioners, and we are collectively shouldered up by a rich history of voices legitimizing our activism and contesting neutrality. I have never been neutral about sexual abuse. I have never been neutral about torture. Neutrality is itself a particular political position.[60]

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[56] German philosopher Karl Marx wrote, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" (1994, pp.118).

[57] Charles Waldegrave and Flora Tuhaka of the Just Therapy Team also join in this conversation. I am referencing Kiwi Tamasese as these teachings became clearer to me through multiple and divergent conversations with her during my practicum at the Family Centre in Wellington, New Zealand (1998).

[58] McCarthy (2001), pp. 267.

[59] McCarthy (2001), pp. 271-2.

[60] Peace Psychologists, go further, and write that "feigning neutrality is intellectually dishonest and socially irresponsible" (Winter *et al.*, 2001, pp. 366).

Relational Ethics

While much supervision and training is centered on investigations into theory and practice, for me the center of supervision is the practitioner's relational ethics and how these ethics are revealed in practice.[61] By this I mean the community worker's ethical positioning as they respond to the clients' varying needs within contexts of power. I am curious about what comprises the ethical stance of the practitioner.

I have worked alongside diverse practitioners, including addiction nurses, community workers and psychiatrists, who engage ethically and effectively with diverse models in work with people in marginalized locations. These practitioners' theories range from Rorschach Tests to Narrative Therapy and Motivational Interviewing. I believe that there are many paths to liberation and that no theory or practice is harm free. For me the quest is not to find the perfect intervention, but to examine our ethical positioning for work alongside people struggling in the margins of our communities.

Centering Ethics requires that I invite community workers to bring forward their struggles with ethics, rather than present a *case* or their individual problems. The dialogue around relational ethics may focus on places where the community worker is in accord with their ethics, and invite witnesses to attend to that. It may center on an ethical struggle or struggles, where practitioners are acting in ways that are not in line with their ethics and the resulting tensions.

Spiritual Pain

As a supervisor and trainer, I believe I have been most useful when I have helped community workers practice in ways that are more in accord with their own ethical stance. But social structures and limited resources, which force community workers to work in ways that go against their ethics, can result in spiritual pain.[62] The spiritual pain I am talking about is a full-bodied and palpably undeniable discomfort, which follows when we act in ways that go against the ethics that brought us to this work.

Spiritual pain is exacerbated by the fact that clients suffer some of the consequences of our inconsistency. As workers we cannot personally change or contain the consequences clients suffer. I believe it is important to acknowledge that to a large extent, as practitioners we learn our work on the backs of clients. We can experience this structurally unjust and often silenced situation as unaccountable and unacceptable.

Care of the community worker is at the center of my work, and when a worker is experiencing spiritual pain there is almost a professional imperative for me to move in and smooth over this discomfort. Instead, I see this spiritual pain as a potential resource to the community worker, a knowing-in-the-bones, whose immediacy calls out for an ethical investigation. Why is this spiritual pain present in this moment, in

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[61] Irish therapist Imelda McCarthy of the Fifth Province Team, gives a thorough account of the concept of relational ethics from a view of social construction in *Fifth province re-versings* (2001).

[62] Cloé Madanes is an Argentinean-American strategic therapist. Madanes used this term to name one of her strategic stages for treatment with men who had used sexualized violence against their children (1995). I am using the term in a different context and with a different meaning, but want to acknowledge how I came to this phrasing. When I heard Madanes speak, this phrase moved me, and I was drawn to it in a meaningful, rich and curious way.

work with this person, and in this context? These reflexive questions require an immediate answering from the community worker. Here, attending to spiritual pain and to the ethical investigation it invites, can help community workers move in line with their own ethical stances, with an aim to "do the right thing".

Many of the community workers who I work alongside immediately resonate with this concept of spiritual pain. I believe that spiritual pain is what leads many people to leave our collective community work. Often times, the extremity of pain and oppression suffered by the clients we work alongside, or the ways of being of the clients themselves, are blamed for burning out workers. In my experience, most often it has not been the clients, their ways of being, nor clients' suffering which community workers cannot bear, but our spiritual pain.

Useful Understandings of Shame

Spiritual pain, in the way that I am using it here, is connected to shame. More specifically I am referring to the potential usefulness of shame, practices of holding onto shame, and resisting practices of smoothing over shame. When workers speak with me of moments of shame in their work with people, for example, times when a worker believes they were disrespectful with a client, I often inquire about the meanings of this shame and their relationship with ethics:

> ➔ What might the absence of this shame say about you? Your relationship with ethics?
>
> ➔ What does the presence of this shame, and your resistance to avoiding, ignoring, mitigating, or defending against it, say about your identity as a community worker? What does it say about the ethics you are trying to hold yourself accountable to?

Dorothy Allison is a queer feminist writer who grew up poor in the southern United States. Her autobiographical novel, *Bastard out of Carolina,* outlines the poverty, violence, love and exploitation of her youth.[63] Allison writes of a childhood incident in which her stepfather made a racist remark against a Jewish shopkeeper. The shopkeeper heard the remark, and Dorothy and her sisters were implicated.

> "Heat flamed in my neck and I wanted to apologize -- to tell him we were not like our stepfather -- but I could do nothing. I couldn't speak a word to him in front of my stepfather, and if I had, why would he have believed me? Remember this, I thought. Don't go deaf and blind to what this feels like, remember it."[64]

In this account, what stands out is Allison's desire to attend to this shame, and to think of herself in her position of privilege, when she could easily be seduced into attending to the oppression present in her life by abdicating responsibility for the injury to the shopkeeper. Her commitment to re-membering this feeling is in line with my desire to invite workers to participate with shame in these enabling ways. [65]

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[63] Allison (1992)

[64] Allison (1994), pp. 11.

[65] I have been influenced by Jenkins' work with both inviting responsibility and ideas of enabling shame. I am particularly informed by close studies of his therapeutic conversations (1990, 2006).

Thomas King is a professor of Native Literature who self identifies as "of Native descent". He tells a story that I connect to Allison's, about holding onto a racist cartoon which denigrates people of Native and Jewish descent. A white openly racist colleague gave him the cartoon. The purpose of keeping this cartoon in his possession is so that, "You don't have to wonder if you're being too sensitive [about oppression]. I still have it. Just in case I forget".[66] In this way King holds onto his colleague's absence of shame in a way that is of use to King in his ongoing resistance to claims that he is misreading experiences of racism.

Despite discomfort, I encourage community workers to engage as fully as possible with spiritual pain, feel it and hold it near. In my work alongside practitioners I resist opportunities to centre my role as the problem solver. Instead I get curious about the ways spiritual pain speaks to us of our ethics. I encourage community workers to smell it coming, welcome it, and respond in line with our collective ethics.

Collective Ethics

The collective ethics that I am talking about are those important points of connection that weave us together as community workers. In most of our work these collective ethics go unnamed, but they are the basis for the solidarity that brought us together and can hold us together. I have found it useful to map out collective ethics with a group, in order to create shared meanings of words, and invite a collective commitment to these ethics. Without this *outing* of ethics a collective ethic may operate tacitly. Naming collectively held ethics can invite rich critique, and clearer agreements.

As community workers we do not have to create perfect collective ethics, as points of departure and distinctions in our ethical positioning can also offer broader possibilities. In rare times when the holding of our personal ethics is irreconcilable with positions of collective ethics, we need to consider moving to a different location of the work where there is enough-harmony between our personal and collective ethics. I acknowledge that this is never easy or neutral in terms of the politics of paid work.

Differentiating Opinions and Judgments

The center of our collective ethics is some commitment to the idea that justice is important, and that our work is not neutral. While there is room for people to have differences in values and ethics, and to struggle alongside each other with that, opinions that side with hate are not a fit. For example, if a practitioner has an opinion that Jehovah Witnesses are immoral because of their religious practices, and the worker refuses to engage with "those people", then the worker is outside of any collective ethics. Collective ethics shine a light that exposes and contests the idea that as practitioners we can claim opinions as sacred and individual rights.

Opinions, like preferences, do not require justification. Opinions are however, different than judgments. Moral relativism dictates that people are entitled to their judgments. This is ethically problematic because these judgments are connected to power relations. We are entitled to our opinion that no one should make garlic ice cream. But when we think no one should be queer, that is a matter of judgment – not opinion. Judgments require scrutiny, whereas opinion or preference requires no substantial backup.

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[66] King (2003), pp. 53.

Canadian ethicist Claudia Ruitenburg suggests pluralism is a more useful stance than relativism in differentiating opinion from judgment.[67] Pluralism allows for multiple possible positions to be taken. However, advocating pluralism does not mean that all values are legitimate and of equal merit.

> "What matters in pluralism… is that an ongoing conversation between the boundaries of the moral is maintained, and that this conversation meets certain criteria, perhaps most importantly that the interlocutors understand the difference between preferences and judgments, that they provide reasons for their judgments, and that all judgments and reasons are open to interrogation by others."[68]

Discerning pluralism from relativism invites an inquiry into the practitioner's ethical stance and is a useful strategy for Centering Ethics.

Being Public

Community work that aspires to *doing justice* makes claims to being client centered, centering the needs of the client over the needs of the community workers. In my work alongside practitioners we continually reflect on how our work is being held to account to the clients we work to serve. I often speak of this in terms of tracking vulnerability, and in all situations looking for a reading of power that makes known who is at risk in the interaction. For example, I recently facilitated a consultation with a family counselling team that works with families in extreme poverty. There were five counsellors present, and so I made public my hope that this meeting would serve families in a way that was commensurate with ten hours of counselling time. If we did not collectively believe this ten hours was spent ethically in a way that was of use to clients we would not have met. Making this public invited all of us to share the responsibility to make the work of use and to hold ourselves accountable to the families we serve.

American collaborative therapist Harlene Anderson offers the language and practice of being public in response to her useful critique of the term transparency.[69] Transparency makes a claim that our work is see-through and this is not possible. The onus is on me to make my work public. It is my obligation to show, not the client's obligation to see. When we make our work public we invite a richer critique, which invites accountability.

A Hermeneutics of Suspicion

I am interested in helping workers practice in accord with their ethics. It is in the doing that ethics are revealed and made public. Theory, the ideas that support our work, is revealed through an examination of practice, or what we do. Both theory and practice are in relationships with our ethical stances. This inquiry into the relationship of our ethical positioning with our theories and practice is informed by Norwegian qualitative researcher Steinar Kvale's "hermeneutics of suspicion", where claims are held in

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[67] Ruitenburg (2007)

[68] Ruitenburg (2007), pp. 55.

[69] Anderson (2008), pp. 16.

abeyance until the practice can be shown to reveal the theory.[70] Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation which resists authoritative truths, and engages with multiple meanings from different voices. With this phrase Kvale invites us to take a critical distance from the claims to ethics we make, and invite a hopeful yet skeptical position, open to the possibility that our practice may reveal something other than our intention. Kvale's use of a hermeneutics of suspicion has proven a useful practice for me in my work alongside community workers, as it invites us to problematize claims to particular sets of ethics. With a complex analysis we investigate our work to reveal the performance of ethics.

Continually examining our practice in relation to our preferred ethical positioning with this hermeneutics of suspicion offers a way to hold ourselves to account. This tenuous and specific knowing that we are working in accord with our ethical position in some moments which we make public with each other, can promote our sustainability both individually and collectively.

Part of my own ethical positioning is to honour the ethics of the worker at the center, and de-center my own ethics. I do not want to replicate dominance or abuse my access to power. This is of course messy business, as my relationship with ethics and the worker's relationship with ethics will have important points of connection and departure. I have found a quote of Foucault's useful in terms of helping me find a position that is fluid, not neutral, not denying my own influence or power, and yet not centering my own ethical position in my work alongside community workers:

> "The work of the intellectual is not to mold the political will of others; it is, through the analysis that he [sic] does in his own field, to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake the habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions and... to participate in the formation of a political will (where he has his role as a citizen to play)."[71]

Summary
The Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics invites a philosophical investigation into community workers' rich, diverse, problematic and messy relationships with ethics. It invites workers to make public their own ethical stance. We also find important points of connection, making room for our emergent collective ethics to become available to us and direct our work towards *doing justice*.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics: A Wave of Heat

> *Surrounded by a sea of vibrant Tibetan flags I deliver an address critiquing the human rights record of the People's Republic of China. Other speakers, many of them Tibetans, speak of the illegal occupation of Tibet by China; I am there to speak to the death penalty issue, in particular, as it relates to forced organ donation*

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[70] Kvale (1996, pp. 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, pp. 312).

[71] I acknowledge my former student, Dina Aquila, for kindly sending this quote to me. This held meaning for me because Dina acknowledged that we had created ways for her to have her own ethical investigation in our work together, and still be accompanied in solidarity with me (Foucault, 1994).

of death row inmates. I have been accompanied in this pro-Tibetan rally by my ally Sid, who is a Chinese Canadian and a longtime activist for social justice. Following my speech, which is succinct, powerful, and sorrowful, there is warm applause. I feel an affinity with everyone – as if I have something of use to share, and that change is possible. I move from the microphone and join the crowd, reach down and grab a sign that says "Free Tibet" and tune in to the next speaker.

After the rally Sid approaches me, thanks me for my words, and asks me if he can tell me something. There's an awkward connection between us. I have an immediate bodily sensation that is unbalanced, and I walk to the side with him and say "yeah, please fill me in". He lets me know that when I was speaking of the human rights violations of the People's Republic of China I only used the words "China" and "Chinese". For Sid that meant that he was implicated in these human rights violations because of his ethnicity. I had collapsed important discernments in my speaking. I had denigrated every Chinese person, including the Chinese people who are on death row and whose organs are being harvested; and also the Chinese allies who were present to protest actions of the Chinese government. A wave of heat accompanied this enabling shame. I thank Sid for this, let him know that I will be accountable and attend to differentiating the Chinese government from Chinese people in my future human rights work. I apologize for the pain I caused him, and name that I have been racist. (Racism against Chinese people is something I get caught up in living where I do in Vancouver, where it passes easily in polite Canadian society). Sid immediately put aside our conversation as it was time to go back to work. He said, not unkindly, but pragmatically, "we just need to be able to work together; we need you in this movement. I just wanted you to know." We walk apart to do what has to be done next. Sid begins to pack up pamphlets, I start collecting scattered signs. [72]

I hold on to this learning as a gift from my fellow activist who has been racialized and marginalized. I welcome this enabling shame, a shame which speaks to a knowing of the difference of right and wrong.[73]

This event occurred over a decade ago, and Sid and I continue to work in a less than perfect and mutually respectful spirit of solidarity.

B. Doing Solidarity

This writing describes the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity. Like a rhizome, all of the Guiding Intentions are interconnected by commitments to promoting solidarity and all of them are shored up by the presence of solidarity. For these reasons it is difficult to isolate Doing Solidarity from any of the other Guiding Intentions.

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[72] Sid Chow Tan has chosen to use his name in this re-telling, and his collaboration in this writing has made it more useful.

[73] Allan Wade credits his ideas about shame as an act of resistance to a client, Anna. She claimed that her shame was an act of resistance. Allan asked her how that was possible. Anna said that her abusers don't know the difference between right and wrong, but that her shame was evidence that she still did (personal communication, 2009).

In the context of community work, I understand the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity as taking actions informed by understandings that our liberation, our ways forward towards something *just*, are interdependent and woven together. I was inspired by my participation in activist movements to bring a spirit of solidarity to my community work where I experienced profound pain at the absence of solidarity. Community workers are often pitted against each other when we work in contexts where injustice does not allow basic needs of clients to be met. Solidarity invites us to collectively resist the metaphor of crabs crawling over each other to get out of the bucket.[74] Instead of accepting a culture of competition, Doing Soilidarity invites us to see the dignity and ethics of other workers, and the interconnectedness of our struggles and successes, and offers a sustainable path forward together. Doing Solidarity also invites workers to be in solidarity with clients, as too often situations that lack solidarity negatively impact clients.

Relational Understandings of Solidarity

Freire teaches that solidarity is the "wheel" that drives our collective work. "Solidarity does not only imply denouncing the process of dehumanization, but also announcing the dream of a new society".[75] Solidarity speaks to the interconnectedness of our struggles towards social justice, and the strength, hope, and sustainability that can come from solidarity inspired, and relational ways of holding ourselves together.

Profoundly relational understandings of solidarity have been credited to different Indigenous Elders for multiple re-tellings of this adage: "if you are here to save me you can leave now — but if your liberation is tied up with mine, you are welcome at my fire".[76] I heard a re-telling of this wisdom when I was involved in an action against uranium mining in Kakadu, Australia. There were few non-Aboriginal folks present, and the Aboriginal elder who was opening the event used a re-telling of this phrase. Was I there for her, for me, or for us? I did not participate in this land rights action *for* Aboriginal people, but rather because my life and my relational ethics are inextricably linked in solidarity with these struggles. I live on land that is unceded territory of different Indigenous nations: Different people, same issue. Other ethical

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[74] This metaphor of crabs crawling over each other to get out of the bucket is popular in anti-oppression work. I came to this metaphor in my supervisory work alongside the women of WAVAW, (Women against Violence against Women).

[75] Freire (2001)

[76] Walker cited in Sinclair (n.d.)

commitments I hold for sustainable environmentalism and against war prompted me to take a position against the mining of uranium, a product directly connected to the weaponry of warfare and imperialism. The threads of these particular complexities woven together connect me and this Aboriginal Elder in solidarity.

Zapatista Teachings on Solidarity

My own hopeful relationship with solidarity is amplified by the Zapatista movement of Chiapas, Mexico, which has also brought an expansive understanding of solidarity to a generation of activists.[77] The Zapatistas take their name from Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata who was a leader of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. The Zapatista movement identifies as an indigenous movement, and they have declared war on the global corporate powers which they say rule Mexico. In their analysis, the architects of neo-liberalism have judged Indigenous and poor people as no longer relevant, essentially declaring war on the poor. Their irrelevance in the economic world is particularly violent as it sentences them to lives of extreme poverty, denies their participation in civil society, and subjects them to environmental devastation. The emergence of the Zapatista movement is a resistance to their disappearance.

The Zapatista movement is very particular to the Indigenous people in Chiapas, but they see themselves as connected to communities and peoples involved in all struggles for social and economic justice. Zapatistas call "we are you", and global justice activists respond "I am Zapatista".[78] This is the doing of solidarity.

A major spokesperson for the Zapatista movement is Subcomandante Marcos. He illuminates solidarity, which is the wheel driving the Zapatista movement, when he identifies himself in these diverse and connected ways:

> "Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Québec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10:00 P.M., a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, and of course a Zapatista in the mountains".[79]

Affinities: Points of Connection

Pre-existing solidarity and points of unity are present in our community work alongside people living in the margins of our societies. I work to bring these relationships of solidarity to the surface and to strengthen and multiply them. I am always looking for points of connection and what Richard Day, a Canadian anarchist theorist, writes about as "affinities".[80] Affinities are those moments, those points of connection, where we meet each other and something occurs that is transformative and in line with our collective ethics. Affinities are a part of social change in line with social justice.

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[77] Zapatistas also refer to themselves as Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

[78] Big Noise Films (1998)

[79] Subcomandante Marcos (2002), pp. 116.

[80] Day (2004), pp. 716.

I experienced an affinity during the March Against Homelessness, which took place in April 2009. The march started in three different parts of Vancouver. People collected and marched towards each other, merged and collectively arrived at a site for a rally. I was alongside the people of the Downtown Eastside, walking with some guys pushing shopping carts, smoking cigarettes, and drinking from bottles wrapped in paper bags. Three First Nations women safety-pinned a piece of cloth to my back that said "Homes not Games", contesting the billions of dollars going into the 2010 Olympic Games. We were a spirited and skeptical crew. A homeless man with stringy hair, who was walking beside me, was making up his own responses to chants that had us laughing alongside and enjoying his wit. As we came up an incline of the street we could see the people from the West side coming towards us. No shopping carts or jerry-rigged wheelchairs, but lots of all-terrain baby strollers and expensive raincoats. It was the convergence of two very different communities. The guy beside me stopped walking. He looked at me and through a genuinely surprised smile said,   "They're here for us". I was elated. I was moved. My body felt expansive. I felt connected to him. I could exhale again with some dignity about membership in the communities of my city. This relational moment, between me, and this man, connecting with all of the West End marchers, was an affinity.[81] Our differences were back-grounded, not invisibilized: our connections of solidarity fore-grounded.

In describing her desire for solidarity, American feminist and democratic socialist Barbara Ehrenreich says, "I am talking about a kind of experience that can unite people who don't even know each other, and that can happen in demonstrations".[82] This kind of experience is different from that of a group of fans, although that can also be very powerful. The kind of connection I am talking about as solidarity has specificity in terms of an ethic of social justice. This connection is related to our collectively held and relational ethics. I embrace a solidarity metaphor as it speaks to my hope that we can work, both as activists and community workers, in communion with each other. Solidarity speaks to a hoped-for-connection, and a social poetics of being held up collectively. [83] In relationships of solidarity we experience ourselves as alongside others, and having those others connected with us by shared ethical responsibilities.

There has been a problematic history of some ways of doing charity in the roots of community work, and these practices are at odds with a spirit of solidarity. Paul Taylor, a Downtown Eastside anti-poverty activist offers this description of charity: "in an exploitative society, a well to do person or institution gives donations to selected poor people in a humiliating manner while using philanthropic slogans, in order to conceal the necessity of radical social change".[84] This describes helping relationships which do not create the conditions for solidarity to be enacted. Freire addresses related concerns by saying that

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[81] Mary Lou Shack, a Gestalt therapist from Philadelphia, spoke to me of "moments of mutuality". She thought about these points of connection as I spoke of affinities. I found her language compelling (personal communication, 2006).

[82] Ehrenreich (1998), p. 27.

[83] Katz & Shotter (2004). The role of social poetics is considered more expansively as part of the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language.

[84] Taylor (2005)

> "Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform. Only through such praxis, in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously, can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped".[85]

When we work in solidarity with people we are also open to being helped as Freire says, or we risk enacting charity in our work. Charity can be an obstacle to the possibility of relationships of dignity between community workers and clients.

Dignity

Dignity is inextricably linked with solidarity. To be in solidarity requires relating in ways which dignify the other. Canadian response based therapist Allan Wade says,

> "Dignity encompasses so many heartfelt aspects of human conduct and experience. It concerns the most basic, everyday, ever-present concerns in social interaction and is arguably even more important when it comes to working for folks who are oppressed and socially marginalized. It is completely interactional – not something a person can claim by themselves, so to speak, but socially accorded through interaction. The theme of resistance to violence/oppression can be seen as a subset of the larger issue of how people accord dignity to one another, repair relationships when it is affronted in ordinary ways, and preserve it when it is violated in more extreme ways."[86]

The ways Wade speaks of according and doing dignity fit with my understandings of solidarity in action.

Dignity is also afforded to people when they are given the power to define themselves. America Bracho is a medical doctor who works with Latino Health Access, and describes it as an Institute of Community Participation. This project addresses community work with impoverished and sometimes undocumented Latinos who struggle with homelessness, and inadequate health care in Santa Ana, California. One of their principles of practice is allowing people to define themselves, and refusing to generalize.[87]

Discerning Difference and Division

Solidarity is not synonymous with unity. Bracho says, "Unity in a community is never going to be generalized. It will occur only around certain issues. We do not seek to unify the community in any general way. We do however seek to find and build a sense of common ground on particular issues."[88] She speaks about the inability even for people in a small village in Mexico to be united on any issue, and the basically racist assumption that Latinos in the United States should be united on most issues. While holding onto a common ground on particular issues and declining unity, workers at Latino Health Access also work purposefully to decline invitations for division. Doing Solidarity requires discernment between division and difference. The point is not to achieve unity by smoothing off the edges of all differences, but

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[85] Freire (1978), pp. 8.

[86] Wade (personal communication, 2008)

[87] Bracho(2000)

[88] Bracho (2000), pp. 2.

to find points of connection in relationships that bring forward an "intimacy that does not annihilate difference".[89]

I caution myself against judging communities of activists as not working in solidarity because they don't join directly and visibly in struggles of the other. When communities are under direct attack, struggle is constant. I can choose to be in solidarity with other communities when my own are not under severe threat.

Intersecting Oppressions. Uniting Resistance

As social justice activists, it is not useful to look for perfect solidarity, or a fixed, concretized model of social change we sign in blood with each other. Naming the solidarity that exists amidst the multiplicity of responses and resistances against global neo-liberalism the Zapatistas say "many yeses, one no".[90] No One Is Illegal (NOII) is an activist group who defend undocumented persons and refugees primarily from the global south whose claims to refuge in the global north are denied. In a spirit of solidarity they work with other groups attending to "Intersecting oppressions. Uniting resistance."[91] Struggles over perfect ethical engagement can lead to the loss of small but important changes, and can relocate the site of struggle from changing society to debating theory for its own sake. Sometimes these debates create false dichotomies, separate out, create otherness, conform to a hierarchy of virtue, and are a barrier to solidarity.

Resisting these debate styles of relationship engenders a search for points of connection. The most inspiring example of these points of connection for me came from some strategies of anti-death penalty work I was involved with in California. A fellow activist, Magdaleno Rose-Avela, head of Amnesty International USA West, suggested that as I am Catholic, I should contact the "right to life" community. I made a counterclaim to him. Happily we were both able to temporarily get outside of our struggles against the governance of our church, and connect with a community of people who were radically against the death penalty, although they differed with us very much on issues of choice and abortion. These conversations and alliances are connected to the work of Sallyann Roth and her colleagues at the Public Conversations Project in Boston.[92] This "right to life community" had never been contacted by the "death penalty community": they had never been invited to show their solidarity on this issue. The presence of these folks caused many of *us* to be more careful in our languaging of *them* as other. That was a beautiful moment of affinity for me, and it opened my life to the possibility of another other who may be in solidarity with me where I'd previously been unable to imagine these possibilities.[93]

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[89]Palmer (2003), pp. 49.

[90] Big Noise Films (1998)

[91] No One Is Illegal (n.d.)

[92] I name Sallyann Roth specifically because I trained with her during this period and her approach to dialogue resourced me in my anti-death penalty work (Chasin *et al.*, 1996; Roth *et al.*,1992). Also see the Public Conversations Project website.

[93]Following this solidarity based community building, the priest of the Catholic Church in Berkeley, who was a liberation theologian, invited me to give the homily on the Death Penalty at a Mass. This was an unexpected development, and not how I'd imagined my return to a Catholic Church.

Threads of the influence of the Public Conversations Project are also present in death penalty abolitionist work that brings together murder victims families and execution victim families. This work creates solidarity by accentuating the points of connection everyone experiences. Everyone has suffered the unnecessary deaths of healthy children, brothers, fathers, and uncles, whether the death comes from enforcement of the law or breaking of the law. These experiences feed my hope, and inform a useful assumption I hold close: There is always more solidarity than we know of.[94]

In Ecofeminism, Indian feminist physicist, Vandana Shiva, and Maria Mies, a German feminist scholar, weave together feminism, activism and environmentalism.[95] This positioning of environmentalism as activism had an impact on me, as it helped me begin to draw connections between social movements and see the intersection and solidarity of multiple paths towards global justice. Prior to this learning I had been part of perpetrating the rifts between environmentalists and political activists, seeing them as separate, individual and competing projects. This separation dissipated entirely for me when I worked alongside a survivor of torture from Nigeria, whose activism was environmentalism. After working alongside this activist/environmentalist I could never again entirely separate one from the other. It is fabulous that fifteen years later, this division needs to be explained. This has me wondering in this moment what other divisions and barriers are keeping us from seeing who is in solidarity with us.

As community workers we can experience our work as very individual, which brings with it continual invitations to division. We are separated off into disciplines for good reasons including certification, accreditation and scope of practice. The separation between our working disciplines and ourselves as professionals is, however, of our own making, not the making of clients, and does not always serve them or us. Invitations to division abound in our community work, and we can be seduced into judging other workers, their positions, and their professions. In contexts of adversity, the point is not to figure out which community worker to blame, but how to help clients and change the social contexts that support problems. Our greatest resources for doing that are each other. Doing Solidarity invites community workers to be alongside each other because we need each other, and because it doesn't serve clients for us to be divided off. When we insult a position, there is a person in that position.

As drug and alcohol counsellors, nurses, and detox workers we rely on mental health workers and physicians to be the ones to commit clients. It is these workers who are put in the position of individually using their power and taking the responsibility for removing someone's autonomy, and committing them to institutions. This grave responsibility should fall on society collectively, yet it falls on individual workers. Those of us who do not have to make these choices, or use this power, can sit in judgment and keep our hands clean of this less than innocent work, which one mental health worker spoke to me of as "heart breaking". Sometimes, our collective social response to clients being committed holds individual workers to account for the lack of dignified social solutions. As if the power of choice was the individual worker's in a very personal way. Where is our duty to create more *just* options for people, when we limit our duty to judging the workers we deem responsible? This is the kind of injurious division that solidarity

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[94] Here I am thinking of the work of the organization, *Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation.*

[95] Shiva & Mies (1993)

can transform. Freire teaches that solidarity goes beyond naming oppressions and oppressors, and "implies the transformation of oneself, institutions, and the world".[96]

Community-making

Activist based understandings of community invite me to locate my work in a position-within-community, of collective community, which is very different than coming "from community" or "supported by community". I describe my work alongside community workers as communalizing dialogues or community-making dialogues, meaning that there is a construction of community that occurs in the ways we are connecting in solidarity.

Often we are constructing temporary community together, communities which will exist as long as we hold ourselves in dialogues held up by a spirit of solidarity. The community may last as long as the conversation, or may be brought forward in different ways. Much as I do not look for perfect solidarity, I am also very interested in imperfect community, fluid understandings of community, and the intentional temporary community of a campfire.[97]

Activists have created community in fluid ways to respond to the collective ethics and purposes that connect them in solidarity. Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome has been eagerly picked up by activist communities because it offers a map for the fluid construction of communities and networks. Activist networks can be thought of as "a web of connections and affiliations with diverse interconnected nonhierarchical links between those in the network... a rhizome is not divisible and has multiple entryways, just as an activist network has, with entrance points such as friendship groups, the Internet, and zines."[98] Rhizome-like networks welcome activist to meet in community through many channels. People see flyers, people are handed zines (autonomously hand published magazines), people are connected by electronic list serves, and other points of connection. People decide for themselves how they will participate, which actions they choose to be part of, their level of engagement and commitment, and who they will invite into the network. These networked communities are based on affinities, collective ethics, and some imperfectly shared agreements on actions to bring about the changes people are willing to work towards.

The work of American anarchist theorist Hakim Bey has also informed my understandings of community. I am particularly interested in his articulation of the temporary autonomous zone, which he calls TAZ.[99] An example of TAZ is "Car Free Sunday" on Commercial Drive in my neighborhood in East Vancouver. Originally groups of community activists began to play street hockey on a major road in order to limit car traffic, only allowing public transit to pass. This is an example of TAZ, as the goal was not to win the street, or break up the concrete and plant trees. TAZ exists outside of the binary of winning and losing, and celebrates the moments that are car-free and the spirited community of a street hockey game.

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[96] Freire (2001)

[97] Samuel R. Delaney, who identifies as a Black and Queer author, offers this analogy (1999).

[98] Fine (2005), pp. 290.

[99] Bey (1985) is a psedonym of Peter Wilson.

When the game is over the street returns to car traffic. This intentionally impermanent community is no less real for existing only the duration of a street hockey game.

As activists we have also created temporary communities as acts of resistance to the walls and fences put up around the sites of meetings of neo-liberal globalization meetings such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the G-8. While activists are locked out and guarded by heavy security and military action, we create "spaces of inclusion"[100] in direct response to our exclusion in these meetings of global power holders. "Activists create spaces of juxtaposition, in which diversity and inclusion are fostered... These spaces of justice are temporary expressions of what global anti-capital activists are striving towards... expressions of the social divine, a sense of being together in self-directed and shaped environment."[101] My experiences of participating in the spontaneous co-creation of these "deliberately forged spaces"[102] accompany me in my work alongside community workers.

Cultural Connections to Doing Solidarity

Understandings of culture are connected with solidarity in my work with community workers, and are expansive and intentional. By culture, I mean preferred sites of belonging in the connections people have co-constructed socially, across time. While ethnic heritage is an aspect of culture, it is not the only site.[103]

In our community work much of what qualifies us to be of use comes from teachings from our cultures. When I ask community workers what qualifies them for this work, they usually begin by telling me what academic credentials they hold and from which institutions. These taken-for-granted practices erase the rich teachings and knowings that come from our sites of belonging, which include our families, communities and cultures. Historicizing these qualities enhances our solidarity by making public the points of connection between our rich cultural knowings and our community work.[104]

Solidarity exists as something outside of individualism, and is not anything people can do alone. It is relational. Albert Wendt, a Samoan author, describes the importance of relationship in his culture:

> "Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Va or Wa in Maori and Japanese. Va is the
> space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates,
> that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context,
> giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. (We knew
> a little about semiotics before Saussure came along!) A well-known Samoan expression is 'Ia teu le va.'
> Cherish/nurse/care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group,

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[100] Lacey (2005b), pp. 404.

[101] Lacey (2005b), pp. 404.

[102] Lacey (2005b), pp.407.

[103] These ideas and practices are written about more expansively in the article *Weaving threads of belonging: Cultural Witnessing Groups*, (Reynolds, 2002). My understandings of the role of culture in wellness owe much to Métis response based therapist, Cathy Richardson, who writes beautifully about culture as a site of both belonging and healing. Of particular importance is her article entitled *Métis identity and tactical responses to oppression and racism* (2005A). Richardson & Nelson (2007), Richardson (2005b).

[104] See the appendix, *Honouring Ourselves in our Community Work* for an experiential exercise I use to honour the qualities, ways of being, and teachings from our cultural sites of belonging which qualify us for our community work.

> unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships."[105]

This description of relational meaning resonates with me, although I don't share Wendt's cultural background. It invites me to keep my value of community at the centre, especially when I'm inundated with messages and practices that promote individualism at almost any cost.

Contesting Individualism

Individualism can serve to invisibilize interdependence, communal action and belonging, all of which can promote solidarity in our community work. Individualism elevates personal autonomy, separation, independence, and a host of selfs; self-esteem, self-soothing, self-control, self-care, self-worth. Cushman speaks of the construction of the "empty self"[106] which he describes as an "embodied sense of absence".[107]

> "In the last 400 years in Western society, the self, overtime, has been constructed as empty in part due to individualism's and capitalism's relentless attack on family, community, and tradition. The post-WWII empty self seeks the experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to calm the ever-present emptiness."[108]

Individualism denies the complexity of human experiences which occur between people. The structural inequities, such as poverty and racism, that impact the lives of clients and community workers become constructed as the personal problems of individuals. The construct of the individual denies the communalism and collectivity[109] of cultures, and is presented as an undeniable truth, when in fact; it is a product of statistics.[110] "The autonomous individual has sprung forth from our labs, clinical couches and academic armchairs, amputated from social relations, history and context".[111]

Ken Gergen, an American social construction theorist, critiques the practice of therapy for constructing experiences, even group ones, in ways that individualize the meaning of events. Gergen says therapists can participate in the "interiorizing" of experience, and construct people individually and not relationally.[112] These individual oriented practices are a barrier to building solidarity. As well, individualism serves many purposes, none of them neutral, in terms of maintaining the status quo of unjust societies. Addressing the specific problems of individuals in isolation denies the commonality of social injustices, and can lead to

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[105] Wendt, A. (1996), pp. 15.

[106] Cushman (1995)

[107] Cushman (2006), pp. 3.

[108] Cushman (2006), pp. 4.

[109] My goal is not simplistically to remove rampant individualism and replace it with the pure construct of collectivity. Collectivity can also serve to deny the complexity of human experiences, and is not above critique.

[110] Danzinger (1990)

[111] Fine (2006), pp. 90.

[112] Gergen (1989)

invisiblizing issues of power, justice and ethics. [113] For example, addressing a client's issues with alcohol in narrow ways that don't name the unjust contexts in which they live denies the impact of power and oppression in the person's suffering.

Individualism poses huge threats to solidarity by mystifying and invisiblizing inherently collective movements which have achieved some measures of social justice. I refer to this as the cult of the great individual. For example, civil rights leader Martin Luther King is not the civil rights movement, nor would he ever want to be or purport to be. Canadian anarchist poet, Ryan Murphy, describes this process as destroying movements through metonymy.[114] The reductionist tactic of using non-violence resistance leader Mahatma Ghandi to stand in metonymically for Indian Independence obscures much. Practices of propping up one individual at the cost of acknowledging broad based social movements are not just wrong because they're unfair. They're questionable ethically because they leave one fallible person to hold a space that takes a movement to fill. The attacks on the moral character of King, for example, work as attacks aimed at the successes of the civil rights movement as a whole. One man is easy to take down as no one is infallible. The question most worthy of public debate is not King's morality, but the rights of Black people as citizens. Capitalist society, which reveres the autonomous self, makes meaning of social change when it is credited to an identified leader. Solidarity is strengthened when we realize that social change is not a result of individualized identities and the qualities of charismatic leaders. Social change comes collectively.

For the most part, the media decides who the individual leaders of social movements will be because those are the people whose voices are amplified. As activists we may participate in these individualizing practices as resistance tactics in order to have our collective needs heard. In a community event in which I was working alongside Korean, Taiwanese, Tibetan, Filipino, and Chinese activists, I was chosen by the media as the person to be interviewed. Collectively, we had anticipated this, and strategized about how we would respond in solidarity. We decided that all of the speakers would crowd the camera, and that I would invite the voices of others spontaneously. It made sense to all of us that, because of my Canadian-born accent and white skin, I would be evaluated as a more legitimate spokesperson by members of the media. Racism and individualism were both employed to elevate me above my peers. Strategically, we did succeed in having our issues amplified by the media even though the camera did an extreme close-up of me to eliminate the faces of all of the allies I was in solidarity with.

A Witnessing Stance
Doing Solidarity invites practices of witnessing in community work. The term witnessing has multiple meanings in diverse domains including legal and religious contexts. Witnessing is also used in the fields of medicine and psychology, with diverse definitions and purposes.[115] There are many threads of Doing

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[113] McCarthy (2001), pp. 257.

[114] Murphy (2004)

[115] For an investigation into the diversity of witnessing descriptions in relation to medical and psychological fields see Canadian therapist Patrice Keats' article (2005). Keats outlines this history and offers what she calls "Vicarious Witnessing".

Solidarity and witnessing work in the narrative and collaborative therapy communities which I highlight below.

American Bill Madsen works alongside what he refers to as multi-stressed families. Madsen names his relational stance as that of an "appreciative ally".[116] Madsen says that "this could be described as standing in solidarity with clients". Collaborative family therapist Lynn Hoffman writes of "withness"[117] ways of working with people which are both communal and collective.

American narrative therapist Vicki Dickerson offers a practice she calls "seeking allies", in which "young women can create a community of support and a cadre of witnesses".[118] Dickerson honours the influence of Australian narrative therapist Michael White's Outsider Witnessing Groups in her work.[119] White has referred to his work as witnessing.[120] Makungu Akinyela, who is connected within the narrative community, describes his work as African centered family therapy. Akinyela writes of his practice as testimony work, which honours the use of metaphor, elevates oral over literal traditions, and affirms the role of culture in relational work.[121]

Although the term witnessing comes from diverse cultural, spiritual and religious traditions, I connect my engagement with witnessing practices to activist cultures, human rights defenders, and new social movements. In activist culture, the presence of the witness can be a resistance against human rights violations and the political repression of voices of dissent. Witnessing is a performance of solidarity with the intent to hold governments and corporate powers accountable for abuses of power and to bring to justice the individuals who perpetrate and benefit from political oppression. Where activists have been murdered, witnesses refuse to accept disappearances and call for justice and accountability. The presence of an international activist community is a profound act of faith in the power of witnessing. These teachings of solidarity from activist culture have informed my engagements with witnessing work. A witnessing stance aims to open our community work in hope-filled and *just* directions and configures helping relationships as sites of belonging that can promote connections of solidarity.

My hope in using a witnessing metaphor is to bridge the worlds of community work and activism. Witnessing conversations move between private pain and public issue with an aim to draw connections and make visible that which oppresses invisibly and passes for normal. A commitment to the practices of witnessing in activist cultures is tied to the responsibility and duty of the witness to move beyond the hearing of individual pain to a collective "response-ability"[122] to take action against injustices. What I am talking about as witnessing cannot occur without relationships of solidarity. It is inherently communal, and can't exist individually. Witnessing as I am using it from activist cultures exists in relationships of

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[116] Madsen (2007), pp. 23.

[117] Hoffman (2007)

[118] Dickerson (2004)

[119] White, (1999)

[120] White (2007)

[121] Akinyela (2004)

[122] Wade (personal communication, 2007)

solidarity, meaning shared ethics, a stance that is overtly for justice and encompasses the duty of the witness to respond with action.

Positioning myself as a witness has profound ethical and practical implications for the work. It requires a stance that contests neutrality and engages with an accountably to power. The desperate lack of resources, safety and hope which is where clients live and we work, is very much the stuff of our struggles. The community worker is not an audience to this person's individual struggle, a positioning which could invite practices of judging, diagnosing, educating, explaining, encouraging, applauding.[123] An audience position is outside of, looking in on performance.

My practice of interrupting audience positions is informed by German playwright Bertolt Brecht's use of what he referred to as the "alienation effect".[124] Brecht wanted to interrupt the audience feeling collapsed onto, or subsumed by the characters. He used the alienation or distancing effect to do this, sometimes showing all of the behind-the-scenes action, by removing curtains and showing the work of the stage crew. Brecht purposefully brought down the fourth wall separating audience and actor. He wanted the audience to understand his characters' dilemmas and the social contexts of injustice behind the drama. Brecht, a committed Marxist, began creating theater in the 1920s with an aim to use theater as a forum to explore political ideas. His hope was not to entertain, but to encourage theatergoers to develop a political understanding of the contexts of social injustice. Brecht believed in the possibility of theater to inspire what I would call witnesses to change the world both socially and politically.[125]

Discerning positions of witnessing from audience positions is important. It is not just that a position of audience does not invite accountability, but also the fact that being positioned as an audience promotes the uncontested stance of the audience member as passive, innocent, and powerless. American film maker and literary theorist Susan Sontag offers a critique of viewing representations such as photographs of suffering, and challenges the neutrality of this audience position:

> "The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferers — seen close-up on the television screen — and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all good intentions) an impertinent — if not an inappropriate — response. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering and may — in ways we might prefer not to imagine — be linked to their suffering, as the

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[123] White (1999)

[124] Willett (1964)

[125] Connected to the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity, Brecht's method was profoundly collaborative. His theatrical style is described as *Brechtian*, and informed critiques of his work accentuate the importance of viewing Brecht's work as a collective effort, and not as an individual project (Jameson, 1998).

wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark." [126]

A witnessing stance in community work can create conditions in which it is possible for clients and community workers to experience themselves as being known in a way that dignifies them and connects them to the witnesses. As if to say, "In this moment, I experience myself as respected, understood and accompanied". Witnessing makes it possible to legitimize people's own truths and knowings, and creates spaces in which their own voices can speak truths that cannot be heard elsewhere.

Witnessing acknowledges that we are in this together, as practitioners we participate in the relational performance.[127] Witnessing is not the sole territory of professionals, as clients also bear witness, and serve as witnesses to each other and to the community worker.[128]

I discern witnessing from gossip as witnessing allows for the co-creation of a collectively held space that can hear that which can easily be dismissed elsewhere. [129] This speaks to the interconnection of solidarity and witnessing. I am also intentional about the fact that witnessing cannot replicate confession, which speaks to an entirely different set of ethics and practices.

Summary

The Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity draws on the rich history of activist cultures in creating imperfect solidarity, and using affinities as points of connection. Understandings of communities that are informed by Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome metaphor greatly influence my work with community workers. The influence of expansive ideas of culture, and cultural knowings, is important in this work and it invites a critique of the influence of individualism. The metaphor of witnessing and the invitation for community workers to take a witnessing stance alongside clients is informed by social justice activism. Doing Solidarity embraces the duty of the witnesses to take actions to promote change and to work alongside each other in connection with our collective ethics.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity: Where is Margarita Elaina Martin Martinez?

> *2006. 1986. 1973.*
>
> *June 2006, and we are in the graveyard in Santiago, Chile marching alongside the families of the disappeared. In 1986 police executed Margarita Elaina Martin Martinez, along with her son and sister because of their political activities resisting Pinochet's military dictatorship. In 1973, on September 11, Pinochet came to power in a United States backed coup that led to the death of democratically elected*

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[126] Sontag (2003), pp. 102-3.

[127] This way of understanding the relationship within the practice of therapy is informed by the writings of American anthropologist Victor Turner (1987).

[128] These ideas of ascribing witnessing to clients as well as professionals and the construction of clients responses as witnessing were co-created in conversation with Allan Wade (personal communication, 2007).

[129] I speak extensively about the differentiation of witness and gossip in "Witness Not Gossip: the Gender Group at Peak House". This is co-authored with two young women residents of Peak House, Crystal Radke and Mackenzie Kitchen (Radke *et al*, 2000). Peak House is a residential program for youth and their families struggling with substance abuse and exploitation. This unpublished paper is available on the Peak House website.

socialist President Allende. Pinochet lead a brutal regime whose agents tortured and murdered thousands of Chileans, and opened the doors to neo-liberalism and the American economic agenda.

It is a cold day, brisk, and the signs we hold up with Margarita's picture blow about. Pinochet is dying, the dictatorship is over, and yet the elderly woman in front of me is still missing her children. There is a fluidity of time, it is 2006, but feels like an earlier, more dangerous time. For Margarita's mother nothing is over. She calls aloud in a shaky but steel edged voice, "Where is Margarita Elaina Martin Martinez?"

We respond, "Presente".

Margarita's mother leads us in procession throughout the graveyard, past the marker for President Allende, past the monument for the disappeared. Armed guards wander through the graveyard. Margarita's mother does not pay them any mind, although she is tiny in stature against their strength. I am shaken, not so much by the presence of courage as the absence of fear. My voice quivers as I respond to Margarita's mother's call. My eyes have filled with tears that are yet to spill over. An older man, who befriended me last night at a different protest, moves alongside me, puts his arm around my shoulder, and says in good-enough English, "No tears. No tears".

Margarita's mother has lost her children. There is no fear because the worst has happened. For her the nightmare of the dictatorship does not end. We bear witness.

The Chilean *Report of the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation* determined that Margarita Elaina Martin Martinez, her son and her sister, were executed by police in 1986. [130] Their murders were initially reported as suicides despite the fact that multiple bullets entered each of their heads from the back. The commission found that they were executed by police officers, and regards the deaths as violations for which government agents are responsible. I am re-telling this story as a practice of bearing witness to these murders because their families implored me to take their stories back to Canada and to resist the disappearance of their lives.

C. Addressing Power

In this writing I describe the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power. As with all of the Guiding Intentions, Addressing Power coexists alongside the other Guiding Intentions in a rhizome like relationship. My intention in using a rhizome metaphor is to show the equal importance of all six Guiding Intentions. However, I sometimes envision all of the other Guiding Intentions organized around Addressing Power, because I recognize that no action I take exists outside of relations of power.

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[130] (National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, 1991). I want to acknowledge Cecilia Tagle for welcoming me into her activist communities and for accompanying me in transgressing many borders.
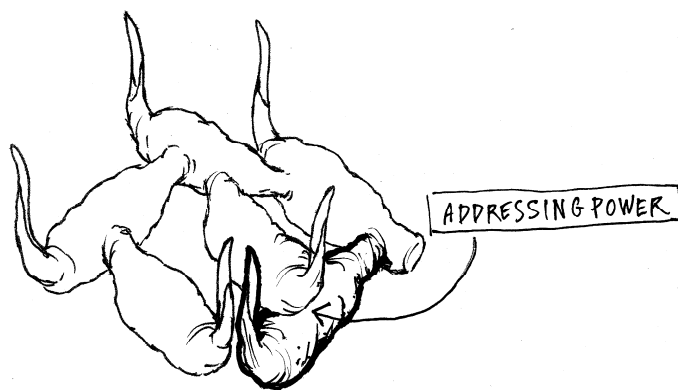
ADDRESSING POWER

The Guiding Intention of Addressing Power is my response to a reflexive question I ask myself in all of the community and activist work I engage in, which is, how am I attending to power in this moment? Power is always present in our work, and abuses of power are often at the center of community work. I am not neutral about power relations, and take an overt position for social justice in relation to power.

Attending closely to the particularities of power in all of our relationships informs our decisions about how to act in line with our ethics. The costs of ignoring power relationships among people are huge. I am concerned about abuses of power in the lives of both clients and community workers. I am also concerned about the potential for abuses of power in relationships between workers and clients. Addressing Power requires attending to locations of privilege and oppression. It encompasses practices of accountability, and an analysis of the complexity of power relations. Part of this complexity includes understanding the usefulness of power, particularly related to movements towards social justice, bringing some hope to this work. Most importantly, Addressing Power has made space for me to witness people's resistance against oppression. Bearing witness to these acts of resistance has nurtured my own hope and sustainability in activism and community work over the long haul.

Describing Power

Power can be described as having, and being seen to have, the right to name things.[131] That right is backed up not just by words, but by might, including institutional and military power. American feminist, Carolyn Heilbrun describes power as "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter."[132] Participation in a *just society* requires that people have access to this kind of power. I appreciate what Heilbrun's perspective brings to an investigation into power because it speaks about power belonging not just in the realm of what can be spoken, but also in the world of action, where some people's access to power can lead to the death of others.

As community workers committed to Addressing Power, we work collectively to change the social context, not just deconstruct it, name it, and analyze it. Part of how we address power is by working towards *just* social change. This critique is eloquently voiced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori social researcher:

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[131] This description comes from the work of Frederick Nietzsche, a 19th-century German philosopher (1977).

[132] Heilbrun (1989), pp. 18.

> "In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying."[133]

Addressing Power requires an understanding of the balance of power and responsibility. The client is responsible for their actions, but not for their social context. Society, the collective we, is responsible for a social context that has created conditions which uphold and tolerate child abuse, violence, and poverty. People are accountable for their actions in relation to the presence of real choices in their lives, which is related to power relations. The responsibility for changing the social context belongs to all of us.

In my commitment to Addressing Power I use many practices. These include: witnessing resistance, contesting neutrality, engaging with a complex analysis of power, addressing the intersections of identity and power, embracing collective accountability, understanding power in generative ways, and examining discourse.

Witnessing Resistance

Addressing Power requires that I be skeptical and critical of locating the origins of abuses of power inside of the people who are the victims of oppression. For example, violence is an abuse of power that is a form of social action by people who can be called perpetrators. Violence should not be cast as a problem in the minds of people who can be called victims. Gergen critiques the field of psychology for engaging with practices which interiorize social problems, and make sense of experience as if it happens in the landscape of a person's brain. In practice this looks like talk of "addicts" as people who are somehow broken on the inside. [134] Similarly, Wade critiques the helping professions' "continuous drift into the mind of oppressed people".[135] I am more interested in addressing the actions of people doing the oppression in the physical world than in finding damage in the minds of the people who are oppressed. As an example, a gay therapist consulted with me around his "internalized homophobia". In our conversation addressing how homophobia got inside of him, it emerged that homophobia had been shoved down his throat. He knew he did not invent the idea of homophobia or the power that backs it up in his daily life. [136] In my work alongside community workers I find it useful to keep my attention on the ways problems are created in the social world, where power is wielded and people are harmed. I resist being curious about what is wrong in the minds of the victims in order to make sense of abuses of power. I am, however, committed to making sense of the person's acts of resistance to abuses of power.

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[133] Tuhiwai Smith (1999), pp. 3.

[134] Gergen (1989). The idea of "false consciousness", from Marxist theory, is part of these interiorizing ideas. In *Culture and Imperialism,* (1993) Said says that if we must look for false consciousness we should first look at the elites, and not at the people who are subjected to power.

[135] Wade (personal communication, 2009)

[136] Ryan Barlow is the therapist. He is using his name so that this learning about homophobia is not credited solely to me, a heterosexual person.

I am talking about understandings of resistance from activist traditions. Resistance, as I am using it here, refers to all of a person or peoples' responses against abuses of power and oppression, and the many ways that they maintain their dignity and try to move towards justice. The ever present nature of resistance and cultural histories of resistance are hard to reference, but have been passed along within connected groups of activists within all cultures, since ages before the Diggers.[137]

In *Asylums*, American sociologist Erving Goffman wrote about people's resistance to being held in "total institutions", such as psychiatric institutes and prisons, where power is overt, and the holders of power dictate most human behaviour. He witnessed people's responses to these institutions and their nuanced and small forms of resistance, such as sticking out their tongue, walking slowly, and pretending to be unintelligent. Goffman's ideas are important because they question what usually gets attended to as resistance, which is often socially constructed as fighting back and speaking up. Instead he amplified these "small acts of living" to describe the nuanced and multiple ways people resist abuse and work to address abuses of power. [138]

What is credited as resistance in our culture is this physical fighting and speaking out. However, overt acts of resistance against oppression are the least common forms of resistance, as the consequences of such resistance are extreme. Often, people who are subjected to abuses of power cannot safely and openly protest abuse. People fight back against oppression in multiple ways, but not always in ways that are easily noticed or understood as resistance. [139]

For example, victims of rape are judged, legally and culturally, about their resistance to rape. Many women I have worked with, and some men, tell stories of how they "should" have defended themselves against rape, including screaming and physically fighting. Many people who are the victims of rape are unsure if they were raped because their responses fall short of all-out physical struggle, and get retold as compliance.

When I ask where they learned how a person is supposed to act if they are "really" raped, people tell me the learnings are from television and films. Women scream, scratch and fight. For the most part stories of men being raped are absent. When I ask who wrote this script, it comes forward that the actress' voice is a woman's, but the writer and director who create that voice are most often male. I facilitated a women's counselling group in which young women were talking about their experiences of sexualized violence. Everyone was surprised to learn that while every woman in the conversation had experienced some acts of men's violence, no one had screamed. Some women said they could not breathe enough to scream, some

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[137] This group also called themselves True Levellers, and in England in the mid-1600s these folks attempted to take back the commons; their resistance took the form of planting crops on Crown Land (Worden, 2001).

[138] Goffman (1961), pp. 181.

[139] James Scott's work focuses on the resistance of oppressed people to domination. He wrote about Southeast Asian peasant resistance to authority (1979), and then expanded on the resistance of all oppressed peasants and their "everyday" acts of resistance in a book entitled *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Later he wrote *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts of Subordinate groups* (1990). Scott asserts that oppressed people always resist their oppression. This view is a contrast to ideas, such as Freire's and Gramsci's, that people consent or contribute even in small ways to their own domination.

said they knew it would not be wise, others said they were physically restrained by gags or hands from making noise. The conversation led to sharing the acts of resistance these women had created, with an aim to create more safety in their futures. These women passed these invaluable "resistance knowledges" on to each other in acts of collective solidarity.[140] Naming these hidden knowledges of how prudently these women had responded to violence held meaning for them, and informed my work in profound ways. I hold close to this teaching. It informs me to bear witness to the resistance that was hidden out of necessity. James Scott, an American anthropologist, uses the term "hidden transcript"[141] to highlight the covert nature of many forms of resistance.

A young woman told me of how she held shame and an identity as a "slut" in her school and community because she had sex with several different young men at one time. Our conversation brought forward a hidden transcript, which included this group of men's premeditated acts to create the conditions necessary to gang rape her: getting her drunk, taking her to a hotel room, taking her alone, and spreading word that she was a "slut" to preempt any effort she might have made to charge them with rape. She said she hadn't "fought back", and elaborated that she should have screamed, bitten them, and fought physically. I asked why she didn't and she said she knew fighting could lead to her being killed. Resistance is spontaneous, and is occurring in the moment as the oppression occurs.[142] This understanding of the spontaneous nature of resistance informed me to ask what she did do in the moment. She brought forward a range of intelligent responses. She tried humour, reminded them they were her friends, and used their first names and nicknames. She responded in ways that tried to keep them from being angry and violent. We talked about how afraid she was, acknowledging her ability to think even when terrified. As we uncovered this hidden transcript of her resistance she moved into her body by sitting up, looking me in the face, and speaking with a steady voice. She acknowledged her own intelligence, and said it was meaningful that I was alongside her as a witness to these acts of resistance.[143] Because covert acts of resistance such as this woman's are easily hidden in therapy talk, community workers need to finely attune their attention to the possible sites of resistance where people are acting in ways that maintain their dignity and move towards justice. [144]

My approach to witnessing resistance is informed by three basic understandings of resistance

➔   1. Wherever there is oppression there is resistance.

➔   2. Resistance ought not to be judged by its ability to stop oppression, rather;

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[140] Wade (1996)

[141] Scott (1990)

[142] Wade (1996), pp. 170.

[143] Our work together was organized around her substance abuse issues, further mystifying the fact that she was the victim of violence. I was teaching a trauma course at that time, and asked if I could share her resistance strategies, which she agreed to. My purpose was partly to get her appropriate witnesses, and to give *in the moment* examples to practitioners to help them help others. Knowing she was helping other people in the future who were the victims of violence was meaningful for her.

[144] Wade (1997)

> → 3. Resistance is important for its ability to maintain a person's relationship with humanity, especially in situations outside of human understanding.[145]

We witness resistance, not because it stops the abuses of power, but because attending to resistance amplifies the person's sense of autonomy and their attempts to keep a grasp on their dignity. As practitioners, we serve as witnesses to the person's resistance despite the success or failure of the struggle. A small man who was incarcerated for extended periods of time told me of the many ways he tried to avoid being beaten up in jail. He tried to hide in the library and took extra work shifts that had more staff present. He sat beside people he disliked to win their protection. He engaged in some sexual acts he found abhorrent. He was not able to keep himself even reasonably safe in jail, and we did not measure the effectiveness of his resistance, or judge it for its ability to deliver safety. Oppression occurs because some people have more access to power than others and choose to abuse others. Instead, our conversation focused on his creativity, intelligence and continual, determined resistance. We also attended to his resistance to hurting others in attempts to stay safe. He refused to join in racist and homophobic jokes. He chose not to set more vulnerable men up for abuse in his place; including men who were smaller, homosexual, or newer to jail and without allies. What was most important was witnessing his continual attempts to stay human in a degrading institution amidst violent and persistent attacks.

It is important not to fetishize resistance or to get taken up with romantic ideas of resistance, as our collective purpose is to promote possible lives of justice, not to have rich practices of resistance. Practitioners need to be careful not to name every act resistance, and assign meanings which don't fit for the person. An act can only be understood as resistance if the person performing it would describe it as such.[146] Resistance is often inadequate in terms of addressing unjust situations. Acts of resistance can maintain a person's relationship with humanity, but they do not stop people from being oppressed.

These understandings of resistance have been essential in my work alongside community workers and clients who struggle in the margins. Witnessing resistance always gives us a hope-filled place to go in our work with clients, as there is always a protest against oppression. Ideas and practices of witnessing resistance have been of use to victims of abuses of power in constructing identities that are wise, prudent, and resourceful. Witnessing resistance is also a useful practice for the sustainability of community workers as it invites us into hope-filled conversations, which can be transformative for both workers and clients.

Contesting Neutrality
Our work is not neutral. Ignatio Martín-Baró was a Jesuit priest, liberation theologian, and also a psychologist who believed in the possibility of psychology taking a position against neutrality and

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[145] I outline my understandings of resistance in connection to work alongside survivors of torture and political violence in more fully elsewhere (Reynolds, In press; 1997). My stance for work with "trauma" is beyond the scope of this present writing. Basically, I attend to amplifying the person's meanings of their resistance, as opposed to attending to the meanings "trauma" makes of the person.

[146] Allan Wade's excellent article *Small acts of living: Every day resistance to violence and other forms of oppression* gives a solid understanding of this way of working with resistance. Allan's work has had a profound influence on my own understandings and practices of witnessing resistance (1997).

addressing its collective power accountably and constructively. Following his murder by a Salvadoran death squad, Martín-Baró's writings were posthumously collected under the title: *Writings for a Liberatory Psychology*.[147] Martín-Baró said "to achieve the psychology of liberation demands first that psychology be liberated".[148] He was the first psychologist to impress upon me the possibility of psychology resisting abuses of power and the replication of acts of oppression.

I am often identified as political, a political therapist, or a political activist: Of course all community workers, therapists, street nurses, and doctors, are political, dealing in relationships of power. Community workers who identify with an ethic of social justice inform me that they are often held to higher levels of scrutiny regarding their politics than are other workers. They speak of other people's concerns that activist informed helpers may be "doing politics" with clients. Some critics boldly assert that politically oriented therapists can at times engage in "covert political re-education" with clients.[149] This critique requires an answering, and cannot be taken lightly. My experience as a supervisor informs me that workers who are co-located as activists have an awareness of their power and their political positioning. In my role as a supervisor I address the need for the worker to de-center their activism in the helping relationship when centering activism is harmful.

Having tattoos, dressing in gender transgressive or gender-ambiguous ways, and riding a bicycle to work are all political acts. However, I would contest that it is also political to wear a wedding ring, have a framed picture of your heterosexually normative family on your desk, and drive a car. None of these actions are neutral. They all have different meanings and these can all be open for critique as they relate to our influence on clients and our ethical stances. Community workers who identify as neutral and non-political may not acknowledge their access to power or their political locations, and are perhaps more likely to unknowingly abuse power and replicate harmful status quo agendas in the helping relationship. All positions are political.[150]

Engaging with a Complex Analysis of Power

Addressing power is complex. bell hooks writes that Addressing Power "requires a commitment to complex analysis and the letting go of wanting everything to be simple. Segregation simplifies; integration requires that we come to terms with multiple ways of knowing, of interaction."[151] In work with people from oppressed locations it is important to have understandings of the political world. For example, people from the global south and in other oppressed positions spend a great deal of time educating helping professionals about the realities of their lives. The point is not for the practitioner to do their homework on the political situation in Somalia, for example; but to have a complex analysis of the workings of power, a framework that is able to embrace the complexity and specificities of a person's lived

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[147] Martín-Baró (1994). Ignatio Martín-Baró was influential in challenging state powers, and was assassinated in 1989 by agents of the Salvadoran government along with six of his Jesuit brothers, their housekeeper, and her daughter.

[148] Martín-Baró (1994), pp. 25.

[149] Kitzinger & Perkins (1993), pp. 99.

[150] Contesting Neutrality is also addressed in the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics.

[151] hooks (2003), pp. 78.

experiences related to Somalia. Practitioners are more likely to address power when working with conversations and persons that are deemed political, such as refugees. But a complex analysis is required in all helping relationships, as no relationships exist in apolitical locations. All helping relationships are embedded in relationships of power, both structural and relational.

Much of the research into power in helping relationships addresses practitioners' overt abuses of power.[152] Practitioners must not abuse their clients; yet power is present in helping relationships in ways that are more complex and less attended to than overt abuses of power by the practitioner. In my inquiry with community workers regarding their uses of power, I invite them to hold these reflexive questions close:

➔ In terms of the power of questions: What questions am I asking? What questions are silenced?

➔ In my work with people am I manufacturing consent for the status quo? Am I accommodating clients to indignities such as poverty?

➔ Am I centering myself as an expert in a person's life?

Inquiries into relationships of power between helping practitioners and clients require close attention to the dialogue, which is best served by having a supervisor or fellow practitioner sitting in, or recording conversations. Leaving practitioners to report on the dialogue can leave huge gaps in the work.

Addressing the Intersections of Identity and Power

In order to address our power, and resist being power-blind,[153] it is important to have some understanding of our own multiple identities and the locations in our lives where we have access to power and where we may be subjected to power. The convergence of these sites of privilege and oppression create what African-American Therapist Tracy Robinson calls our intersectionality.[154] Intersectionality refers to the convergence of human characteristics which have particular status ascribed to them in society. For example, where I live in Canada, white skin is valued, and skin that is not white is less valued. The status of our identity, which informs our access to power, is socially constructed around these multiple statused characteristics.

Characteristics such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation have socially constructed meaning and status ascribed to them. Our identity cannot be totalized in one domain: I am never just a white person, but also a woman, from a working class family, an able-bodied person. My identity is a convergence of indivisible characteristics. I cannot be fully respected or understood outside of the intersectionality of all of these aspects of my identity. African-American critical race theorist Kimberly 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".[155] There is

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[152] Pope & Vasque (2007) and Kuyken (1999).

[153] Paul Orlowski, a Canadian critical educator, offers a thorough analysis of "liberal power blindness" in his critique of curriculum in Social Studies education. Orlowski states that the main issues in connection to studies involving Indigenous peoples include both eurocentrism and liberal power blindness (2001, 2009).

[154] Robinson (2005), pp. 42.

[155] Crenshaw (1995), pp. 375.

no woman – there are always specific instances of being a woman – and there is no woman who is just a woman. We are always located in multiplicity. Crenshaw talks about her intersectional identity as a woman of colour, and describes this as something very different than belonging to both the category of woman and the category of person of colour. When "practices expound identity as a 'woman' or 'person of color' as an either/or proposition, they regulate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling".[156]

Intersectionality is used to frame the relationships between race and gender, but is also and always used in multiple domains of identity. Crenshaw maintains that "By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable".[157]

Having a critique of the social construction of categories does not mean that categories do not exist. Categories have meanings and consequences. Race is a social construct, but the consequences of racism are very real. I can theorize that we cannot be divided from our intersectionality, but I also have to acknowledge that in the material world specific categories, such as skin colour and money privilege, are separated out, held in higher esteem, and connected to access to power. I aim to hold myself accountable to my locations within categories of privilege. Access to power based on membership in a particular socially constructed category may be neither reasonable nor *just*. This doesn't mitigate my access to power related to being seen as a higher statused member within such a category, such as being read as white in the category of race.

Justice-based Canadian therapist Karen Grant utilizes the construct of intersectionality and the convergence of multiple identities in her work addressing diversity and power in helping relationships.[158] Grant invites practitioners to name multiple categories of identity and to rank the status of different identities within each category. For example within the category of gender, men would be ranked highest, less masculine performing men would be below that, women would be significantly lower, women who transgress gender stereotypes for women would be lower than that, and multiple transgendered locations would be near and at the bottom. Transgendered female to male identities might be above transgendered male to female identities. Within the category of language, Canadian born English speakers would be highest, accented English would comprise the spaces below that, elevating European accents, then accents from ranked cultures, non English speakers would be near and at the bottom. First Nations English accents might be below accented English speakers. Breaking down the statused levels of the categories is a worthwhile and thought provoking exercise. Context is an important variable that can make a considerable difference to how these ramifications of power /status are enacted. There are no clearly right answers for this analysis, and much room for discussion. After many of the categories of identity are ranked in terms of socially constructed status, the practitioners map themselves onto the multiple

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[156] Crenshaw (1995), pp. 357.

[157] Crenshaw (1995), pp. 378.

[158] Grant (2008, 2003, 2001). While these references allude to Grant's attention to intersectionality, she is presently engaged in the process of publishing these ideas as a training tool.

categories. This mapping can give practitioners some self-awareness of the diversity of locations they hold, some of which are connected to access to power and some of which are connected to being the subject of power.

Practitioners then consider a particular client they are working with and map the intersectionality of that person's categories of identity. This mapping will show the gaps between the locations of the helper and the locations of the client. Practitioners can then work towards being accountable to the specific gaps which name the locations of power which they hold, and which their clients do not.

Practicing Accountability

Addressing Power requires practices of accountability, meaning an answering or a *just* response to our practices of and access to power. Our collective ethics include accountability to clients, which is always the touchstone for our work. The work of the Just Therapy people at the Family Center in Wellington, New Zealand has greatly influenced my understandings of accountability in community work.[159] They work diligently and purposefully to try to hold all of their work specifically accountable to locations of culture, gender, and class.

I am also inspired and informed by activist cultures and practices of looking for "groundless solidarity, and infinite responsibility".[160] "Groundless" meaning that our ethics are not tied to one location of oppression. No location is seen as the organizing principle of all oppression in all situations; rather, the intersections and the gaps between our multiple locations in relation to privilege and oppression are tended to in a complex analysis. "Infinite responsibility" invites us to always attempt to be "open to another other",[161] to the multiplicity of ways that I might not be in accord in relation to my ethics; ways that I am not in relationships of solidarity.

Embracing Collective Accountability

We live in a world where many of us, whether we intend to or not, benefit from the oppression of others. Feeling personal guilt about that is not the same as accountability. Collective accountability differs from an individual response. We need to collectively recognize, articulate, expose, and resist acts of oppression. Activism teaches us to analyze structures of oppression behind specific situations. Beyond immediate responses to these specific situations, we take actions together to change underlying structures that create the conditions for abuses of power.

For example, as a white person I hope to respond to another white person who is performing racism by seeing them as my brother, by locating myself as collectively responsible for the performance of racism, and for the fact that racism benefits me. The seduction of identifying myself individually at these times is extreme – I want to identify myself as, "not that kind of white person". Attending to the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power holds me to account to identify collectively as a white person in the

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[159] Tamasese 2001, Waldegrave & Tamasese 1993, Waldegrave 1990

[160] These writings are from Canadian anarchist Richard Day's provocative book *Gramsci is dead* (2005, pp.18).

[161] Day (2005), pp. 18.

presence of white racism, and to help my white brother move towards accountably as well. Collective accountability invites us to see another other as a part of us, belonged with us, and declines the invitation of locating ourselves as not that other. This is not based on me being a good person, but on my understanding that all racism benefits me as a member of the dominant culture, whether I perform it or not. Collectively addressing racism, or any form of oppression, is not a heroic act, but is a performance of our collective, ordinary, respect and dignity. This analysis has been useful across a multiplicity of locations.

Individual accountability can be a limiting idea, especially if it constructs the responsibility for social contexts of injustice as a personal project. The contexts of deprivation and injustice, where clients live and we work, require enormous, collaborative, and resourced social responses from all members of society. The responsibility for this ought not to lie with individual community workers but reflects our relational responsibilities.[162] Collective accountability promotes our sustainability by contesting the individuation of responsibility, and offers hope in finding ways forward together.

Understanding Power as Generative

Conversations about power often collapse into critiques of power as entirely oppressive. Power can also be used in "generative"[163] and "constructive" ways.[164] In my work alongside community workers my aim is not to mitigate or disappear relations of power, but to help workers have more access to power.

A shelter worker told me of a heartbreaking incident in which he had turned a homeless youth away from a shelter on a rainy night. The mandate for the shelter outlines that it is adult only. For reasons of propriety and safety youth are not allowed. The shelter worker felt absolutely powerless in saying no to this homeless youth. My response was that the youth perhaps experienced the worker as being very powerful, and as having the power to say no to their needs. Feeling powerless and having access to power are different things. While the shelter worker did not have the power to say yes to this youth he had the power to say no. My hope is that shelter workers can have greater access to power so they can help create more options – so that youth can be safe, and enough youth housing can exist so that the unacceptable option of youth shelters is not needed. Trying to mitigate or eliminate power from the equation leaves both the shelter worker and the youth with fewer options.

A conception of power which acknowledges the possibility of power to be generative and constructive is a useful approach. Instead of smoothing things over for the shelter worker and agreeing with him that he had no power, we strategized ways to work towards change, and to amplify the albeit limited power both of shelter workers and of homeless youth. We did not solve either of these problems, but I find this a more ethical and hopeful approach than attempts to mitigate or disappear power, or succumb to powerlessness.

In my work alongside community workers it has been useful to differentiate between power and influence. In the story above, the shelter worker did not have the power to say yes to the homeless youth's

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[162] McNamee & Gergen (1999)
[163] Foucault (1977), pp. 194.
[164] Sampson (1993), pp. 143.

request to stay in the adult shelter. The shelter worker does, however, have some influence in the organization in which he works, and can respond to this heartbreaking situation by advocating for needed change. Differentiating power and influence has been a useful idea for many community workers as it gets us out of the binary of having power or having no power, and into the space of possibilities where we have some influence, and possibly some relational access to power.

Examining Discourse

A full description of the complexity of discourse is beyond the scope of this writing. Here I am going to offer a working description of discourse as it is related to my work alongside community workers and the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power. Foucault wrote about discourse as systems or institutions of knowledge that are created through language and set limits of what can be said about specific issues, and what is held as truth.[165] Postmodern theorists, including Foucault, question the existence of single truths, and instead look to see how what passes for truth is created and promoted. These realms of knowledge are discourses, such as the discourse of mental illness, the discourse of normality, the discourse of nationality.

We do not exist outside of discourse. Different discourses converge, and several different discourses are always going on at the same time. For example, as a community worker, I might engage in a case consultation regarding a client who is a survivor of political violence and an undocumented refugee. While I would bring forward a discourse of social justice, other professionals may engage a discourse of law. Discourses are not in and of themselves positive or negative things, nor are they neutral. The discourse defines much of what is accepted as reality or truth in our lives. American queer theorist Judith Butler speaks about the limits of acceptable speech, meaning the parameters of what can be said within a particular discourse before there are repercussions for transgressing across lines backed up by power.[166] Following from the case consultation example, the discourse of social justice would make room for me to make a case that the person's illegal status is contestable, questioning the authority to judge a human being as an illegal person. I would say that it is unethical from a social justice stance to decline giving this person services they desperately need. Alternatively, a colleague speaking from a discourse of law would exclude my protest as unacceptable speech. From a discourse of law the legal status of the person is centered, not social justice.

Discourse is more than a practice of language, and is inextricably linked with practices of power. Discourses play a role in legitimizing power, constructing what is acceptable as truth and maintaining power relations. Power is often wielded through controlling discourse and excluding or delegitimizing dissenting voices.[167] For example, in the discourse of psychotherapy, the client is not the person who holds expertise – that belongs to the professional, who is legitimized by the discourse as qualified to speak. Foucault believed that power and knowledge are interrelated and indivisible, and that there is

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[165] Foucault (1972)

[166] Butler (1997)

[167] Foucault (1980, 1977)

always a negotiation of power in human interactions. Foucault wrote of this indivisibility as power-knowledge.[168]

Dominant Discourse, Truth Claims, and Subjugated Knowledge

Three ideas from Foucault warrant a closer look here: dominant discourse, truth claims, and subjugated knowledge.[169] These concepts inform the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power, because they are useful tools in our community work with clients who are often the subjects of power.

There are multiple voices within any discourse. For example, within the discourse of psychotherapy there are diverse and at times competing discourses, such as the discourse of Psychoanalysis, the discourse of Motivational Interviewing, the discourse of the Twelve Step Fellowship, and the discourse of Solution Focused Therapy. Dominant discourse is the naming that is backed up by structural power, such as the state and institutions. Simply put, the dominant discourse in a particular domain defines who can say what and with what authority.[170] In the example of the discourse of psychotherapy there is some contention of what constitutes the dominant discourse, but there are registering bodies and regulatory institutions which are backed up by state powers, which exclude some of these voices and elevate others.

Who can speak? A Downtown Eastside activist elder told me of a public meeting on homelessness in which nobody got to speak into a microphone except younger people who had "straight teeth and good shoes". Whose voices are amplified and listened to?

What can be said? Clients can be described as depressed and suffering from chronic depression without much critique of the power of that language. But what kind of response do I get as a practitioner when I describe a client as oppressed and suffering from chronic oppression, such as systemic poverty, colonization, being under-housed and subjected to a lifetime of indignity?

With what authority? In an activist event claiming to address poverty, all of the speakers were people who did not live in poverty and had university degrees. One speaker was lecturing on economic theory. A sole parent on welfare stood up and spoke from the floor, "My welfare cheque doesn't leave enough money for a liter of milk. That's all the economic theory I need. My question is what are we going to do about it?" Who is positioned as the authority on poverty?

Dominant discourses work to construct what passes for normal, the way things are, and the real world, in uncontested and sometimes uncontestable ways. Normality can be considered a dominant discourse. Addressing Power requires us to disrupt and contest the social construction of what is understood as

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[168] Foucault (1978), pp. 99.

[169] Foucault talks of these ideas in several places, especially in *Madness and Civilization* (1967), subjugated knowledges in *Power/Knowledge* (1980, pp. 81-82), and dominant discourse in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) and in *The History of Sexuality* (1990). I came to these ideas through the teaching of Michael White, who used his readings of Foucault's ideas about power-knowledge in therapeutic work in the approach he and David Epston co-created as Narrative Therapy (Epston, 1994; White & Epston, 1990). It was through training in the narrative community, specifically under the supervision of Canadian narrative therapist Stephen Madigan, that I became familiar in a practice-based way with the ideas of dominant discourse, truth claims, and subjugated knowledge (Madigan, 1992a).

[170] Law & Madigan (1994)

normal in multiple domains. The greater our access to power, the closer we are able to come to measurements of what passes for normal. In fact, we may not even think about how we came to identify as normal, as the water is invisible to the fish. For example, my partner can be seen as a prototypical human being: meaning he is white, male, able-bodied, middle aged, university educated, Christian, heterosexual, English speaking, and American. The world was designed for him: medication is tested to serve him, Canadian immigration accepted him. He sees himself reflected in school texts, popular media, books, and management structures. He can pass for normal, meaning he can claim, "I am just a person" and does not have to explain himself or search to see his identity reflected back in positive and power-filled ways. When we work with clients whose identities are constructed in the margins, we are often located as normal, and the clients are located as other. I encourage community workers to actively resist being located in the normalizing center of identity, to resist accepting locations as helping professionals as normal.[171] This is more in accord with our ethics. Folks who pass for normal often struggle with these ideas; while folks who are subjugated and measured down as not normal in multiple categories (such as culture, gender, class) have in-the-body-knowings of the power behind normalcy.

 A broader example of the dominant discourse of normality is the way Eurocentric or western cultures take the position of normal. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz said "the concept westerners have of themselves, is a rather peculiar idea within the contexts of the world's cultures...Other peoples have very different ways of making meanings of and describing themselves".[172] There is nothing inherently normal about European based cultures. Power relations which allow for western culture to situate itself as normal situate the rest of the world's cultures as other. Following the exclusion from normal, other cultures are socially constructed as exotic, abnormal and sub-normal. Palestinian-American cultural theorist Edward Said's brilliant work, *Orientalism*, speaks to this power backed social construction that centered western culture, and created "the oriental" as other, and savage.[173] When the dominant discourse helps locate groups of power holders as normal, it leads to the construction of people from marginalized identities as "serviceable others", who can be exploited, subjugated, and oppressed.[174]

Truth claims refer to particular taken-for-granted knowledges that back up the dominant discourse, or follow from the dominant discourse. Power supports the social construction of these truth claims, though they are constructed as natural, as the way things are. Addressing Power invites an investigation into the

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[171] To investigate the unspoken and often invisiblized privilege of normality I have found it useful to consider *cisgendered* privilege. This is the privilege of being located as a man or a woman, in a gendered body that fits the genitalia we believe belongs with us, are read as the gender we experience ourselves inhabiting, and never having to hide, be closeted or face the risk of *outing* ourselves regarding our transgendered identities. I use an exercise, entitled *Questioning Normal*, to invite people into an inquiry of this part of their identity because it usually, but not always, invites us to locate in our privilege. This is a good common starting ground for social justice work. The exercise appears in the appendix. These exercises are never neutral and Structuring Safety is necessary as always in these risky conversations. To invite accountability, I never assume there is not a transgendered person in any group, especially when I use this exercise.

[172] Geertz (1975), pp. 49.

[173] Said (1979)

[174] Sampson (1993), pp.142. American anthropologist Edward Sampson's writings, particularly*Celebrating the Other*, take bold positions on the political power of both western culture and specifically psychology to suppress the other in order to maintain the power of the dominant classes.

power arrangements and power relations that prop up these truth claims and asks who is served and who is harmed by them.[175] For example, Butler's work unmasks the truth claim of the binary of gender which states that there are only two genders, and that they are perfectly differentiated solely by genitalia. This truth claim which limits gender to two finite possibilities, man or woman, is problematic for multiple reasons. It leaves no ambiguous space for transgendered and transgressive identities, and polices what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman, and invisiblizes everyone else.[176] The discourse of a gender binary is the power behind punitive actions for gender transgression. Gay bashings, trans bashings, and men's violence against women, are all connected to the discourse of patriarchy, which is backed up by the truth claim of a strict gender binary. Words don't kill, but discourse can create the conditions for violence.

The contents of subjugated knowledges are in direct contrast to the ideas of the dominant discourses. Subjugated knowledges offer alternative ways of knowing that are outside of the dominant power structures and are often subsumed, appropriated or overtly disappeared. I listen for these subjugated knowledges, and bring them forward, making space in our work for other ways of knowing. For example, in many "addictions" counselling courses the contributions of Alcoholics Anonymous and the larger Twelve Step community are rarely a part of the curriculum. Alcoholics Anonymous is often not afforded the same respect and consideration in some professional contexts as other discourses. Many students in these same classes hold rich knowledges of Twelve Step communities that are useful, but are sometimes not welcome in class discussions or papers. Being *out* as a member of a Twelve Step fellowship can negatively impact the identity of the student, and their future identity as a helping professional. These practices subjugate knowledges which may be liberating for clients and help address their suffering.

Summary

The Guiding Intention of Addressing Power requires understandings of the relationship of power and knowledge and the ways in which discourses are socially constructed in contexts of power. The constructive and generative possibilities of power are sites of hopefulness and provide opportunities for community workers to advocate for change in line with social justice. Addressing Power requires a complex analysis and understandings of the intersectionality of identity, which includes locations of both privilege and oppression. Addressing Power requires accountability and the hopefulness generated by collective accountability. Witnessing resistance to abuses of power offers hope and transformation for both clients and community workers, and constructs understandings of acts of resistance as intelligent and dignified responses to oppression.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power: "Where is My Ten Thebe?"[177]

> *I have been in the village of Kanye for all of four days, and the heat here on the edge of the Kalahari Desert is*
> *already getting to me. I think the dusty path I am on will eventually lead to the school, though I have*

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[175] Burr (2003)

[176] Butler (1990)

[177] I worked as a teacher in Kanye, Botswana from 1985-88 with a non-profit organization called, WUSC, World University Services of Canada.

already dodged cattle and I am holding a rock in my hand as my Peace Corps roommate assured me I would need it because of the dogs. Further on up the path I see a small boy. He is wearing Chubuku waxed paper beer cartons for shoes, a pair of shorts, and no shirt. As I walk towards him, he puts his hand out dramatically and says, "Madame. Where is my ten thebe?"

I am still not used to being addressed as Madame, it seems far too respectful as I am just out of university, but I am in a different place. I laugh, smile, and tell him I have no money for him. He says, in crisp English, "Madame. You are rich".

Without a thought, and with no pause I reply, "I am not rich". The words are not passed my lips before I feel the inadequacy of this response, and how ludicrous it must seem to this small boy who is not wearing real shoes. Simultaneously, I am having a conversation with myself about the context of my life growing up, and the certainty I hold that where I grew up I was not rich. I am not smiling now.

The young boy smiles and says, very formally, "Madame. You came here on a plane. You speak English. You are a school teacher. You are rich".

He has saved the moment for us both. I stop walking, hunt through my briefcase for ten thebe, and hand him the coin. I am smiling again.

I give this young boy ten thebe many times after that, over the next three years, but know that I have never paid him enough for his teaching.

D. Fostering Collective Sustainability

In this writing I illuminate the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability. Again, for the purposes of clarity in this writing, I am artificially separating Fostering Collective Sustainability from the other Guiding Intentions which collectively describe my ethical stance.

FOSTERING COLLECTIVE SUSTAINABILITY
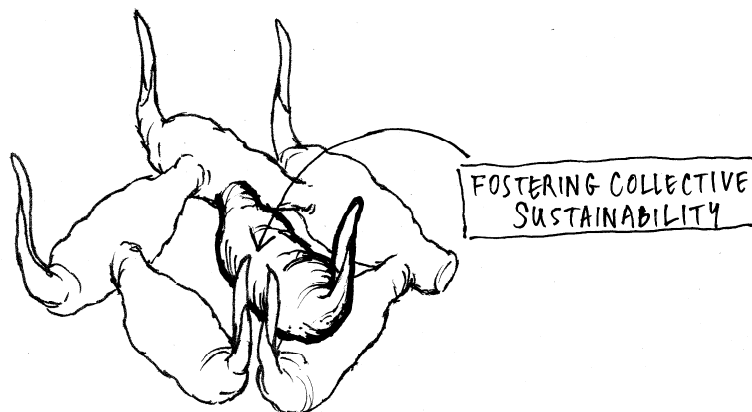
Fostering Collective Sustainability is a major focus of my work alongside community workers who struggle in the margins where clients live. In these contexts I use the term sustainability to mean an aliveness, a spirited presence, and a genuine connectedness with others. It requires more than keeping on, more than resisting burnout, more than keeping a desperate hold on hope; and yet it encompasses all of these capacities. We are sustained in the work when we are able to be fully and relationally engaged, stay connected with hope, and be of use to clients across time. I see sustainability in our community work as something that we promote relationally, not as a series of individual projects running in isolation. Sustainability is nurtured by working in line with our collective ethics, which can offer a useful response to the spiritual pain that comes when structures, and our own limitations, require us to work in ways that go against the ethics that brought us to this work. For me, sustainability is inextricably linked with an alive engagement with a spirit of social justice.

Teachings of Sustainability from Environmental Activists

My commitment to Fostering Collective Sustainability alongside community workers who work in contexts that lack social justice was inspired by what I learned in communities of environmental activism. My understandings of sustainability are linked to what Indian environmental activist and physicist Vandana Shiva calls *Earth Democracy*. [178] Shiva includes sustainability as a principal of an Earth Democracy, which respects the dignity of all life including ecological cultures, and which promotes life-sustaining lifestyles and consumption patterns that do not overuse resources or exploit people. She sees the project of global justice as one committed to sustainability of life in all of its domains. Earth Democracy is dependent upon the interconnections of ecological justice and social justice.

It was only in the mid-80s that the United Nations began to formally address the requirements of sustainability for both the global community and the Earth.[179] In a report entitled Our Common Future, sustainability was loosely defined as "the need for humanity to live equitably within the means of nature".[180] The interconnectedness of environmental and social justice issues in relation to sustainability was clearly articulated in the opening of the report:

> "The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impacts on others. Some consume the earth's resources at a rate that would leave little for future generations. Others, many more in number, consume far too little and live with the prospect of hunger, squalor, disease, and early death."[181]

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[178] Shiva (2005)

[179] Matis Wackernagel and William Rees' *Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* is a brilliant and engaging overview of ecological sustainability and how to move towards it (1996).

[180] World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), pp. 43.

[181] World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), pp. 27.

Teachings from multiple cultures have always spoken about the need for sustainability of the planet, and the interconnectedness of people with each other and with the earth. [182] Many teachers have said similar things, but one maxim which stays with me is often attributed to Mahatma Ghandi, "live simply so that others can simply live".[183] The interconnections of these teachings from environmentalism, social justice movements, and many cultures inform my understandings of sustainability.

Collective Sustainability

I am interested in collective sustainability because we are connected in our work alongside people who are marginalized and as community workers I believe, we are meant to do this work together. At times, this requires great creativity to maintain connection across chasms of difference, conflict, and competition over limited and diminishing resources. Working together is also challenged by competing over theories and practices, by righteousness, petty squabbles and the many significant hurts we incur as workers across time with each other. The greatest resource available to us in the relational work that we are doing, is ourselves and each other.

We are irreplaceable. An organization can hire another housing support worker, another addiction doctor, or another anti-violence worker. But we are not replaced. All of who we are, the relationships we have created, the partnerships we have developed, the organizational trainings our work requires, the solidarity we hold with other workers, the education clients have given us; all of these things leave with us. New workers need to forge new relationships, create more solidarity, and learn again how to be of use where they now find themselves. The cost to clients and to our work in the margins is impossible to fathom when relationships with individual workers end. At the same time we need to permission each other to be allowed to leave our positions, so that we experience our relationship to our work as one of choice, not burden. We can take our skills, our knowings, and our pre-existing solidarity into new avenues. There are many paths to being of use. But losing workers to what is euphemistically and simplistically called "burnout" rips workers and clients out of relationships; it steals expertise, experience and hope from workplaces and practice communities – all desperately needed and in short supply. This rupture in relationship between community worker and client can be experienced as akin to cutting an artery.[184]

Resisting Burnout

There has been important work in the helping professions that tries to address the experiences of practitioners working with clients living in the margins of society. Much of this is written about in the

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[182] I use the term teachings instead of learnings here, as it is a practice of accountability and respect within activist cultures and many other cultures. I engage with this word to acknowledge that the teachings sometimes come from contexts of oppression and at a cost to the person or community who is teaching me. Using the term teaching also acknowledges that the knowledge often comes from non-academic sources.

[183] Ghandi (2009). I offer this reference attributing this maxim to Ghandi, however, he never published this phrase.

[184]Hoffman (2002), pp. 242.

literature in terms of "mechanization"[185] and the "transmission of traumatic stress".[186] Vicarious Trauma[187] refers to the therapist experiencing the symptomology of the client's trauma. Secondary Traumatic Stress[188] refers to the impact on the lives of caregivers who care for people who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Compassion Fatigue[189] speaks to stress and burnout that familial caregivers and helping professionals experience when they are themselves the victims of both Secondary Traumatic Stress and burnout. Empathic Stress Disorder[190] is another term that has also been used to acknowledge the potential harms therapists are vulnerable to. When I speak about fostering collective sustainability I am talking about something very different than addressing the conditions of Vicarious Trauma, Secondary Traumatic Stress, burnout, or Empathic Stress Disorder. I am speaking about collective and relational responses to our work, shored up with a spirit of solidarity and connected by an ethic of *doing justice* which embraces clients, workers, communities, and societies. I am suggesting the co-creation of something like Shiva's Earth Democracy, which respects the dignity and sustainability of life in all of its domains.

Care for Ourselves

Burnout, as the term is used generally amongst community workers, is an idea that is inherently individualistic, and is repeatedly presented to us as the inevitable outcome of work with people who are exploited and marginalized. Burnout is sometimes spoken of in disease-like language where clients are positioned as the agents of hopelessness. There are predictions which act almost as prescriptions, that those of us working in the margins have a limited time before this inevitable hopelessness will afflict us. Self-care is often offered as the only antidote to avoiding burnout. Most of the workers that I am in solidarity with struggle with structures of injustice and the ways in which those structures interfere with our work. Concepts of burnout are shortsighted in terms of focusing on the self-care of the individual worker while invisiblizing and obscuring the structures that uphold the problems clients struggle with. This emphasis on the self of the worker isolates us from each other.

The focus on self-care of community workers does nothing to address the social determinants of health with which clients struggle.[191] No one advocating self-care suggests that it will create the necessary practical changes in the daily lived realities of clients. The social conditions that clients and workers face require collective actions and collective accountability. I am interested in our collective care, and our collective sustainability, which is relational, reciprocal and communal.

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[185] Weingarten (2004)

[186] Hernandez *et al* (2007), pp. 231.

[187] McCann & Pearlman (1990)

[188] Figley (1998)

[189] Figley (2002)

[190] Weingarten (2003)

[191] According to the Public Health Agency of Canada there are twelve determinants of health. Not surprisingly the number one determinant of health is income and social status (2006).

Structuring our understandings of sustainability as a collective task invites us to move in towards other workers, to sustain and support them, to be in solidarity with them, and to lend them our hope for a *just society*. This is of course reciprocal as we will also be shored up by these others further on down the road. As a collective project our sustainability is less daunting and more possible. Activism has taught me to structure social justice work into my life. Not a hobby nor an obsession, it is a commitment to a way of being across my lifespan. For this to be possible I need to be able to step away, step in, and take time out. I remember a young woman approaching me in an educational setting telling me, almost guiltily, that she had left the feminist movement and no longer considered herself an activist. I asked her what she meant by leaving the feminist movement and she said that she had had to leave her volunteer work because she had a child. She was in spiritual pain and looked to me for something I didn't know how to give her. So I told her that I thought raising children with an orientation for justice fits well with my understanding of being an activist in line with feminist movements. Witnessing parenting that nurtures accountability, invites transgression of gender stereotypes and binaries, and challenges gender power feeds my hope. I told her she could probably not convince me that she had left the feminist movement unless she had decided to feed boy children first, and make girl children serve them. Over time we saw each other again, this time in activist settings, and we laughed about the conversation. But at the time she felt that she had betrayed something in order to become a mother. I hold this memory close to remind me that I do not want to act in ways that judge anyone's choices of how to be of use.

We are in a conundrum of considering our own reputation, esteem, and sustainability against a backdrop of the lived exploitation and pain of clients. There is real discomfort in attending to our own sustainability as community workers. At times this seems outrageously self-indulgent. And yet we have a right to care for ourselves and each other, as well as an ethical obligation to be well-enough to be fully present in our work alongside people. Clients have a right to have community workers who are sustained.

Working in contexts which lack social justice can seduce us into thinking that we must do everything. Cynicism can paralyze us into believing not only that we can do nothing, but that nothing can be done. Fostering Collective Sustainability requires that we balance responsibility with power. We are not individually responsible for the abundance of need, but only for that work that is within our power to accomplish.

I work alongside housing workers in the Downtown Eastside who are struggling with sustainability. This is not a surprise. According to the United Nations envoy on housing, Vancouver has a world level crisis in housing. [192] When housing workers are able to provide social housing for under-housed and homeless people, the housing agreements often break down because total abstinence is required for some social housing, and homeless people often struggle with substance abuse. When we began to talk about the work as "work with homelessness" as opposed to "work with housing", sustainability seemed closer to us. Re-creating a job description that named the work that they do made a difference to these workers.

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[192] Johal, 2007

Balance

Job descriptions also have to be do-able. In contexts in which the work is never done, this can easily get out of balance. We are required to work diligently and competently to meet the requirements of our job descriptions and contracts. We cannot measure our work by how much work needs to be done. A program may have a mental health worker, but that cannot mean that the worker is responsible for all of the program's issues that are related to mental health. This seems easy to say, but in the contexts of extreme need in which we work, we often know that if we don't do it – it will not get done. How do we promote boundaries that preserve the do-ability and sustainability of our jobs?

In these organizations, directors and supervisors regularly eat their lunch over keyboards, and come to work sick enough to be sent home by their employees. I invite supervisors to mentor workers around sustainability by taking their own breaks, lunch, and sick time. I invite staff teams to collectively agree to permission each other to take earned sick time, vacation time, and to decline overtime, or to take it back in time off instead of money. These simple strategies to prioritize collective care are difficult to practice. I remind workers that they are in this work for the long haul, and I invite them to consider their sustainability as a form of accountability to clients they need to see over the next thirty years. This invitation to transcend time, to hold ourselves accountable to the clients of our future, sometimes helps workers get beyond the numerous and desperate needs of the present to which they need to say no.

Sustainability is extremely taxed when workers are required to provide all day face-to-face service with clients. A diversity of work is another tactic I use to promote the sustainability of workers in the margins. It is common for counsellors in rape crisis centres to see five or six clients in extreme situations of crisis, trauma, and despair, in stretches of five or six consecutive hours, one after another, five days a week. Such overtaxing schedules are driven by pressing needs of organizations and clients, and are directly related to the violence of men and economic disparity in our society. Under these conditions it can be challenging to imagine and move towards acting in ways that can foster collective sustainability. Workers may leave or be hurt in the work and be unavailable to clients, whether they are physically present or not. Engaging in a diversity of work is a useful tactic to promote sustainability and should perhaps be an ethical obligation of organizations. Examples include programming that requires engagement in group as well as individual work, participating in policy work, passing our knowledge on to other workers in informal training, and creative practices of job sharing.

Resisting a Sense of Specialness

Our relationships with sustainability are sometimes put at risk by the seduction to see our work as special. War metaphors used to describe our work "in the trenches" and in "front lines" may be accurate, but they also need to be investigated. Workers often hear comments like, "I could *never* do what you do" and "I am so amazed that you can work *there*". Community workers tell me they rarely experience these comments as genuine or meaningful. Often workers respond to remarks which hold our work as special with a sense of being a fraud. I know that everyone's pain is real and that all relational work in helping professions is difficult. Comparison and competition can lead to the social construction of hierarchies of pain, which ascribe greater value to more dramatic or romantic kinds of pain. American psychiatrist Jonathan Shay calls this comparison "pissing contests", where clients one-up each other to compete over whose pain is

more worthy. These clients are responding to entrenched discourses of deserving and undeserving victims.[193] Resisting participation in hierarchies of pain and pissing contests creates space to acknowledge everyone's pain, without invisiblizing the fact that the contexts are very different. We resist normalizing the contexts that are unacceptable without elevating ourselves as workers. Focusing on the importance of sustainable stances and practices helps us resist constructing identities of ourselves as special for taking on the toughest cases. Our work is particular and difficult, but not special.

Many community workers who work alongside people struggling in the margins of society feel uncomfortable when the exploitation of the clients' life is used to esteem us as practitioners, and construct our identities as extraordinary. I believe that this construction of being put upon a pedestal is actually a position *outside of*, as if our work is other than normal. I think it is important to contest this act of being put on a pedestal, as it does several things. Firstly, it exploits the experiences of clients. Secondly, it engages in a hierarchy of pain that is not useful. Thirdly, it relieves ordinary citizens from their discomfort and obligation to do something about the oppressive contexts of clients' lives.

Leonard Peltier is a leader of the American Indian Movement and perhaps one of the most important political prisoners in the world. Leonard contests the specialness that is inscribed upon him, despite the fact that he is revered in social justice movements, and in indigenous communities throughout the world for the sacrifices he has made for social justice. Leonard claims that he did what his culture has taught him to do in defending his community and his elders and that he is not extraordinary.[194] He refuses the label of extraordinary when he says,

> "You must understand. . . . I am ordinary. Painfully ordinary. This is not modesty. This is fact. Maybe you're ordinary, too. If so, I honor your ordinariness, your humanness, your spirituality. I hope you will honor mine. That ordinariness is our bond, you and I. We are ordinary. We are human. The Creator made us this way. Imperfect. Inadequate. Ordinary. . . We are not supposed to be perfect. We're supposed to be useful."[195]

On the other hand, there are times when working with people who are marginalized actually marginalizes the work of the helper.[196] Some of my greatest successes in the Downtown Eastside community have been getting people respectful dental care and dentures. This work is sometimes constructed as "not the real

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[193] Jonathan Shay (1995, pp. 205) has committed himself to trauma work with War Veterans suffering from PTSD. His work has inspired me in terms of holding space for a stance that is both anti-war and pro-Vet.

[194] Leonard Peltier is serving two concurrent life sentences in prison in the United States of America for the killings of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge reserve in South Dakota in June of 1975. Peltier was extradited from Canada and the United States government has admitted it used false testimony to apprehend him, as they also have admitted that much of the testimony used against him at trial was fabricated. Despite these grave concerns, he remains in prison and has served over thirty years. Governments throughout the world and human rights organizations have called for a complete commuting of his sentence, meaning that there is no evidence that convicts him of these crimes. More context to Leonard's story is revealed in the 1992 film, *Incident at Oglala,*(Apted & Chobanian, 1992) and the website of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee.

[195] Peltier (1999), pp. 9.

[196] This idea was expanded upon in a supervisory dialogue with Suzanne Hinds, a Social Worker in the Downtown Eastside (personal communication, 2007).

work", meaning in my case, not real therapy. Instead, it is seen as support work or community work, which devalues what I have done and the meanings it has, while at the same time devaluing these other legitimate forms of relational work.

Contesting Cynicism

Sustainability requires that we work in the world we are in, with what *is*, and not what *should be*. Workers often respond to investments in what should be by signing on to cynicism, and abdicating responsibility for change; or by acting unilaterally as lone wolves. When we work in service organizations it is important that we hold ourselves accountable to the structures and policies of those bodies. This provides some accountability to fellow workers and clients. There is flexibility, wiggle room if you will, in all policy interpretation, and finding that can help us resist acting as lone wolves. If we cannot find ways to work within the structures and policies and be more in line with our ethics, we need to roll up our sleeves - not throw up our hands. We need to work to inform and transform policy and transform our organizations. If we are not able to foster change and resolve the spiritual pain of not working in line with our ethics, and provide what we believe is ethical care to clients, we may consider moving to other work.

Our collective sustainability is threatened when individual community workers sign on with cynicism. Assuming nothing can be changed, working outside of policy and not in alignment with fellow workers, is problematic for our clients, our co-workers, and our organizations. Working on a private practice model in a nonprofit organization can be unethical if it means that workers are following their own rules, or their own standards, and not upholding the policies and practices that the organization is bound to by their mandate and contracts. This is particularly true when workers decide they will make independent decisions about paperwork, files, and report writing that are totally acceptable in private practice, but do not satisfy the requirements which the organization needs to meet. It leaves the burden of the work of the organization with other workers, and can be problematic for their sustainability. As well, workers who act as lone wolves outside of policy can and have caused organizations to lose funding, launch expensive defenses against investigations, and be closed down. In these instances fellow workers lose employment and clients suffer the greatest losses. [197]

Changing the structures and policies of our organizations is necessary, useful, but also limited. Responses are required not just from our managers, our organizations and ourselves as workers – but more effectively, and more justly, from our society and our communities. Cynicism can lead us to blame our managers and organizations for the contexts of injustice in which our clients live. This is no more just than blaming community workers for the injustices clients suffer. Here our analysis needs to be expansive, hopeful and skeptical.

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[197] This analysis was informed by meaningful discussion with Reg Daggitt and Denise Bradshaw, who both hold expertise and extensive experience in the management of non-profit and governmental agencies serving clients who suffer extreme marginalization (personal communication, 2007).

Discerning Skepticism and Cynicism

I believe discerning skepticism from cynicism is important in terms of Fostering Collective Sustainability. Healthy skepticism can help us engage with ethics by questioning our assumptions and generating our desire for something different. Skepticism also invites community workers to look for evidence of the doing of the ethical positioning we claim. In this sense, skepticism is in relationship with hope, and onside with sustainability. Cynicism invites contemptuousness and may obscure the call for the sort of ethical investigation I propose. "Cynicism might be an appropriate reaction to injustice that can't be changed. Hope is an appropriate response to a task that, while difficult, is imaginable."[198] Cynicism can be simple. Bringing hope to our work with clients is more complex and more difficult.

Bringing Hope to the Helping Relationship

It is our obligation as practitioners to bring reasonable hope to our relational work with clients, and not to steal what hope they have. With a caution not to be flippant, I sometimes say, "no therapy is better than bad therapy". I am speaking here to what clients have taught me about the cost of disrespectful or harmful relational work. Following these experiences, clients sometimes prudently decide never to engage with us as practitioners again. In these instances, disrespectful and harmful practice, and the practitioners responsible for it, have stolen the possibility and hope of useful work from the client's future.

I believe in the correlation of hope and sustainability. In this I am backed up by Freire, who says, "Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair, but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice." [199]

It is also my ethical obligation to bring hope to my relational work with community workers. When I began working in the Downtown Eastside I did not consider myself naïve or sheltered. I had extensive experience working and living alongside poor people and with survivors of torture which provided me with a map of how to go on. But "A map is not the territory"[200], and acting as if I knew where I was, I found myself blandly asking when we close client files. This was met with blank stares, and sideways looks. After all, I was their new Addictions Supervisor. Finally, a brave soul looked at me kindly and informed me that, for the most part, files are closed when clients die, or when they go to jail for extended periods of time. I remember a sensation of time and space shifting, and thinking, "this is where I work now". I knew that I would never have the privilege of being able to ask such an uninformed question here again. My map of the world had changed. The task of Fostering Collective Sustainability with this team, and staying engaged with a believable hope, required that I began to think and act in new ways.

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[198] Jensen (2001), pp. 2.

[199] Freire (1970), pp. 72-73.

[200] Polish-American Mathematician and Philosopher Alfred Korzybski used this metaphor to differentiate a concept from the thing itself (1933, pp. 750). American Anthropologist Gregory Bateson expanded this thinking, in his writings of cybernetics, to illuminate the difference between the territory which cannot be known, and the map which is a representation. The representation is not true, but comes from a perspective, creating a map within a map. A different person would draw a different map (1972).

Immeasurable Outcomes

The task of Fostering Collective Sustainability of community workers is connected to knowing and believing that our work matters. Yet how can our usefulness be measured? Immeasurable outcomes cannot be measured; the ineffable, intangibles and the untraceable influences of our collective work. Much of the community work we do in the margins goes unmeasured for lack of an instrument of measurement, or because what we do achieve is not prioritized, or recognized as having value. In line with the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability I name immeasurable outcomes, so that our work is not disappeared. In particular I attend to dignifying clients, fostering safety, and unhappenings – situations that do not get measurably worse because of our work.

In our relationships with clients we dignify them as people worthy of our respect. We repair dignity, and co-create dignity. Dignity is something that we do amongst ourselves as people. It is not a thing you can get on your own. Even in situations where clients die, facing death with dignity makes a difference — a difference we can't measure. It makes a huge difference to clients to have a front desk staff person who remembers their name every time and pronounces it correctly. It is important to know that even though you experience your life as entirely isolating, someone would miss you if you died. How do we measure these differences?

We acknowledge that people are more than the worst thing they have ever done, and work diligently to find an honourable self of the person. [201] That is a core capacity of our work – to be able to recognize honour in people who are struggling at the margins of our society; who do not always respond to our care and professionalism with appreciation or gratitude, and often come to us with their *just anger.*[202] It is important for people whose most often told stories are so far from who they want to be, that we can look for, nourish and make thicker a story of who they prefer to be, who it is possible for them to be, and to reclaim small and precious pieces of an honourable self they have been.

We can measure risks, but safety is not a commodity which can be easily quantified. But we can work towards *safe-r* and *safe-enough* ways of being. In work with young women who struggle with substance abuse in a residential treatment program, much changes in terms of their understandings of what they can do to be *safe-r* or *safe-enough* in the world. [203] Practices like not hitchhiking, not getting into a car with men that they don't know, not getting into any car with a drunk driver. My aim is not to hold women responsible for the violence of men, but to resource them to be as safe as they can be. What gets measured when young women leave this program is their level of use of drugs and alcohol. But there are

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[201] These teachings come from my work for the abolition of the death penalty and from invitations to see the humanity of people who were on death row and who were later executed. I would like to acknowledge Roger Coleman, who was innocent, and Robert Harris, who was not, for this teaching.

[202] This term is taken from a moving poem of the same name by Marge Piercy (1982, pp. 88).

[203] Much of what I have learned about co-creating safety comes from the Gender Groups in this work alongside youth, the Peak House team, and especially therapist Stephanie Saville and Counsellors Sandra Taylor and Wendy Wittmack. There is an unpublished article on the Peak House website co-authored by former residents about the women's Gender Group entitled "Witness not Gossip" that elucidates this work (2000).

immeasurable changes promoting *safe-r* ways of being that go unnoticed in all of our work with clients, including men.

And then there is all that we can't measure because it never happens. A young man who is no longer participating in survival sex trade work because he has six months free of substances. The older client who doesn't need to be hospitalized or committed, because Street Nurses helped him get his medication and take it. The client who doesn't consider suicide this time because they're connected with an outreach worker. How can we attend to all of these unhappenings that defy measurment?

Our influence as community workers may not just be immeasurable, because it cannot be measured, but at times it is untraceable, and maybe that is how it ought to be if our work is truly client centered. [204] But the cost to us as community workers might be our collective sustainability because our work is not being witnessed. The absence of measurable outcomes can be an obstacle to our sustainability, which requires knowing that we are of use to clients. But there are untold stories, which happen "just below the surface of everyday life", which speak to the ways we make differences in immeasurable ways: stories of our collective sustainability. [205]

Secrets of the Universe

Borrowing from the Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous traditions in a *giving it back*[206] practice, I try to catch workers up on stories that are told about them being of use to clients. These fellowships believe that "giving back" is a path to maintaining preferred change. This teaching fits with the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability. When we re-connect with other workers, and catch them up on the differences they have made in the lives of the people we work alongside, we promote our collective sustainability. It is not just a nice thing to do; I consider it an ethical obligation, and I invite teams to overtly engage with giving it back practices. This community making practice situates our work relationally, and generates further acts of sustainability. This selection of a poem by Canadian David McFadden captures the spirit of what these giving it back practices can evoke:

> ### Secrets of the universe
>
> You're waiting for a bus...
> And a woman comes up to you
> And asks for a dance.
> You tell her you don't want to dance...
> And she says, you didn't mind
> Dancing with me last night.
> And when you tell her she's mistaken...
> She says, oh yes you did...

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[204] This understanding was evoked in consultation with Elaine Connolly (personal communication, 2008).

[205] Uzelman (2005), pp. 17.

[206] Members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, with whom I consulted, reference this practice to Step 12 as described in *The Big Book* (2001) and in the *Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text* (1988).

In fact, she says, as her voice drops

And a shy look comes into her eyes.

I even danced with you on other planets.

And then she walks away.

Leaving you to wonder about the part of your life

That is secret even from you. [207]

In my work Fostering Collective Sustainability with community workers, I invite them to hold on to a faith in these secrets of the universe. This faith I am talking about is a kind of trust over the long haul, a confidence based on experience, and perhaps something more sustainable than hope. What differences might this faith make for community workers in terms of connecting with a knowing that what we do matters when isolation and despair take hold? How might we share our knowings of the usefulness of other workers, so that these stories don't remain silenced secrets of the universe?

Revolutionary Love

Despite the absence of the word love from most professional discourses, something we could call therapeutic love, and maybe even a revolutionary love, is alive in our work. I believe this love plays a large role in Fostering Collective Sustainability. Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana's groundbreaking teachings on the biology of love greatly influenced the helping professions beginning in the 1980s.[208] Maturana taught that "love is the spontaneous dynamic condition of acceptance by a living system of its coexistence with another (or others), living systems".[209] He believed that love was fundamental to social activity, and that love does not come from being together: Love is what brings us together.

> "Now I am going to tell you what love is, not as a definition, but as an abstraction of the coherences of our living – and I pretend that this is all that one needs to know. Love is the domain of those relational behaviours through which another (a person, being, or thing) arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself." [210]

Dr Karl Tomm is a psychiatrist in Calgary and his work is influenced by Maturana's teachings. [211] Tomm writes and teaches about therapeutic loving as an ethical stance. He speaks of therapeutic loving, and conversely, therapeutic violence, naming the power of our positions and the possibilities of our relationships. I am backed up by this invitation to acknowledge love in our ethical stance.

Popular education describes revolutionary love as an act of courage, and commitment to others. Revolutionary love, by definition, "is emancipatory, and generative in terms of fostering further acts of

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[207] McFadden (1984), pp. 73.

[208] Maturana & Valera (1994)

[209] Maturana (1991), pp. 59.

[210] Maturana & Bunnell (1998)

[211] Tomm (1990)

love: It cannot co-exist with abuses of power". [212] I was taught a kind of revolutionary love by my father Bill Reynolds, who has an amazing capacity to collect and hold in loyalty and belonging, great numbers of would-be lost souls. My mother Joan Reynolds taught us how to hold on to love together, tenaciously, amidst struggles and across time. Solidarity, affinities, ethics; these are all possible acts of revolutionary love in practice.

The following quote from Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevera seems appropriate here: "Let me say at the risk of sounding ridiculous, the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love".[213] It seems both obvious and dangerous to name love in the context of helping relationships. We all understand the need for careful boundaries and a different way to language the care we hold for clients, but what would it mean in terms of our collective sustainability as community workers if love was truly absent in our work? Maturana says, "Without love as a spontaneous biological phenomena there is no socialization, and that is not trivial for human life".[214]

Transformations

Attending solely to the pain, heart break and difficulty of our work can obscure and mystify the contribution this work brings to our lives as community workers. More than being sustained, we are often transformed by our work with clients. Liberation psychologist Martín-Baró speaks of this relational transformation as "an opening toward the other, a readiness to let oneself be questioned by the other, as a separate being, to listen to his or her words, in dialogue: to confront reality in a relationship to and with but not over him or her, to unite in solidarity in a struggle in which both will be transformed". [215] Without this openness to transformation I believe that our work is less sustainable.

Being open to transformation as workers does not mean that "we're dealing with our stuff". Professional discourse, what Foucault calls regulative discourses, frameworks of intelligibility, and disciplinary regimes,[216] would maintain that we must remain neutral and unchanged in our relational work, or we are accused of putting ourselves at the centre. I contend that it is ethical that I experience myself as useful when I work with people in the Downtown Eastside. It is okay that I have been brought back to some relationship with spirituality through my work with survivors of torture and men on death row.

Anderson writes about her understandings of dialogue as mutually transforming for both the practitioner, and the client (whom she refers to as the dialogue partner).[217] Anderson says that in dialogue "each party, including the practitioner, is as much at-risk for change as any other".[218] The first therapist who

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[212] Freire (1970), pp. 71.

[213] Che Guevara wrote this in a letter to Carlos Quijano, the editor of *Marcha*, a radical weekly published in Montevideo, Uruguay (1965).

[214] Maturana (1991), pp. 60.

[215] Martín-Baró (1994), pp. 183.

[216] Foucault (1977)

[217] Anderson (2008)

[218] Anderson (2008), pp. 19.

permissioned me to find ways to acknowledge clients for their contributions to my transformations was Michael White, who wrote, "I would particularly like to emphasize the importance, to me, of acknowledging the ways in which these interactions are life-changing for me – the importance of finding an appropriate way of openly speaking of this within the therapeutic context."[219] I have been honoured to be in relationship with survivors of torture, survivors of residential schools, and survivors of other human rights violations, whose stories humble, appall, inspire and move me. If I am not open to being relationally transformed alongside these clients, I am not ethically competent to engage relationally with anyone in "transformative dialogue".[220]

I catch clients up in the meanings our relationships hold for me and in the ways that I have been transformed in our work when it is appropriate to do so. At times, these conversations are more appropriate to have with supervisors and colleagues, because to have such a conversation with a client would centre the community worker and not be of use for the client. Discretion and discernment are important in deciding what to share with clients. However, keeping the transformative experience of the community workers secret from clients, and only speaking of the worker's moving experiences in supervisory conversations is not a neutral or objective act. For me, there is an ethical invitation to acknowledge and honour the clients' relational participation in the transformation of us as practitioners: Withholding acknowledgment of this relational transformation is like stealing something from the relationship, and from clients. When my client speaks of a moving experience, I am moved, and while I do not want my experience to be centered, I name my experience in that moment as it is a relational experience, not entirely mine. "As I am listening to you speak of this 'holding on to dignity', I feel tingles coming up my legs." This information can be understood as the body speaking the relationship. I wonder about the difference it might make for clients to know that they change us too. I believe that clients contribute to our lives, whether we acknowledge them or not. We are transformed in the work, and that's not just acceptable, it is desirable, as it fosters our collective sustainability. We need to continually find ways to accountably tell clients that these relationships matter to us, and that they change us!

Transformation is also engendered in relationships of solidarity across difference, in helping relationships with co-workers and clients. Radical black feminist educator bell hooks and her longtime friend, white radical critical educator Ron Scapp published a conversation they staged to "document these border cross-ings", the transformations that grew from their relationship across sites of privilege and oppression.[221] Scapp says:

> "If I could share what I have learned from my experience of bonding with an incredibly powerful, intelligent feminist black woman, it would be that honest, just, and passionate engagement with difference, otherness, gives me the opportunity to live justly with love. Difference enhances life. This is not to be confused with shallow notions of inclusiveness or experiencing diversity where one stands in the space of privilege, taking in and from those who are other. But rather where one is fundamentally

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[219] White (1995), pp. 57.

[220] Gergen & McNamee (2000)

[221] hooks (2003), pp. 106.

moved -- transformed utterly. The end result of this transformation is mutuality, partnership, and community."[222]

Acknowledging privilege has made room in his life for expansiveness and transformation. Conversely, unacknowledged privilege can threaten our sustainability by stealing the possibility of transformation and openness to another other. Unacknowledged privilege makes our lives smaller.

Summary

In contrast to the prescriptive stories of burnout as the *effect* of my work, my life has been immeasurably expanded and my hopes amplified in *response*[223] to my work. As community workers, we do more than survive this most difficult work: We are transformed in the doing of it alongside co-workers and clients. There are always unexpected possibilities and hopes for transformations. Outcomes that can be measured often miss the most salient connections of both our usefulness and our collective sustainability. Engaging with a spirit of collective sustainability invites us to witness and connect with the important work of others, witnessing our spirited successes while also holding onto the knowing that much more must be done. This collectivity helps us to envision our collective work as both doable and sustainable. Earth Democracy informs this work and speaks to the relationship of the sustainability of the planet and sustainability of community workers through the practice of social justice. What follows is a story that speaks to the heart of my own relationship with sustainability.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability: School Pictures

> The glass milk bottle is slipping out of my hand. As I rush for the store counter I have a near miss with a delivery guy. We pirouette around each other in the tiny aisle by the register, and although it is fluid there is an arresting moment when we really look at each other. The bottle gets safely delivered to the counter, and I put my other stuff up there, and slowly turn around to make sure I haven't caused too much trouble. The delivery guy says, "How's your day Madame?" It is an out of place greeting, a greeting not of this time.
>
> "I am okay just a little uncoordinated – you?"
>
> "Do you remember me?" he says in a softer voice, and the jovial mood between us dissipates.
>
> I say "yeah I know that I know you, but I don't recall your name."
>
> He says "Victoria, my name is Ahmid."
>
> In the speaking of his name my breath catches, and the space between us shortens and I don't know who has moved. "Yeah. Yeah, I know you Ahmid. You're Kurdish, yes. How are you?"
>
> In answer he puts down the delivery tray, reaches into his pocket, pulls out his wallet and meticulously removes a school picture. "This is my boy." We can't talk and yet it is all said in casting our eyes on the same photo of a young boy, maybe twelve, in an ordinary picture that could be from any school in Vancouver. The cashier is watching, there is another shopper behind Ahmid; nobody seems put out that we have been captured in time together. Ahmid addresses the other people, passes his son's picture around, first into the

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[222] Scapp in hooks (2003), pp.115.

[223] Response based work attends to "responses" as differentiated from work informed by "effects" based language (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2003).

hands of the shopper behind him, who holds the picture as if she were holding his child. Ahmid says," this woman saved my son. She got him here to Canada."

I know that this is not true, there was a team of people involved — good lawyers and determined settlement workers, and my role was primarily as his therapist. I don't speak, because this is Ahmid's story for the telling, and the present story is his son, whose open-faced smile greets us all like a blessing.[224]

E. Critically Engaging with Language

This writing illuminates the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language. Like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions are hard to separate and distinguish, flow horizontally, roll over and bump into each other, nourish each other, and grow strong together.
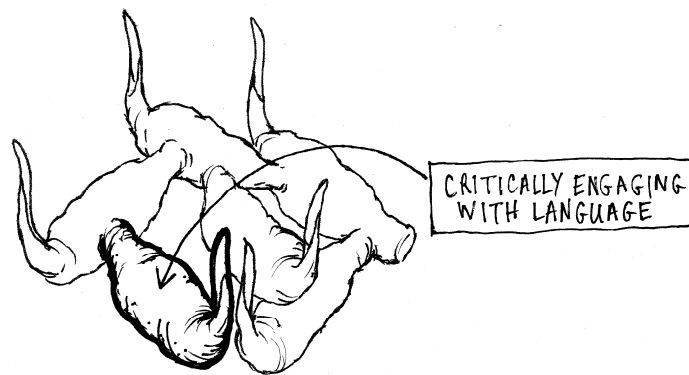
Critically Engaging with Language is a Guiding Intention in this work because of the powerful role language practices play in community work. Having been immersed in both activist and social construction traditions, I use language in ways that resist abuses of power, and allow for the speaking of experiences that have been marginalized, dismissed, and perhaps dangerous to talk about even with oneself. I aim to contest language practices that maintain power arrangements that are limiting, if not destructive and I aim to avoid using language in ways that hold marginalized clients responsible for their own suffering, displacement and poverty. By holding an overt intention of utilizing language in liberatory ways, I hope to open possibilities for clients and community workers who are marginalized to tell alternative stories and resist attacks against their individual and collective identities.

A central part of what I mean by Critically Engaging with Language is making words, stories, and conversations come alive. I want to create language practices that invite languaging the body, acknowledging ways of being together that are outside of spoken language. I listen for and use language to open space for certain kinds of talk that invites difference into the conversation and recognizes the usefulness of ambiguity, discord, and silence.

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[224] I have used a different name for Ahmid to guard his confidentiality, and because I do not have a way to contact him to negotiate using his own name, which he may have preferred.

The Social Construction of Language and Meaning

I am informed by social construction understandings of language. This means that what we experience as reality is created in and through language and social interactions between people.[225] This challenges the idea that if we just found the right language to represent our true inner experiences, we would know the single universal truth of ourselves and the world.[226] Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein contests this idea that language accurately represents reality and offered instead a relational understanding of language.[227] For Wittgenstein, meaning is a social-linguistic product, an action; language is something we do together. We create meanings of the world through our "collaborative activities".[228]

Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin also understood language as a relational and responsive activity. [229] People respond to each other's utterances in a series of collaborative actions. Similarly, Maturana describes language as a "manner of living together".[230] Language is what makes us human, and actually developed from human interactions and from our love for each other. Maturana's ideas are compelling, in part because his ideas come from the traditions of biology and science, not linguistics. "I am not denying that you need a brain to participate in language. What I am saying is that the phenomenon of language does not occur in the brain, rather it occurs in the recursive coordination of interactions in the flow of living together."[231]

Critically Engaging with Language in our community work helps us to resist professional "talk of things hidden inside of the heads of individuals". [232] As Maturana says, the brain is involved in language – but in my work I hold this idea alongside my knowing that a brain is contained within a particular body that is moving in the world and is subject to power. Oppression doesn't happen to people in their brain. It happens to people in the world. Critically Engaging with Language offers the possibility of naming these oppressions in the social realm and working to transform them.

Meaning as Context Specific and Cultural

Recognizing how meaning is always socially constructed sharpens our awareness of how many interpretations and meanings can develop from a single utterance or seemingly simple exchange. This awareness opens possibilities for working to develop *just* meanings and liberatory change.

No one coherent story is revealed through correct language or gesture. Rather as Colin Sanders, a Canadian narrative-informed therapist, eloquently states, meaning is "ascendant", through our "mutually

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[225] McCarthy (2001), pp. 254.

[226] Strong & Lock (2005)

[227] Wittgenstein (1953)

[228] Gergen & Gergen (2004), pp. 7.

[229] Bakhtin (1984, 1981)

[230] Maturana (1991), pp. 58.

[231] Maturana & Bunnell (1998)

[232] Shotter & Katz (1998), pp. 88-89.

evolved fragmentary experiences".[233] The meaning given to a gesture or a phrase in one setting is particular to that context and would be different inside a different meaning-making system or culture.[234] Power and the presence or absence of justice are important aspects of context. This understanding of context problematizes the idea of common sense, and giving obvious or stable meanings to actions and statements.[235] Consider an example of the act of shaking hands with a client. The worker shakes the client's hand without immediately releasing but holding on, perhaps bringing their other hand to the clasped hands and resting it there momentarily. This act would hold a particular meaning for a client who welcomed touch, but was used to being physically avoided due to the lack of hygiene that comes with being under-housed. In this context the exchange may evoke meanings of dignity and respect. This same exchange of hand shaking and handholding would hold different meaning for another under-housed client who experienced this as a transgression of boundaries. This requires workers to consider likely meanings, possible impacts, and minute discrepancies between worker's intentions and client's responses to gestures and speech.

This fluidity of meaning is the stuff of great hope in our work. Critically Engaging with Language requires that we ask questions or behave in ways that welcome alternative meanings, where we sometimes introduce alternative meanings directly, or where voices that support submerged or marginalized meetings are heard. This critical engagement assists us in creating experiences for clients that can go beyond the limits of identities that others have put upon them, and means it is possible to make or find many different meanings of events across time. "The meanings carried by language are never fixed, always open to question, always contestable, always temporary."[236] When I read Sanders saying, "the experience of self and other need not be linear and ordered" I understand just how useful it can be to engage in talk that is potentially fractured, hard to navigate and almost purposefully unclear.[237] These are challenges, but also opportunities, for a particular attention to language that holds potential for gleaming previously ignored and liberatory meanings, which may offer clients a path out of suffering. I am heartened by Gergen's call for practitioners to create new liberatory meanings by becoming "poetic activists".[238]

Dialogue

I think about and describe my conversations with clients and community workers as dialogue. Dialogue is a particular practice of language. Tracking some of the history of the development of dialogue from social construction traditions and from cultures of activism may be of use here, as these influences are threaded together in my practices with community workers.

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[233] Sanders (1995), pp. 48.

[234] Xu (2005)

[235] Garfinkel (1967)

[236] Burr (2003), pp. 53.

[237] Sanders credits these understandings of the fractured nature of meaning to his readings of poetry and particularly to the stream of consciousness imaginings of Irish writer James Joyce (1995, pp. 49).

[238] Gergen (2005), pp. 49.

Hans-Georg Gadamer was a German philosopher and a student of Heidegger's. He witnessed Heidegger's disgraceful support of the Nazis in Germany. This experience led Gadamer to "appreciate the capacity to respect and be curious about the other, a quality he thought of as an indispensable element of political resistance." [239] Gadamer developed a practice and a concept, which he called dialogue. In dialogue, people experience "a fusion of horizons", meaning a meeting of experiences across difference. [240] He believed that all dialogue requires interpretation, as we can never truly know the world the other inhabits. Dialogue is never complete, nor is it totally understood, but is subject to translation. There are points of connection and co-created meaning, but also and always, moments of disconnect, rupture, and misunderstanding. Dialogue does not lead to an endpoint where all is clearly known and finished. A participant can only offer their interpretation of a specific dialogue, which is then interpreted responsively by another. The fusion of horizons is continual and complex, as we bring our cultural context and historical positions and understandings to every re-telling.[241] Gadamer believed there can be no objective observer to language practices, as we are all swimming in the context of language, and can't get outside of language to look in on it.

My engagement with dialogue has activist roots from popular education and Paulo Freire's teachings. Freire's work followed from Gadamer's engagement with dialogue and picked up the project of democratic dialogue, which is finely attuned to operations of power.[242] For Freire, the goal of dialogue is no less than the liberatory transformation of the world. He sees dialogue as "an act of creation".[243] The participants in the dialogue struggle to regain their right to speak their word, resist their domination, and engage in a dialogue that affirms their humanity.

> "Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people... Love is at the same time, the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause — the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression, is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world — if I do not love life —if I do not love people — I cannot enter into dialogue."[244]

For Freire, the requirements of dialogue are humility, faith in people, hope, and critical thinking. He describes critical thinking as thinking that acknowledges the solidarity of the world's people, thinking that

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[239] Cushman (2006), pp. 21.

[240] Malpas (2009)

[241] Grant (personal communication, 2008)

[242] This is Cornell West's reading of Freire's response to Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics. (in McLaren & Leonard, 1993, pp. xiii). Cornell West is a prominent Black American philosopher and civil rights activist.

[243] Freire (1970), pp. 70.

[244] Freire (1978), pp. 70-71.

views the world as being in a constant state of transformation, and thinking that is always connected to action.[245]

Dialogue, as it is informed from social construction and activist traditions, differs from regular talk as it is not about persuasion, supplying information, or defending our own position. [246] According to American social construction theorist, Sheila McNamee, "In dialogue, we are steeped in uncertainty, incompleteness, and multiplicity....Dialogue is the process of holding firmly to one's position while maintaining a curiosity and respect for another's very different position. This is what Bakhtin refers to as responsibility."[247] McNamee suggests we actively seek coherence, not holes in the argument of the other. This dialogical strategy of looking for what connects in the other's talk can help us resist debate-style language practices. This is a refreshing departure from talk in which we feel the other person is waiting for us to run out of breath so that they can attack: an experience of using the necessity of listening to the other person merely as an opportunity for us to reload.

In community work I align my practice with Anderson's description of dialogue as a withness relational process.[248] In the helping relationship,

> "Dialogue is not a one-sided, unilateral, practice driven process, nor is the practitioner passive and receptive. The practitioner is actively involved in a complex interactive process of continuous response with the client... As conversational partners we continually coordinate our actions with each other as we respond with each other. And, we are each continuously influenced by the other." [249]

For me, Anderson's description of dialogue evokes a metaphor of dialogue as dance.

Language and Therapeutic Conversation

Groundbreaking writing from Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishan in an 1988 article entitled Human Systems as Linguistic Systems highlighted the centrality of social construction views of language in the therapeutic encounter. [250] Much of their work has been integrated into common practice, but at the time, their writing was controversial in its challenge of the then taken-for-granted idea of practitioner as expert on the lives of clients.[251] They also made an enormous contribution to understandings of the profound

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[245] Shor (1993). In the context of work alongside marginalized and exploited people, many community workers find an affinity with Freire's conception of dialogue. This connection may be more influenced by practice than theory, as, in my experience, Freire's contributions are under referenced. See McLaren and Leonard's *Paulo Freire: a Critical Encounter* for a thorough and critical overview of Freire's work (1993).

[246] Here dialogue is differentiated from monologue, which is individualistic, a kind of speaking, that does not require a responsive listener. As described by Russian Linguist Valentin Voloshinov, (1996) a colleague of Bakhtin's. In their writings on Open Dialogue Seikkula and Olsen describe psychosis as a monologue; they propose dialogue, which requires social meaning-making, as a possible path out of psychosis (2003).

[247] McNamee (2008), pp. 9.

[248] Anderson (2008)

[249] Anderson (2008), pp. 19.

[250] Anderson & Goolishan (1988), Goolishan & Anderson (1987)

[251] See Anderson & Goolishan article *The client is the expert: A not-knowing approach to therapy*, in which they position therapists as learners (1992).

impact of language use in the helping relationship.[252] They invited nuanced attending to language that was based on their understandings that our problems are defined within language, as are our systems of meaning. Anderson and Goolishan differentiated therapeutic conversation from everyday conversation and offered a unique understanding of the power of therapeutic conversation to dissolve problems. This was a radical departure from the then current practices of therapeutic interventions delivered from an expert position. They attended to both the unsaid and the not yet said.[253] The idea that the client was the expert on their own experience, and that the therapist was invited in as a conversational partner was revolutionary.[254] Many practitioners struggled with this approach, although they were excited by it. It was liberating for them to think that they were no longer held up as the experts, and that interventions, homework, and strategic and structural realignment were no longer central to their practice.[255] This new thinking invited new understandings of the power of language and collaboration to create dignifying and respect-filled helping dialogues.

Collaborative Language Practices

Collaborative language practices developed by Anderson,[256] alongside many others, are used to create a constant flow of opportunity for clients to decide what transpires "within the back-and-forth movement of the conversational loom".[257] In a consultative dialogue with a community team I asked a beautifully constructed, elaborate and quite intelligent question. One of the workers leaned back in his chair, distancing himself from the question, if not from me, and gently asked me if I could rephrase the question. This practice of collaboration invited me to be of more use to the team. I responded with a respectful silence and went on to ask an unrelated but more useful question. This is one example of how collaborative language practices invite the practitioner to speak as a listener.[258]

Relational Language-Making

Relational language practices invite us to experience ourselves as always being in relationship with others; as opposed to individualism's limiting understanding of persons as "self-contained entities".[259] New Zealand narrative informed therapist Johnella Bird describes her particular attention to language practices in therapeutic conversations as relational language-making.[260] These relational language practices create what Bird calls linguistic space so that people can get some distance that allows for an investigation into

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[252] Anderson and Goolishan took a more definitive step away from cybernetics, and further challenged the prevailing discourses of family therapy in their article, *Beyond Cybernetics* (1990).

[253] The ideas of the unsaid and the not-yet-said are from the work of German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975).

[254] Anderson and Goolishan's position was controversial, and drew criticism. Canadian social construction informed therapist Tom Strong, wrote an article partly defending this position saying, "To be an expert discursive therapist involves competence in hosting resourceful conversations of possibility, not certainty. Such competence is not the same as knowledge-based expertise" (2002, pp. 230).

[255] Roth (personal communication, 2009), Sanders (personal communication, 2009)

[256] Anderson & Gehart (2007)

[257] Seikkula & Olson (2003), pp. 414.

[258] Hoffman (2000)

[259] Sampson (1993), pp. 23.

[260] Bird (2006)

the relational meanings of words and language. For example, Bird would not talk about a "courageous person" but would ask about a person's relationship with courage: "this courage that you hold..."[261] This linguistic space invites people into relationship with words and their meanings. Bird's relational language practices that centre these relational connections support me in creating community-making dialogues which are also always centered in fostering, promoting, repairing, reclaiming and holding onto relationships.

The Role of Social Poetics

Social poetics, as described by American social construction theorist, Arlene Katz and British social construction theorist John Shotter, refer to the "living moments of talk" that happen in the immediate relationship between people.[262] Katz and Shotter give credit to Norwegian therapist Tom Andersen for his teachings, which honour what he calls "arresting moments in dialogue".[263] Attending to social poetics invites us to minutely consider the diverse qualities of talk: "its tone, its emotional richness or emptiness, its nuance and variation, the rhythm of the speech used, whether it is monotonic and formulaic, whether it is empathic or wondering talk, full of feeling, varying in tone and intensity".[264] Social poetics requires attending to the reverberations in speech, and to "crucial 'poetic' moments when one is 'moved', 'arrested', or 'struck' by the working of certain words within oneself, and in conversation with others."[265] In all conversations in community work, there are words that make me turn my head. Social poetics invites me to pay attention to these moments, gestures, utterances, and resist "linguistic sleepwalking".[266]

Andersen claims "there are always emotions in the words, there are other words in the words, sometimes sounds and music in them, sometimes whole stories, sometimes whole lives,".[267] I am reminded of Bird's understandings that relational language practices are emotionally evocative. These invitations to attend to social poetics resonate with my experience in a conversation with a teenage woman of colour. She had been incarcerated for various periods of time over the past four years, and spoke of the inevitability of being incarcerated in adult prison when she turns eighteen. When I questioned this "inevitability" of a lifetime of incarceration she responded in a disembodied manner and a monotonous tone. When I asked her if she was a person who needed to be locked up in order for society to be safe, there was a pause, an exhalation, and she looked at me intensely for the first time. In a softer, quizzical voice, she said "I am not a prison person". I was struck by this diction, tone, and the emergent connection between us. Our dialogue moved into a more useful place where the inevitability of a life of incarceration was contested,

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[261] Bird offers an important critique of common uses of externalizing practices, where only problems, or negative identity practices, are externalized. Often more positive qualities are spoken of as if they are inside the person through the use of internalizing language (White & Epston 1990). Externalizing problems and internalizing good qualities is not consistent with practices of relational language (personal communication, 1998).

[262] Shotter & Katz (1998); Katz &Shotter (1996), pp. 921.

[263] Shotter & Katz (1998), pp. 82.

[264] Katz & Shotter (1996), pp. 921.

[265] Katz & Shotter (1996), pp. 920.

[266] This term comes from the work of John Heron (1996), cited in Ness & Strong (2009).

[267] Andersen, (1996), pp. 121.

and her own preferred ideas about who she wanted to be could be named. Attending to social poetics allowed me to resist getting into a debate-style of talk with her about possibilities for not going to jail. I resisted the temptation to ask standard questions that I always have ready about taking responsibility, taking an abstinence position on drugs, and other lines of inquiry that were not alive in the moment for her.

In this conversation my attending to what was happening between us, outside of words, invited our bodies to the conversation, and created space for something useful to emerge. Acknowledging language as a bodily activity invites me to consider "the rhythms of inhalation and exhalation of breath, of words as 'touches' or bodily 'movements'".[268] Shotter describes this embodied language as "the ways we body forth our utterances".[269] The pause of breath, and a pause between words, is something different and yet connected to silence in the conversation. "Creative participation in language ...attends not only to what people say, but also to the existing feelings and sensuous responses that flow between them".[270] Social poetics invites us to attend to the unsaid, the "seen but unnoticed".[271] Katz writes of this attending to the unsaid in a way that has inspired me to listen differently, "I found myself wondering again about what was not said, but hung, arrested, in the space between us, creating a silence that was anything but silent".[272]

Uncertainty, Ambiguity and Discernment

Making space in the dialogue for living moments of talk requires surrendering certainty and tolerating uncertainty.[273] I am mindful that Structuring Safety within the dialogue is necessary in order for the experience of tolerating uncertainty to be *safe-enough*.[274] I need to create a *safe-enough* space for a person to step away from familiar but limiting certainties, and into less familiar or even unknown possibilities. Language practices which make room for uncertainty are central to Anderson and Goolishan's "not-knowing" stance, in which they believe and act as if the client is the expert in their own life and situation, and the helping professional is the student.[275]

Ambiguity is a close relative of uncertainty. McCarthy speaks of ambiguity as an Irish quality she holds in great esteem. Ambiguity has been useful in a language of resistance required by a people who have endured centuries of occupation. Popular critiques of the art of Irish storytelling include ideas that the stories don't hold together, change every time in the telling, and often don't comply with historic facts.

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[268] Shotter (2008), pp. 8.

[269] Shotter (2008), pp. 8.

[270] This article articulates the principles of "Open Dialogue". Seikkula & Olson (2003), pp. 409.

[271] American Sociologist Harold Garfinkel's breaching experiments invited researchers to act as a guest in their own home or treat customers as fellow waiters. In these social experiments, Garfinkel disrupted commonsense and the ordinary. His point was to disclose "seen but unnoticed" practices of social interaction and the taken for granted production of social identities and norms. He unmasked the norms that are operating and showed how rules and norms work in social interaction. As unseen social practices were disrupted, they were made visible (1967, pp. 36).

[272] Katz & Shotter (1996), pp. 922.

[273] Tomm (2009)

[274] Seikkula & Olson (2003), pp. 408.

[275] Anderson & Goolishan (1992)

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McCarthy does not defend against these claims, but rather relishes in them. Ambiguity makes space for different re-tellings, and contests claims of the truth of particular histories. Attending to ambiguity and honouring the resistance that this language practice makes possible have been very useful in my conversations with marginalized people, especially in situations where speaking in ways that pass for clear and understandable are risky and side with injustice. For example, a survivor of torture from the Oromo community ambiguously identifies as East African on his intake forms at various social service agencies. Oromo people have been involved in struggles for independence from the state of Ethiopia. Sometimes this survivor of torture is told that he cannot be Oromo, as it does not exist as a nation, therefore he must be Ethiopian. This language practice disappears his collective cultural identity. Identifying as East African does not allow him to name his collective cultural identity, but does enable him to avoid identifying with a group he experiences as colonizing. This naming silences questioners and allows ambiguity for him to identify in a way he experiences as more *just*. He prudently does not overtly challenge the categories of nationhood in paperwork that he is required to comply with, in order to get services that he desperately needs.

In conversations with people who live in the margins of society, practices of discernment are a great resource to community workers. In social contexts where struggle and oppression can take up all of the space of conversation, it is useful and evocative of hope to listen for small differences and moments of possibility. Practitioners engaging with the best of intentions can reach too far, into territories that are perhaps possible but not familiar. In conversation with people who are homeless and struggle with addiction, questions about how their lives would be different if they were housed, or how their lives would be different if they were free from addiction, are too far from the possible and the known. Conversations that do not move too far into unknown territory are more useful. Andersen looks for dialogue that embraces "something unusual but not too un-usual".[276] I am looking for what American anthropologist Gregory Bateson calls "the difference that makes a difference".[277]

Attending to difference informs me to ask questions about small and different-enough experiences of living:

➔ Last week, you missed our session, but today you got here, what made the difference?

➔ What difference might this "showing up by saying no to alcohol" make for the rest of your day?

➔ If you continue this practice of "showing up by saying no" how might things be different for you in terms of holding onto your housing? Meeting with your welfare officer?

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[276] Andersen (1991), pp. 20.

[277] Bateson (1972, pp. 272). These ideas and practices of difference follow from Russian developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky 's earlier work on the scaffolding of conversations that promote social learning. According to Vygotsky thinking is a social action which occurs in language. Mediators or teachers scaffold learning conversations that invite the learner into conversations of difference, which promote new imaginings. Learning requires enough difference to expand what the learner already knows, but not enough difference to frustrate the learner and end curiosity (1978). White commits the last chapter of his book *Maps of Narrative Practice* (2007) to the influence Vygotsky's scaffolding theory of language has had in narrative therapy.

Silence

Social poetics invites my curiosity about practices and meanings of silence. Silence is not a neutral activity. At times, the silence takes a great amount of space and is very loud. Other times the silence speaks to the marginalization of persons. There is a power in not speaking, in not asking particular questions, and not naming experiences. Bateson talks about what gets paid attention to, which reminds me that questions that are not asked require as much scrutiny as those that are brought forward. [278]

In a therapeutic conversation with a privileged family, I experienced silence from the father in response to my attempts to engage in dialogue. Because of my class and gender locations, I was tempted to personalize this experience and thought that he was treating me as a person who was not worthy of being able to put questions to him. My assumption that his silence was a practice of disrespect wasn't very useful. I was seeing the family because the daughter was struggling with both heroin and disordered eating, and had been hospitalized multiple times when her life was at risk. In responding to his silence I asked "Are you afraid that your daughter is going to die?" This was a question from the margin, a question at the extremes, which seemed disconnected from the conversation, yet resonated with everyone. [279] The father looked at me directly and spoke clearly. "Yes." This inspired a dialogue that began with an inquiry of what it was like to be a man who was so capable in all spheres of his life, but was not able to secure the safety of his child. Questioning at the extreme, though risky, named the unspoken presence, and moved the dialogue in a direction that was more useful. The risk of not asking this question was what prompted me to speak it.

The Potential Value of Discord

I work to attend to the presence of discord, listening for more than conflict, and to open space for differences, especially those differences which are not always safe to speak. Disregarding and ignoring the presence of tension is not in and of itself respectful language, as it can side with "psychology's long-standing tendency to generate constructs that represent and naturalize consensus and coherence, at the expense of evidence of dissent and contention."[280]

My commitment to Critically Engaging with Language requires that I stay with respectful language practices in the presence of disrespect. This is something we ask clients who live in the margins to do all of the time, even when the disrespect is coming from us, the social service workers whose jobs are to serve them. Appreciating tension allows us to hold a multiplicity of experiences. We can be with anger and with respect simultaneously. In the context in which we work there are constant invitations for us to manage the anger of clients or to teach clients to manage their own anger. Addressing Power requires

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[278] Bateson (1972)

[279] *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. McCarthy credits her culture-informed reading of *The Book of Kells* with teaching that "the illumination is in the margins", and she connects this teaching with her practice of the construction of questions at the extremes (personal communication, 1996). The Fifth Province team writes about these marginal illuminations as well (Kearney *et al.*, 1989).

[280] Fine (2006), pp. 96.

acknowledging the presence of a *just anger*, and inviting language practices that allow for a hopeful tension that can hold both a *just anger* and respect. People who experience exploitation have taught me that responding to abuses of power with language practices of ambivalence, contradiction, and discord may be acts of resistance.

Making Public

Instead of holding my own counsel about everything that is going on in a dialogue, I choose to make public those parts of my experience that are not available to others but may be of use to them. [281] For example, I was in a conversation with an elder man who was under-housed and at great risk of returning to jail. I was taken with the need to keep him safe. He was at great risk of losing his parole if he was arrested again, and yet he continued to drink publicly. When he told me he did not care about losing his freedom, I responded with what I hoped was an inner rant against prison and clients who don't know what is good for them. It was obvious to me that my inner dialogue was part of the dialogical flow between us, and I chose to make public my experience with him. "I am feeling a lot of tension, and I am thinking that I am on the edge of either beginning a debate with you or worse, lecturing you. Are you feeling anything like that?" This led the conversation to a more respectful and collaborative place from which a respectful dialogue became possible.

Language and Power

"No language is neutral...Each sentence realised or dreamed jumps like a pulse with history and takes a side". [282] Critically Engaging with Language requires an overt position regarding power in relationship to language. And yet, language alone will not create the conditions for social justice. Several social construction theorists back my critique of the limitations of dialogue to deliver justice. [283] Sampson acknowledges the "gap between what some of the major dialogic theorists tell us and the actual terms of living of the majority of people." [284] Activist culture informs me that broad-based social change requires a diversity of tactics. Critically Engaging with Language in all social spheres, including community work, is but one tactic.

Four Operations of Language

My understandings of language in relationship to abuses of power have been greatly informed by the response based teachings of Canadians Linda Coates and Allan Wade. They outline Four Operations of Language in their critical stance regarding the relationships between language and power.[285] The four operations of language outline the ways that language is used to:

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[281] Anderson (2008), pp. 16.

[282] This line is from a poem by Afro-Caribbean Canadian poet activist, Dionne Brand (1991), pp. 64.

[283] These people include McCarthy (2001), also Byrne & McCarthy (1998), Cushman (2006), and Sampson (1993), among others.

[284] Samson (1993), pp.142.

[285] This analysis relies heavily on Coates and Wade's excellent article *Language and violence: Analysis of four discursive operations* (2007), which deserves a thorough consideration for practitioners committed to Critically Engaging with

- → conceal violence
- → obscure perpetrator responsibility
- → conceal victims' responses and resistance
- → blame/pathologize victims

Here I am going to use a practice example to offer an experience of the operations of language in a therapeutic conversation:

A young woman who has been the victim of ongoing sexual abuse in a foster home, tells me that she has been told by various professionals and others in her life, that she has to "deal with her issues" in order to get her life back from drugs and alcohol. She holds great shame about her willing participation in an inappropriate sexual relationship she was engaged in with an older man. She is mortified that when this sexual relationship became known to other adults she denied it, and she has no answers to the questions she's been asked about why she allowed this to continue. She has been told that there might be something really wrong with her for her to be engaging in this kind of inappropriate sexual relationship.

Violence is concealed when sexualized violence is termed an inappropriate sexual relationship. The violation of her sense of safety, her right to be a child, and other ongoing horrors are left unnamed in this kind of languaging. The perpetrator of this violence does not appear in her account, and his actions are probably absent in any of the referral information as well. Nowhere is there any account of her resistance against these ongoing attacks, or acknowledgment of her responses to them. The idea that there is something wrong with her, possibly psychologically wrong, and that she is to blame for this violence, is offered as the reason for us meeting therapeutically.

In response to pathologizing and unaccountable language, Coates and Wade suggest that in the context of helping relationships we engage with counter operations, using language to:

- → reveal violence
- → clarify perpetrator responsibility
- → elucidate and honour victims' responses and resistance
- → contest the blaming/pathologizing of victims

I ask if this was a relationship she wanted to participate in. She says that she was five years old when the attacks began. She says that he told her that this was what it is to show love, and that she had no other teachers. She says that she felt special and was given gifts for the first time in her life by this man. However, as she got older she came to understand that this was inappropriate and that she was ashamed of herself. She continued to participate in this relationship because she had so many other siblings in the foster home and wanted to keep her family together. I ask her if this was an "inappropriate sexual relationship" and she says that she did not think so; she thought that it was "a man continually hurting a

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Language. Further articles of great use in unmasking power in language include Coates & Wade's *Telling it like it is not: Obscuring perpetrator responsibility for violence* (2004). Also read an article they wrote with their colleague Nick Todd, *Shifting terms: An Interactional and discursive view of violence and resistance* (2003).

child". I ask who should be holding shame for these attacks, and she responds, "the man". I ask what it says about her that, in her own words, she "sacrificed" herself in order to defend her younger siblings from violence and kept her family together. I ask her how a five-year-old girl can defend herself against the attacks of a 40-year-old man. I ask her how drugs and alcohol takes advantage of this violence.

Following this part of the conversation she lets me know that she feels understood. She has great interest in the conversations to come, about how she resisted "full on", and how as a five-year-old girl she kept her family together. She also thinks that this way of talking is going to make it very hard for drugs and alcohol to continue to take advantage of her. She is not interested anymore in figuring out what is wrong with her, and she thinks that the best label for herself might be "superhero".

Critically Engaging with Language invites me to bring this analysis to all of my community work. The power of language is always in play, and there are always possibilities for the naming or disappearance of both power and resistance. For example, in my work alongside survivors of torture and political violence, client deaths are sometimes constructed as suicides within the dominant discourses of society and of therapy itself. Suicide means killing yourself. This language practice conceals the violence and horror of torture, leaves the true killers unnamed, entirely disappears the survivor of torture's ongoing resistance against torture, and blames the victim for their own suicide, which is a criminal act. In resistance to these dominant practices of language, Critically Engaging with Language assists me in attributing these deaths to torture, to the particular people involved in the acts of torture, to the governments or political groups that sanctioned the torture, and to particular people in wider social contexts (such as owners of multinational corporations) that benefit from the torture. In this context, I see the linguistic construction of suicide as an abdication of the relational responsibility of our global community to address injustices.

Normalizing Language

Minimizing and normalizing language disappears the social injustices within our society. I am using the word disappear as a verb here in homage to social justice activists who have been extra-judicially executed by government agents to control dissent and to instill terror in communities of resistance. The word disappear speaks to the active process required to keep knowledge silenced. Minimizing language can be more than oversight, and borrowing the term disappear from activist cultures connects these political processes that uphold structures of oppression. For example, trauma is a term that is often used in relation to work alongside people who are extremely marginalized and exploited in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. I am not contesting the presence and history of trauma, but I am critical of how normalizing and minimizing this language use can be. People can experience trauma in a car accident or a storm, where there is no person responsible for an abuse of power in relationship. Collapsing different experiences that can fall under the umbrella of trauma obscures more than it reveals. Use of the word trauma masks the heart wrenching suffering, daily indignities, and desolation people experience. In some ways, a medicalized term such as trauma can work to quiet discomfort, and make sense of these experiences which should be outside of human understanding. There is nothing normal or necessary about the violations of social justice people have experienced. Stumbling through words trying to find ways to touch this experience is not a bad thing, especially juxtaposed against the almost Orwellian speak

of trauma, which seems to end our inquiry, and disappear our social responsibility to address the conditions that made these horrors possible. [286]

Activist Language

Activist language and terminology from social justice movements often finds its way into therapeutic talk through different avenues, much of it well intentioned. Without a commitment to Critically Engaging with Language, and an ethical stance against mis-appropriation, activist language is easily de-contextualized, de-politicized and distanced from the histories and traditions from which it came. For example, this co-opting of language from social justice movements has led to the collapsing and depoliticizing of the terms protest, resistance and liberation. These words are often used interchangeably in therapeutic conversation, but hold very particular and different meanings in activist traditions.

As well, I try to be cautious about righteousness. In the language of ethics and justice, I can too easily slip into anti-oppressive rhetoric that is little more than hollow jargon. The language of social justice is appealing on many levels, even fashionable in some circles. Like other interpretive repertoires, such as the language of mental disorders, it can be co-opted for unjust ends, to position one's self as more critically conscious or activist than another person/professional, for example.

Critiquing Binaries

Binaries are linguistic constructions (such as the gender binary of men and women) that set up opposing and finite categories. While at times binaries are useful language practices, they can also be used to limit possibility and disappear outliers. The meanings of binaries are derived from opposition. I can't speak about sustainability without comparing it to burnout. It is also difficult to speak about what we are for, and the positions we choose, without being defined by what we are against. For example, many activists are defined as anti-globalization activists, when in fact, we self identify as global social justice activists. These are very different identities and not best described by binary constructions of language. [287]

In my community work I problematize the binary of gender, especially as it denies queer identities and alternative possible spaces.[288] For example, I wrote about my work alongside queer and gender transgressive youth, using androgynous language constructions such as them, they, our, and this person.

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[286] Orwell was a British anti-Stalinist leftist. He fought with the Trotskyite brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Primarily he was anti-totalitarian. In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell wrote about the relationships of language and power in a possible totalitarian state, by creating a fictitious language, "Newspeak". The totalitarian state, led by Big Brother, utilized the power of Newspeak to decide what would be held as archives, what would be remembered as history, or re-written into history, and what would be forgotten. One aim of Newspeak was to eventually eliminate "thought crimes" by making these anti-state thoughts unimaginable as there would be no language for them. In the appendix, *The principles of Newspeak,* Orwell lays out the grammar of Newspeak and offers an excellent analysis of abuses of power through language (1949).

[287] This analysis is informed by Chomsky's work, especially the practices of limiting the dialogue, and disappearing dissent, outlined in *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), and in *Necessary Illusions* (1989). In my activism against the Death Penalty, I witnessed the media engage in rigorous and exhaustive discussions on how best to kill people: hanging or lethal injection. This debate took up all the space, and presented the media as addressing the issues. The question of whether or not to kill people wasn't asked.

[288] This analysis relies heavily on Judith Butler's analysis of binaries in *Gender Trouble* (1990).

My purpose was for people to self identify, or choose not to identify their gender. An editor corrected this writing using binaries such as he, she, and him/her. Some participants who self identify as differently gendered people struggling to live and be seen outside of the binary of man/woman were invisibilized by this editing. The point is not to use inclusive and space-making language only when speaking of folks who exist outside of the binary, but to use it everywhere to expand possibility for everyone's preferred and liberatory identities.[289]

Identity and Language

Our practices of language do not merely reflect identity; rather practices of language "continually bring into being individual's social identities".[290] In this sense, language is identity-making.[291] This understanding of identity as a social and creative process is useful because it holds possibility for who we might want to be, and who we would prefer to be. But the construction of identity is not neutral and exists within contexts of power. In community work alongside exploited people, I am committed to using language in ways that resist the social construction of pathologizing and marginalizing identities. I am inspired by the possibilities created by language practices that hold people collectively and assist them in being seen in ways they experience as liberatory.

Fluidity, Performance and Multiplicity of Identity

Who we might be, and flexible ways of being related to identity, are connected to ideas of fluidity from queer theory.[292] Fluidity speaks to mutability, unstuckness, and an ability to morph. Thinking of identity informed by ideas of fluidity helps us to resist constructing identity as sedimented, reified, static, and immutable.[293] In line with the fluidity of identity, Butler believes that identity is performative.[294] She offers the example of performances of gendered identity, specifically the unlimited ways to be a woman. In doing this she opposes an essentialist interpretation of gender, which supports ideas such as the essence of woman is giving birth, the essence of man is competition. When I say, "I play third base well, *and* I throw like a girl", I am problematizing the essentialism of gender and enacting Butler's performative understandings of identity.

Identity is also multiple, as there is no one unified and true story of identity. My identity is co-constructed differently with my co-workers, my fellow activists, my family members, and my neighbours. Fluidity,

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[289] 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), pp. 23.

[290] Ehrlich (2001), pp. 5.

[291] Gergen, (1991), Cameron (1995)

[292] Jagose (1996)

[293] This languaging comes from McNamee's description of the risks of past oriented dialogue (2008).

[294] Butler (1990)

performance and multiplicity are sites of hope for us in our work as community workers with people whose identities have been under attack and damaged. I was working with a young man who had been removed from his home for violently attacking his mother. While I worked to hold him to account for his violence, I also came to know of his identity through the relationship he and I had with each other. At the beginning of our work together, I asked him if he might be up to committing to a respectful relationship with me for all of our work together. I told him that if this was something he was able to stay with, I would come to know him as a person who holds respectful ways of being, and that this story held hope for me. He was humbled by my willingness to co-construct a different identity than the one that his use of violence had constructed between him, his mother and others. We worked diligently together, and with others, to responsibly co-construct an identity of him as a young man who could be part of the culture of accountable men.

Ascribed Identities and Identity Attacks

Ascribed identities are identities which are put on a person, not necessarily of their choice or preference, and may be experienced as oppressive. These include identities such as addict, welfare-mother, or borderline. Goffman's work addresses the social responses people receive which work to spoil their identities. This perspective is useful because it acknowledges that a person's identity can be actively attacked. Identities are socially constructed, and can be diminished based on power relations, and on responses people receive from each other. Goffman referred to these attacks which result in "spoiled identities" as "stigma".[295]

Collective Identities

Collective identities are also socially constructed. In work alongside communities and groups of people who have been marginalized and exploited it is important to respond when these communities' identities have been attacked through oppression and histories of exploitation. Ignatio Martín Baro, who worked alongside oppressed communities in El Salvador, wrote about the necessity to uncover the collective lies told about a People's history. He highlighted the importance of excavating the untold story of who these communities have been and who they are. Martín Baro believed it was important to liberate not just individuals, but communities in collective ways, "shaping a new collective identity".[296] In the community work I am involved in excavating liberatory collective identities has been a creative process that moves in the direction of social justice. In this work I have been inspired by the construct of identity projects as described by American anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff.[297]

Identity Projects

Meyerhoff created the term identity projects to describe the interpersonal process used by people to socially construct their preferred identity. Meyerhoff researched a community of extreme elders who were

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[295] Goffman (1963)

[296] Martín Baro (1994), pp. 189.

[297] Meyerhoff (1978). See also, the Academy award-winning film, *Number Our Days*, which was a documentary of this project (Littman & d' Usseau, 1976).

living in Venice Beach, California and whose cultural origin was the Diaspora of Jews from Russia at the turn of the last century. Many of these elders had no living family members and few social contacts outside of their membership in an elders' social center. Myerhoff witnessed these elders telling preferred stories of who they are and who they have been. She wrote of this practice as "remembering", which she saw as collecting dis-membered pieces of their identities and putting them together through the relational language that occurs between people.[298]

One woman found repeated audiences for a story in which she was the protagonist defending herself against several young Christian anti-Semitic thugs. The climax of the story had this woman declaring to the young Christian men that Jesus was a Jew. The young men were aghast at this revelation and dispersed. The story did several things in terms of the identity project of this woman. It showed her lifetime of resistance against anti-Semitism and racism, it highlighted her intelligence, her ability to stand up against tormentors, her fearlessness, and her dignity as an elder. This languaging of preferred identity was an act of resistance against identities that were inscribed upon her and ascribed to her, such as helpless little old lady. Her preferred story constructed an identity that resisted the invisibility of elder women. Meyerhoff demonstrated throughout her work that identity is a fluid social construction which requires particular audiences.

Meyerhoff's invitation to create language practices that evoke and support the projects of individual and collective identity is threaded throughout my community work. Identity projects have made a meaningful difference in my work, most particularly, in the lives of refugees and survivors of torture, who have had their identities, both personal and collective, attacked and stolen. My understandings of witnessing have been expanded by Myerhoff's descriptions of particular audiences.

Summary

Critically Engaging with Language is a resource to community workers to assist us in Addressing Power and acting in accord with our collective ethics. It invites a spontaneous and relational practice that embraces social poetics, and joins with people in talk that is alive and meaning filled. It invites us to socially construct new and liberatory identities alongside individuals and communities who have been victims of social injustice. Critically Engaging with Language invites us into what Johnella Bird calls talk that sings[299] and dialogues that makes a difference with the hope of *doing justice*.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language: A Not-quite Silence

> *Sabeen arrives at our small community office accompanied by an interpreter, Tommy. I haven't seen her in over a year as our therapeutic work ended and the settlement worker was handling her refugee status, which seemed to have gone smoothly. Tommy called yesterday to schedule this appointment. Sabina and I greet each other with kisses on the cheek, and I look from her to Tommy, who tells me that Sabeen's father was arrested three days ago and the family has received word that he has died in prison. As pain shoots through my body I look to Sabeen, put my hand on her arm and say "Let's go into my room". Tommy doesn't interpret this into Arabic, as I anticipate, but moves his neck awkwardly. Speaking in English he tells me that*

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[298] Myerhoff(1982)

[299] Bird (2004)

he will not be coming into this session, as Sabeen has told him on the drive in from the suburbs that she wants to meet with me alone. He says sheepishly, "I think she just wants me as a driver today". I do not speak Arabic, and I feel a moment of total inadequacy, alongside a desire to follow Sabine's request for what she needs. I open the door to the office and invite Sabeen to enter first.

Sabeen moves to the couch, declining either of the chairs, sits near the middle and pats the place next to her suggesting I sit there. We sit quietly, not looking directly at each other and not touching for an amount of time I have difficulty judging. Sabeen exhales loudly, turns towards me, takes my right hand in her left hand, and slowly begins to weep.

I am moved. I am thinking of her father's murder. I am thinking of Sabeen's own suffering at the hands of Syrian agents of state. I think of my father and how empty the world will be when he is not in it. I have lost track of time, I notice that Sabeen and I are breathing in the same pattern. Sabeen reaches over with her right hand and takes a ring off of my finger. She slips a red stone ring off of her finger and puts it onto mine. She puts my ring on her finger, takes my hand again and continues to sit alongside me, weeping quietly. I feel distressed in my gut; I know that as a refugee she has not brought much from Syria. And I remember this ring, because we have joked about it in the past. I sternly remind myself to never complement a refugee about something precious again. I am uneasy about the politics of exchange and wonder how I will refuse her gift.

We have been together almost an hour when she reaches across with her right hand, takes her ring off of my finger and returns mine. Something shifts between us. She takes a tissue and wipes her eyes and blows her nose. She gets up ahead of me and leads me out of the room.

In the main office Tommy awaits our reappearance. I ask Sabeen in English, if we should meet again, she and Tommy speak in Arabic. He replies to me that meeting again is too difficult to arrange as there is no childcare, transportation is difficult from the suburbs, and that Sabeen is beginning some paid work alongside her English language classes. Sabeen takes my arms in her hands, looks at me with sadness and says, "Thank you Victoria". We kiss each other goodbye, once on each cheek, and I say goodbye to Tommy while shaking his hand. They walk out together.

I do not know what meaning Sabeen has given to our time together. For me this dialogue outside of words, a not-quite silence, resonates. I exhale, and feel that I have been accompanied.[300]

I remember being afraid to bring this work to clinical supervision as I felt I had broken so many rules. The immediacy of this discomfort led me to contact Colin Sanders, my supervisor at another workplace. He said, "Sometimes all you can do is be with a person when they cry". I felt the solidarity connecting us, and was not so alone in my work. It helped me go on, despite not knowing what I was supposed to be going on to. I still hold that teaching close.

Colin critiqued this writing and responded to the re-telling of this story by offering these reflections:

> The intention behind my words had to do with being present and attentive to what is being conveyed perhaps for the first time after all of the suffering. What was Adorno's reflection: "There can be no poetry after Auschwitz"?[301] In this poignant engagement between Sabeen and yourself, she provided you with a different cultural experience, one in which introductions may be made by kissing, touching, holding. Often, this stands outside of the normative perspective.

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[300] Much later I asked Sabeen if I could offer a re-telling of this story as I thought it would be useful to my students, and she agreed. She asked me to choose another name for her.

[301] German social philosopher Theodor Adorno wrote," To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" in *An essay on Cultural Criticism and Society* (1967, pp. 34). Adorno was influential in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.

This speaks to me of an-other tradition, other ways of being and engaging that are heart-felt and, perhaps, confounding. We might refer to the experience Sabeen moves you through as a ritual of inclusion; Sabeen including you within the silence of her own anguish and you providing a safe witness to this experience, whatever it was. Your collective exchange evokes the unsaid and the not-yet-said.

F. Structuring Safety

This writing addresses the Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety. Discerning Structuring Safety from the other Guiding Intentions is difficult because they are all closely connected in the horizontal structure of a rhizome. As well, Structuring Safety is achieved through simultaneous engagement with all of the Guiding Intentions.

I use the term Structuring Safety to describe the practices of negotiating or co-constructing conditions, structures and agreements that will make space for a *safe-enough* experience for all participants in community work. I believe Structuring Safety is a necessary condition for community work. Of course safety is not a thing that can be delivered by one person, as safety is co-created in relationships. Dialogues that are experienced as safe are not capricious, natural, or random. They require intentional practices and ways of being that set the space for *safe-enough* dialogues.

Structuring Safety is important because issues of power are present in all of our community work, and we are always involved in risky conversations. Doing harm by replicating some kind of oppression is always a potential risk. This is true despite our commitments to act in ways that are connected to social justice and in accord with our collective ethics. Many of us have all too familiar experiences of being in unstructured groups where risk was palpable and harm was done. Many people doing our work have participated in groups with facilitators who have not upheld their obligations to structure safety and address risk. My commitment to Structuring Safety follows from and is developed in response to this kind of painful learning. I aim to approach all learning, training, or supervision informed by the same Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety with which I approach a counselling group.

The components of Structuring Safety I describe here include co-creating collaborative agreements, resisting innocent positions, and setting parameters for the dialogue. This includes confronting the politics of open space, and practicing collaboration. As the facilitator I aim to anticipate a transgression against safety, and act to prevent avoidable injuries and maintain safety. If a transgression occurs I work

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to create responses which repair relationship and restore *enough-safety* to go on. Structuring Safety brings predictability to counselling and community work, and that predictability contributes to the building of safety. Much of my understanding of Structuring Safety is informed by my work as a therapist and supervisor alongside survivors of torture and political violence. I present some teachings about Structuring Safety from this therapeutic work alongside survivors. I believe it has much to contribute to community work.

Many teachings about Structuring Safety are unreferenced in this writing as they come from my work in activist communities and new social movements over decades of fellowship. [302] A fabulous maxim of activism says, "It is amazing what you can accomplish when you don't care who gets the credit". These teachings are alive in our activist and community work, and a part of the commons that belong to no one and to us all.[303]

Risks of Transgressing Safety

It is important to have someone in the group dedicated to Structuring Safety.[304]In my role as facilitator, trainer or supervisor, my job is to hold the care of the group of practitioners at the center. All group members have an obligation to find ways to make the work useful for them, and to the clients they are working with; group members' obligations to the safety of the group come second.

As the facilitator I cannot assure safety. Nor can I accept the consequences of the risks inherent in the work, as these risks cannot be shared equally. Practitioners and clients with less access to privilege and status are at greater risk than other people in community work. Creating agreements that mean we are willing to be held accountable for our transgressions is part of what structures safety. I am also aware of the limitations of this accountability. At times accountability holds the center in our community work, when justice would be better served by creating a context in which the risk of transgression is minimized. This requires Structuring Safety. When, for example, homophobia is enacted, when something denigrating of others based on sexual orientation is said, there is blood on the floor. While our collective attempts to build accountability can offer the hope of repair to relationships and begin to create some way forward together, through and beyond paralysis, it does not undo the violence of the act. All

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[302] I would appreciate being caught up on any appropriate references which could assist me in referencing this work more accountably.

[303] American political philosopher Michael Hardt offers this description of the commons. "On the one hand, the common refers to the earth and all of its ecosystems, including the atmosphere, the oceans and rivers, and the forests, as well as all the forms of life that interact with them. The common, on the other hand, also refers to the products of human labor and creativity that we share, such as ideas, knowledges, images, codes, affects, social relationships, and the like" (Hardt, 2009). Canadian cultural critic Naomi Klein writes of the commons as," the public sphere, the public good, the noncorporate" (Klein, 2002, pp. 242). Global social justice activists everywhere collectively resist coprorate attacks which aim to privatize and exploit the common wealth of the planet.

[304] I hold respect for leaderless groups, acknowledging that groups which function as collectives have different practices and histories that allow them to collectively move forward. In much of the community work that I am engaged in there is no structure, analysis, history or time that would make a group *safe-enough* without someone taking responsibility for Structuring Safety.

conversations across difference are inherently risky, and of greater risk to some than to others. This is just one small way in which our work can never be innocent.

Preparing the Space to Foster Safety

I do not leave more to chance than I have to in terms of Structuring Safety. Nor do I rely on the good intentions of everyone engaged in the processes. This is true whether the group is meeting for the purposes of activism, community work, counselling or training. I want the dialogues to be free-flowing, spontaneous, with room for the possible which has not yet been named. For that to happen, I take responsibility to put structures in place, in accordance with an ethical stance, from which a dialogue can be constructed. This adherence to structure supports the dialogue, and makes the fluidity and spontaneity of the group dialogue possible.

One way I attend to preparing the space to foster safety is by having some cultural objects immediately visible that give people a more informed idea of who I am. For example, I often have a Pride Flag somewhere, a sticker on a filing cabinet or a pin in a bulletin board. I have a painting in my office that reads, *Aboriginal Reconciliation: Learning Together*. The image is of the clasped hands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Other people may chose to have a fairly neutral feeling to their office in line with their engagement with Structuring Safety, as it allows room for whoever the client is to be welcomed. There are many paths to Structuring Safety in terms of setting. What I think is most important is that the setting serves as a response to the question: How does this space engender safety?

I try to dress in ways that let people know more of who I am, related to the purposes of our work. When I am working in the Downtown Eastside or with groups of marginalized workers I dress in ways I hope will be read as respectful. I aim to let people know that they are important to me and that this is important work. I might also roll up my sleeve to show some tattoo because that is part of who I am as well. As RuPaul says, "we are born naked and the rest is drag".[305] This speaks to the social construction of our identities and specifically names the fact that there is no natural way of dressing or presenting ourselves. I speak directly about my cultural locations depending on the group and its purposes. I usually say I am Irish Catholic with ties to Newfoundland and England. It is important that I name my cultural locations because I have white skin and in Canada that is the dominant culture. Without naming my cultural locations I could pass as normal. Here the Guiding Intentions of Addressing Power and Structuring Safety merge. My initial actions help to structure safety as they allow people to have a bit more information about who I am before we begin working together. Having some idea of who the facilitator is can invite being at ease, but not so much at ease that participants can say anything they want without thinking.

Collaborative Agreements

In all the work that I do I begin with co-creating collaborative agreements. I resist the pressures of time and ideas of "getting on with the real work" and prioritize the co-creation of collaborative agreements.

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[305] RuPaul is a Black drag queen, who has said, "The clothes, our religious affiliation, our color, our race -- all of that is temporary. It is all just something we put on. That's really what prompted me years ago to say we are born naked, and the rest is drag"(2009).

Experience in activism has taught me that shortcutting collaborative agreements is a set up for a risky dialogue.

Collaborative agreements are always fluid in terms of the context in which they are co-created and the purposes of our work. I am not talking about a list of rules. There are however, key agreements that are always brought forward by participants or by myself. These include; respect, agreements on time, holding our own counsel, holding the dialogue to the purposes we agreed on, and confidentiality. Each of these items is discussed in depth so that everyone knows what they are agreeing to. I will ask people what they mean by respect, and depending on what comes forward I may add my understanding of respect. This includes the ways in which we speak about clients and other workers, a position against being oppressive in any way, sharing space and making room for alternative voices, and permissioning every participant to have the autonomy to do what they need to do to make the group useful. Taking time and space for the preparation of collaborative agreement increases the potential for everyone to know what is meant by the words that we are using, and to commit to them.

I invite collective responsibility for the collaborative agreements, and I make public the limitations of my ability to keep the group safe despite my best intentions. I am clear that I will hold an intention of inviting the group back to collaborative agreements, and hold participants accountable. I let people know that I will not be siding with the politics of politeness and that I will step in. I am also public about the fact that I am the person who has the most power in the group and it is possible that I may act against the collaborative agreements. In the event that this happens, I invite participants to address my transgression against the collaborative agreements. I acknowledge publicly that my position of power within the group makes this a harder task.

As part of the collaborative agreements we discuss holding our own counsel. By this I mean that participants have the autonomy to decide how they will participate in the work of the group. This is more complex than the right to pass, or not participate, or stay silent. Participants don't get to hold their own counsel if someone else transgresses against it by making their own meaning of the person's silence. It is a relational activity that we gift and permission each other with. Taking time and space to have a richer engagement with holding our own counsel structures safety, and makes it more likely participants can engage the practice of holding their own counsel, with fewer fears of being judged or misunderstood.

There are multiple reasons why a participant might hold their own counsel. They may want to maintain their containment as speaking may move them to a place that is not useful. People may decline speaking, as they are struggling with an issue which may be offensive or discomforting for the group in a way that is not useful. People may hold an intention of de-centering themselves and taking less public space. People may be unsure of the structures of confidentiality and boundaries related to what they may share.

Dignity

I prioritize Structuring Safety as it can guard against violations of peoples' dignity. I do not want to catch people and prove how righteous I am by correcting them publicly. In terms of Structuring Safety I take many preventative moves, one of which is to always set the scene so people know who I am and what might transpire in our work together. For example, when we are speaking about respect in negotiating the

collaborative agreements, I usually find a way to give an example from the community of people from the Downtown Eastside, who are extremely poor and are often talked about in pathologizing ways. Purposefully bringing forward practices of respect in relation to people whose identities are marginalized invites participants into a thoughtful engagement with collective ethics. I want to invite everybody into the dialogue in respectful ways, and not have to resort to confronting anyone.

No Innocent Position

As practitioners, we learn our work on the backs of clients. There is no other way forward. I believe a hard truth is that there is no innocent or neutral position for community work. Clients pay the greater consequences for our lack of knowing. This is an inherently unfair and unsafe situation. This lack of innocence is painfully articulated by the Fifth Province Team of Ireland: "Knowing that an innocent view can never return to us we pause as silent witnesses to the alienating, impoverishing rupture between ourselves and the dispossessed."[306] Part of my resistance to siding with the secrecy of this unfairness is to name my own history of mistakes made on the backs of clients I have worked with. When I am involved in training or supervising I always hold close to me those clients who never returned to the counselling relationship. The ones I could never ask about what I did wrong. Sharing this vulnerability about the part of my work that is not innocent structures safety by inviting practitioners to bring forward their own vulnerabilities.[307]

Contesting the Politics of Politeness

I am Canadian, so I understand the politics of politeness as a tenant of my national identity. I was in Portugal for Carnival, in a chaotic mob. It was unclear how you could get a ticket and then get to the gate through this wild melee. I caught sight of what appeared to be a lineup of five people and I happily took my place in line and relaxed. My problem solved. Not surprisingly, three minutes later, the gentleman in front of me turned around and said "You must be Canadian too. This line hasn't moved in half an hour. I fear we have to elbow our way through this crowd". We were all mortified that there would not be an orderly line that would solve this problem of how to be in this festive community. This politics of politeness can be a nice thing in a lineup, but engaging with politeness in an uncritical way can pose risks to safety in our community work. The politics of politeness shows up in our community work as smoothing things over, talking ourselves and others out of our discomfort, and more egregiously, esteeming harmonious relationships over *just* relationships. Certainly there is a role for politeness in our relationships to each other as community workers, without which our collective action is impeded. It is useful, however, to elaborate and experiment with the boundaries of politeness. My point here is that engaging with politeness that sides with smoothing over discomfort can be a threat to Structuring Safety.

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[306] The centering of social justice in the work of the Irish Fifth Province Team has been a constant companion in my therapeutic and community work over time. I have been informed and sustained by the writings, teachings, and fellowship of Imelda McCarthy and Nollaig Byrne. This quotation comes from the writing of the expanded Fifth Province Team; Kearney *et al.*, (1989), pp. 17.

[307] These ideas are supported by the writings and work of the Amy Rossiter (2001, 1995) who teaches Social Work from a critical perspective.

Resisting smoothing over tensions and discomforts that may be important for our collective work requires moral courage and a rich engagement with my ethical positioning. [308] When something disrespectful or discomforting occurs in groups, many participants, and sometimes facilitators, become extremely interested in their shoes. They look down, serving to disengage themselves from what is going on within the group. When something disrespectful happens in a group, I aim to invite the group to take a position on the transgression. This makes it something other than a personal relationship between two group members, as everyone is involved as an audience to this speech act.[309] Tied to the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language, I acknowledge that language is used and performs as action: words do things. Structuring Safety requires that I attend to these speech acts, which could be shaming. Shame is a relational thing we socially construct. It is in these moments that I invite collective responsibility and community-making into Structuring Safety. We have shifted the dialogue from being interpersonal between two people, to being the stuff that the group must collectively respond to. This collective responsibility structures safety and lets people know that they will be backed up. Acts that are not in line with the collective agreements of the group will be dealt with compassionately but clearly, which also promotes *enough-safety* for the group to function. As the facilitator my work now is to invite the group to attend to the repair of relationships.

Community workers are often people with a great capacity for compassion and sometimes we find it difficult to allow each other to struggle. When another practitioner makes public their discomfort, there is a tendency for fellow workers to jump in and resolve the tension or discomfort with praise, applause, or evidence that the discomfort is not warranted. Rescuing each other from discomfort sets the tone of harmony and contentment, which often passes for support. I trust that community workers hold embodied knowings of their own relationships with ethics. Acting in ways that transgress ethics is often experienced as discomforting. I welcome this discomfort as a resource to the practitioner, a communication from the body which requires not a solution but an attending-to. Often our discomfort can be an invitation to revisit our ethics in the moment. Practices of smoothing over discomfort can silence this important knowing. Structuring Safety requires different responses, which make space for people to engage with ethical struggles, but does not leave them alone in that struggle.

A penchant for avoiding conflict often passes for good facilitation, despite the risks that prioritizing good feelings might bring. Conflating differences into sameness does not promote safety. It promotes compliance and silence. People with more access to power can more easily set the parameters of the discourse, meaning what is allowed to be said, what questions can be asked, and what becomes possible to do.[310] Discomfort and harmony interact continuously in groups flowing between togetherness and

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[308] Practices of moral courage are informed from the teachings of Johnella Bird (1995).

[309] As we are speaking we are performing, doing something, not just describing something. These understandings of performative speech are informed by the writings of Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and Turner (1987).

[310] I am referring to Foucault's theorizing about dominant discourse, which is described more fully in the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language (Foucault, 1972).

separateness. While I welcome harmony in groups, I also recognize that discomfort can be creative and conducive to committed *just* action.

The Role of Structure

Part of Structuring Safety is providing a specific structure for the dialogue. In my community work, I engage in purposeful conversations with intent. I am clear in co-constructing the collaborative agreements that we will be sharing space, and that we will stay within the parameters of the work that we have agreed to do together. This is important because if the dialogue is taken over or meanders into territory that is risky or not of use, getting back on track may require me to intervene overtly and powerfully.

An example from activist work within the women's movement may be useful here. I participated in a broad coalition addressing women's rights, in which meetings were loosely structured and a facilitator was randomly chosen or volunteered at the beginning of each meeting. The group was organized around a particular project, which everyone had agreed to. The conversation was continually taken off course into a direction which required women to defend their rights to men. Speaking was informal and a microphone was passed hand-to-hand. Contrary to popular claims, an open microphone does not mean that everyone has equal access to speak. Expressing a point of view publicly often requires a level of entitlement that is informed by privilege. Taking unstructured public space is not neutral and can be competitive, silencing some voices.

I learned a lesson about Structuring Safety from the facilitator at the following meeting, who began by seeking our agreement about naming the limits of what the conversation was going to encompass. She positioned herself as someone who would openly limit speakers who were not on topic with the work we had agreed to do together. There were a few loud public rumblings about the lack of democracy in the process. There was also great collective relief that we would address the work we all agreed to do, and resist being taken off track by the loudest and most articulate or powerful members. We had been collapsing democracy with the myth of access in public space. As part of the collaborative agreements, we need to have an understanding of the work we have agreed to do together. The sometimes difficult work of the facilitator is to hold the group to that agreement.

The Role of Solidarity

I try to build solidarity in all of the work that I do, whether it be activist, community, counselling, or training work. This requires safety and promotes safety, as safety and solidarity are interrelated. In conversations in the margins where we are Addressing Power, there are always invitations to competition and debate. Both of these are seductions that lead us away from co-creating safety. It is seductive especially when we side with righteousness, and engage in debate to score points. The ethical positioning I hold requires that I decline the invitation to debate or compete, and try to stay with practices of collaboration.

I resist debating by continually bringing the focus of the dialogue back to what we have agreed to hold at the center. This is usually the clients that we serve. This sounds simple, but when I believe that I can tear another person's argument apart easily, publicly, and victoriously, I struggle to decline righteous. I hold

close my desire to be in solidarity with everyone in this work. This invites a leaning in towards the other. It reminds me that acting in a way that harms the dignity of another person, especially publicly, is not in line with the ethics I hold. I remind myself in these moments that my aim is not to be right, correct, or seen as smart. My aim is not to put this person in their place, which is a place outside of my location. My aim is always moving toward solidarity, and so I need to act in a way that makes space for that person and me to be walking alongside each other. I remind myself that there are some collective ethics we share or we would not be meeting in this space together. I hold on to that faith as it helps me move towards Structuring Safety through being in solidarity with others.

The Role of Allies

I am often situated as an ally in community work. In activist cultures an ally is a person who belongs to a group which has particular privileges, and who works alongside people from groups that are oppressed in relation to that privilege. The hope is to create change and increase social justice in relation to this oppression.[311] For example, accountable men work as allies alongside women to address men's privilege. Able-bodied allies work alongside people with physical challenges to increase public access and reduce stigma.

Kiwi Tamasese, Head of the Samoan branch of the Family Center in New Zealand, taught me several things that I have held onto in terms of Structuring Safety in my role as an ally alongside women of colour from colonized cultures. What she has found most useful in terms of developing relationships of safety and trust with women from dominant cultures, is knowing how long allies are going to be in the struggle and what is the nature of their commitment. She wants to know if I am a tourist, putting my toe in the water to see if I am going to jump in, or if I am a committed ally, in for the long haul. This is important, because an ally position is not static or fixed. As a straight white woman of privilege from the global north, I can choose to act as an ally alongside marginalized women and then choose to leave the struggle. In terms of Structuring Safety I have found it useful to make public the particularities of my commitment. When there is trust that I am committed alongside marginalized women over the long haul, my unavoidable (yet not innocent) mistakes may be put into a context which invites a knowing of me that is informed by my acts of solidarity; "She has been with me before, she is going to be with me and with my communities into the future. It is worth teaching her about this. Her intentions were probably not to replicate this oppression with me". Committed relationships that are made public and open to invitations to accountability contribute to Structuring Safety across differences.

When serving in the role of ally it is important that I locate myself in my privilege. I have been respectfully referred to as a "queer-passing straight girl" by members of queer and transgendered communities in settings where I am serving in the role of a heterosexual cisgendered ally.[312] Early in the dialogue I find ways to publicly position myself in these privileged aspects of my identity. I do this by making reference

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[311] A thorough and accessible text on this subject is Anne Bishop's *Becoming an ally: Breaking the cycle of oppression* (1994).

[312] Descriptions from queer and transgender communities were more fully laid out in The Frame. Simplistically, my cisgendered privilege speaks to the fact that I have the biology of a woman, identify myself as a woman, and I am most often read as a woman socially.

to my male partner. It is important that I do not pass for a member of queer and transgendered communities, as people may experience more affinity and safety than my privileges warrant. Later, people may feel that they have been lied to or that some truth has been withheld from them. When I work with community workers and clients in the Downtown Eastside, I usually find ways to be public about the fact that I have never lived on the street or struggled with substance abuse. I do this because I am sometimes read as someone who has had these experiences, and these misunderstandings invite a trust and fellow-feeling that is neither earned nor present. In both of these examples, I make my privilege known as part of Structuring Safety, and as a beginning place for trust to grow.

Responding to Backlash

Our aim in creating alliances in community work is to create change for social justice which is in line with our collective ethics. In all work that addresses and challenges power and oppression we need to have an understanding of backlash. Backlash refers to responses that support and reinforce the positions of power or oppressions that are being questioned. For example, in activist work alongside refugee claimants experiencing racism, a backlash position may be taken that immigrants need to adapt to "Canadian culture". The presence of racist oppression, which is the experience of many refugee claimants, is negated by this backlash position. In community work where the impact of colonization and genocide in Canada is being talked about, a backlash position may be taken by bringing forward accounts of Indigenous people as "alcoholics". This backlash takes the focus off of the oppression, and presents a very complex issue as simplistic evidence of the pathology of Indigenous cultures. There are no neutral examples of backlash because backlash means reinforcing oppressive power.

Part of Structuring Safety in any work which addresses power and oppression across differences requires planning for a useful response to potential backlash. Members of the community facing oppression and their allies have prior discussions in which responses to backlash are planned. For example, as part of planning of a training on queer and transgendered issues, we had a meeting of the presenters who are members of queer and trans communities with myself in the role of a transgendered and queer ally. We spoke about what backlash we might anticipate, what were some possible responses, and who would be the preferred person to respond. Anticipating and planning a useful response to backlash, which may or may not show up, is important in terms of having a *safe-enough* structure and some confidence that paralysis, anger, or fear, will not silence the response. Negotiations of who will respond to the backlash need to be accountable to the people who are oppressed by it. Often a good person to reply to a backlash position is an ally, as they are most likely to be heard and least likely to be personally oppressed in the moment. In instances where I have responded to backlash as an ally, I work to differentiate the person from what is spoken. The person who has brought the backlash position forward is a member of the same group as I am. Here I want to move in solidarity towards this person, and not shame them, while being clear about naming and resisting oppression. I acknowledge that this requires a great deal of skill and solidarity.

The fact that allies are more likely to be listened to than the people who are being oppressed is by no means unproblematic. Deciding to give voice to allies in addressing backlash is a strategic decision that aims to create more change, but it comes at a cost. A sick-in-the-belly, shaming memory I hold is being

listened to as an ally of privilege when the people who were being oppressed were not being listened to. We were in the same context, at the same time, saying the same things, and yet in that instance I was heard because of my white skin.

Resisting Assumptions

Working as an activist and community worker in marginalized contexts which are rife with risk has invited me to prioritize Structuring Safety. No work is neutral, however, and I strive to prioritize the structuring of safety in all of my work. The Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety speaks to a desire to mitigate risk and promote safety for all people doing relational work. One of the practices which has been useful to me in holding close to this intention is to remember that I never know who anyone is. By this I mean that I never believe that I am in a totally safe place; or that I know who a group of community workers are. Structuring Safety in all situations reminds me to hold the care of the group at the center. This requires that I decline ascribing totalizing identities to any of the people that I am working with. Everyone has pain and everyone's pain is real. A community worker who is a white straight man may have lost a child to death, been unable to conceive a child, had a child given up for adoption, or had a child apprehended. He may be transgendered and have lived experience as a woman. He may be a former heroin user and a Christian, or a Bahai. He may be married to a police officer, or a prisoner. I attempt to hold all of these possibilities open so that I structure safety in ways that are inclusive of all of the multiple and fluid identities for all of the participants.

Structuring Safety in Therapeutic Work Alongside Survivors of Torture and Political Violence

Here I outline some impactful learnings regarding Structuring Safety which come from my therapeutic work as a therapist and supervisor alongside survivors of torture and political violence. In the work shown here, the focus is individual, but I believe there is value in bringing these practices forward as they can be applied to Structuring Safety in other contexts of community work. Developing a capacity for Structuring Safety is a core competency for therapists working alongside survivors of torture and political violence, requiring compassion, creativity and critical therapeutic supervision. These practices of Structuring Safety include: co-creating relationships of enough safety, negotiating permission, developing the capacity to hear no, engaging collaboratively, declining intrusive curiosity, and seeing Structuring Safety as the "real work".

Co-creating relationships of *enough-safety* occurs outside of the binary of safe and unsafe,[313] where talk can become totalizing in terms of paralyzing risk and perfect safety. Relationships with survivors of torture exist outside of this binary, and I aim to create *some-safety*, *enough-safety*, or a *safe-r* conversation. I don't speak of safety as a totalizing construct that is possible between us, or one that I can deliver.

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[313] Practices of resisting the binary of safe and un-safe were introduced to me in supervision with Johnella Bird, and the languaging of *enough-safety* is hers. Also much of my use of relational languaging is tied to Johnella's work and influence (2000, 2004).

Practices such as continually negotiating permission can engender safety. This practice addresses the relational nature of permission, which is different than assuming permission is obtained through signing forms.

Structuring Safety invites the therapist to develop a rich capacity to hear no and to develop their own repertoire of ways of looking for and listening to the survivor's no. Here are some questions I use in my work alongside survivors of torture and political violence to structure safety through negotiating permission:

> ➔ What ways of knowing yourself have you trusting that you will be able to say no to me if I ask something that is not okay?
>
> ➔ What will it take for you to be able to say no to me if I ask you a question that's not all right?

Anything short of a heartfelt yes in therapeutic conversation can be a sign to slow down, re-negotiate permission, and be curious about what it has taken for the survivor to say no to a person with power.

> ➔ This hesitation just now, is this one of the ways you have of telling me that this is not a useful question right now?
>
> ➔ You know, I am thinking that that was not a very useful question. Do you agree? Thanks for letting me know that. Are you having any ideas of what a more useful question could be?

As a practice of Structuring Safety I try to ensure that the conversation is not re-traumatizing. Re-telling details of torture, with no transformation or liberatory negotiations of new meaning can be re-traumatizing for the survivor.

I am very influential in the therapeutic relationship, but as the therapist I cannot be solely responsible for it, as the doing of safety cannot be ensured by any one partner in a dialogue. Collaboration invites the sharing of power, and a sharing of responsibility. As therapists, we do not save people and we are not responsible for people dying. A collaborative stance requires the letting go of some power on the part of the therapist. [314] This can be experienced as profoundly discomforting when the survivors we work with are in extreme situations and death is ever near. I believe that collaborative positionings have contributed to my sustainability, especially in times when torture eventually claims the life of a survivor of political violence.

Collaboration invites safety because the survivor of torture decides what will be talked about and what will be of use. It is my ethical obligation in the role of the therapist to bring hope to the situation and to provide a structure for the work. I attempt to do this without taking a position of expertise on the life of the survivor of torture, or taking prescriptive positions around what they need to do. My hope is for the relationship to be survivor centered, and this requires the de-centering of myself as the therapist.

I attend minutely to the living collaboration in the moment to moment happenings alongside the survivor. This ethic connects with a hope of engaging with joint action where our dialogue together

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[314] My understandings of collaborative stance come from the teachings and writings of Harlene Anderson (1997, 1993). See also her insightful article with Swim on the use of collaboration in supervision (1995).

cannot be seen as an individual project but only exists responsively.[315] Continual invitations for the person's co-creation of the dialogue attends to Structuring Safety as a collective responsibility.

Structuring Safety requires that therapists decline an intrusive curiosity, in particular, as it relates to the details of torture. These are fascinating and compelling stories. I aim to resist being seduced by the torture story, and the privileging idea that as the therapist I have a right to know everything. I tell survivors of torture that I need to know what they think I need to know, so that I can be of use. Inviting survivors at the outset to consider the influence of speaking, structures safety by slowing the re-tellings down, so that survivors have agency about what is spoken or not spoken. This is a practice of conscientiously positioning the therapeutic conversation as something very different than the interrogation under torture. It also honours the survivor with the storytelling rights.[316]

In therapeutic supervision, therapists often share with me their urgency to get to the "real work". Structuring Safety and negotiating permission can often be the victims of this urgency. The work that needs to happen is negotiating safety in this moment, with this person, in this context. Fore-grounded against a backdrop of political violence, this permissioning of the survivor can be transformative.

> ➔ As we're sitting here now and you are considering what you're going to tell me, I would like you to travel ahead in time until after this meeting, and think about how you will be with the telling. How might you feel about the telling tomorrow? Might the telling of this get in the way of our counselling relationship? Might the not telling of this get in the way of our counselling relationship?
>
> ➔ As you're sitting here now, and considering what you're going to tell me, I'd like you to consider knowings you hold about yourself, that let you trust that you can be the person to decide if there will be speaking or holding of your own counsel. What do you know about our relationship together that might help you trust your right to tell or not tell?

While I invite survivors to resist harmful questions, the onus is on me to not articulate them. Questions informed by a naïve curiosity pose great threats to safety.

Relational work with survivors of torture and political violence often exists within a landscape of refugee, immigration and legal action. Interrogation and court appearances are often required for issues of settlement. This reality is a threat to safety which requires that the therapist differentiate their conversation from interrogation. Good allies in settlement and legal work introduce me to clients, and I use that trust as a bridge to create relationships of *enough-safety* with the person. In a profound way I believe work with survivors is collaborative as we borrow on the safety of others.

These practices of Structuring Safety are centered within the context of work with survivors of torture and political violence. However, risk is inherent in all of our community work, and my hope is that these particular learnings can be transferred into other contexts with an aim to promote Structuring Safety.

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[315] Shotter (1984, 1993b)

[316] This is from the teachings of New Zealand Narrative Therapist, David Epston (personal communication).

Summary

Structuring Safety includes practices which set the space for safety, co-creating collaborative agreements, resisting innocent positions and problematizing the politics of politeness. I set parameters for dialogue, which confront the politics of open space, and which value collaboration. The role of allies, and strategic responses to backlash, is important in our community work where attacks on social justice are common.

Storying the Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety: I am Rosa not Maria

> *We're in the middle of introducing ourselves in a workshop training group. The next person to introduce themself says "My name is Rosa and I am from Mexico, and I am a manager of an anti-violence program". Then she just sits quietly for a moment, but doesn't give any indication that the next person should begin to speak. She is still holding the space. She goes on to say "It's important that I tell you that my name is Rosa, that I am from Mexico, and that I am a manager of an anti-violence program because I have just returned from a conference where people didn't hear this. We were together over a few days, you know, and really sharing things. A woman who had facilitated one workshop introduced me to another participant; she had her arm around me at the time. And she said 'this is Maria. She's from Guatemala and she's a volunteer'. And I corrected her and said, 'no, I am Rosa and I come from Mexico, and I am a manager in an anti-violence program'. I am telling you this because this is not the first time that this has happened to me. So I am Rosa." At this point, Rosa smiles, and looks to the person next to her and moves out of the public space. The next person doesn't however begin to introduce themself, because there's a palpable sadness and silence in the room. After a few moments I respond, "Thanks Rosa for trusting us with this and for beginning Structuring Safety for us as a group. I am very mindful that I don't want to replicate these acts, but that is something that I might have done. You remind me of my father's teaching for maintaining dignity, 'always give a guy the answer and then ask him the question' ". After a reflective moment the group moves its attention to the next person, and they begin to introduce themselves.* [317]

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[317] This teaching is from Rosa Arteaga, and she has chosen to use her name for multiple purposes, including witnessing her struggle, and as an act of resistance to the appropriation of cultural knowledges.

3. Conclusion to an Ethical Stance for *Doing Justice*: The Guiding Intentions

My ethical stance for *doing justice* has been illuminated through individual descriptions of each of the six Guiding Intentions: Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Addressing Power, Critically Engaging With Language, and Structuring Safety. While I have attempted to offer a thorough understanding of this ethical stance it is important for me to acknowledge that this positioning is still and will always be in motion. Naming the fluidity of this position and its incompleteness means more than just being open to critique. My ethical stance cannot be complete because of my limited knowledge and the ever changing contexts of social justice that inform it. I think of this ethical stance comprised of the Guiding Intentions as an imperfection project, meaning that I require a stance I can articulate in order to go forward, but by no means am I claiming that this position is correct, or right, or finished.

The Guiding Intentions which comprise my ethical stance have been described here as a rhizome because of the generative, synergistic flow which holds them in relationship with each other. While I have differentiated the Guiding Intentions from each other in this writing for purposes of clarity, it is important to put them back together, as it were. The Guiding Intentions do not exist individually and are inherently inter-dependent and communal. The rhizome of the Guiding Intentions is messy, overflowing, overlapping and inter-nourishing.

I move now to describing the Solidarity Group practice.

PART II THE SOLIDARITY GROUP PRACTICE
1. Introduction to the Solidarity Group Practice

The Guiding Intentions have been fully described. Now I show how the theory is put into practice. I use a real group that I facilitated to show the six Guiding Intentions in action. I refer to the practices I have developed as Solidarity Practices as they all follow from a commitment to the Guiding Intentions.
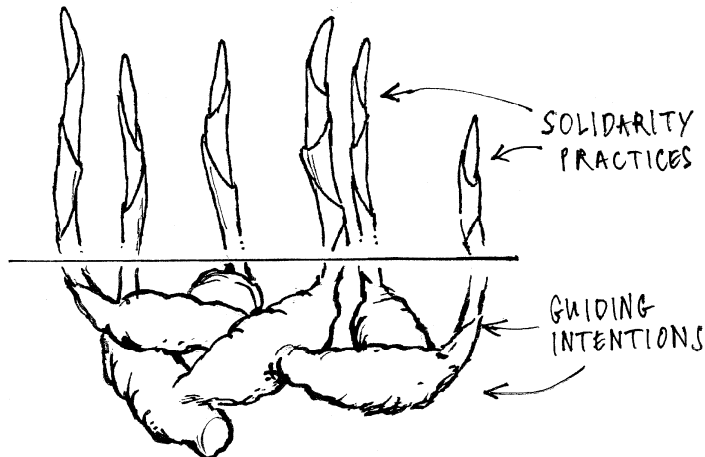
The Solidarity Practices that arise from this set of Guiding Intentions include Solidarity Groups, Solidarity Teams, the Witnessing Supervision Interview, and *people-ing the room*, among others. I have chosen one Solidarity Practice and give a close up look at it to illustrate the Guiding Intentions which support it. I have chosen the Solidarity Group practice as this example because of the energy, interest and usefulness which the practice has inspired in the community workers who participate in it.
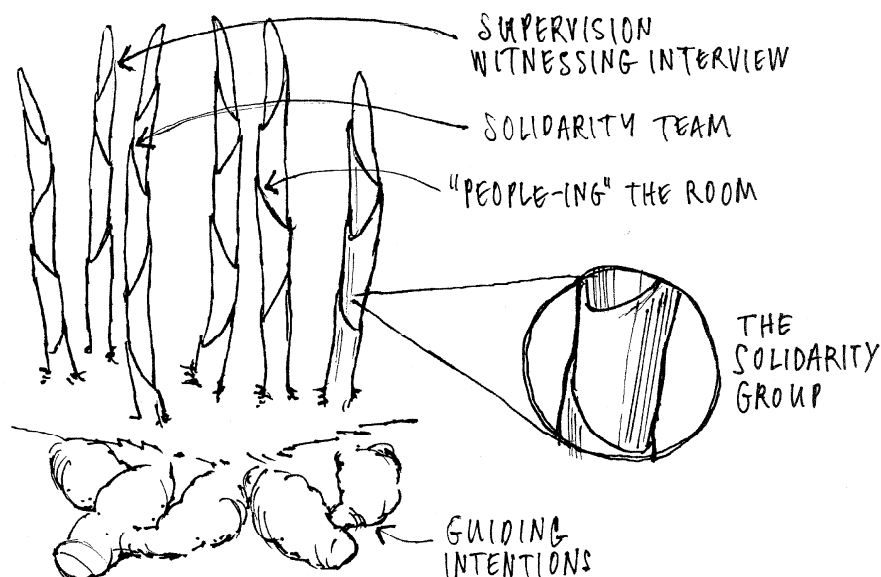
I begin with a step-by-step outline of the Solidarity Group. This is followed by an imagined practice example of a Solidarity Group. I describe a fictitious Solidarity Group I facilitate with an imagined organization called Youth Power. As I move through all of the steps of the Solidarity Group outline using Youth Power's group as an example, I explain the nuances of the work. The outline and practice example lay down the bones of the Solidarity Group.

I follow this with re-tellings of particular Solidarity Groups to show the spirit of the practice. A Solidarity Group which took place amongst a group of diverse practitioners, loosely referred to as the East Van Crew, is brought forward fully. I again follow the outline of the Solidarity Group, showing the work that is done in each part. I offer this thorough account of the East Van Crew's Solidarity Group to invite an embodied and spirited knowing of this practice.

Next I follow specific threads from different Solidarity Groups, with the purpose of illuminating each of the six Guiding Intentions in action. Each re-telling focuses narrowly on a specific Guiding Intention.

I discuss the use of Solidarity Notes which come from the letter writing practices of the Solidarity Group. I describe the diverse contexts and formations in which Solidarity Groups have been created to show the expansive possibilities of the practice. Reflections from some participants who have experienced the Solidarity Group practice follow.

Finally, I briefly describe some of the other Solidarity Practices that follow from a commitment to the Guiding Intentions, including Solidarity Teams. I invite practitioners to expand on these practices within their own communities.

2. Outline of the Solidarity Group

I.   The overarching purpose of the Solidarity Group

    A. Promoting collective sustainability

II. Planning prior to the Solidarity Group

    B. Creating the group experience (participants involved: Interviewer, Contact person for the group)

        1. Understanding the contexts of the people who will comprise the group

        2. Positioning the Solidarity Group to be of use

    C. Preparing prior to the opening sequence of the Solidarity Group

        1. Inviting the Interview Partner (1 person or sometimes 1-3 persons to be interviewed in the Opening Dialogue)

        2. Inviting the Reflecting Witnesses (2-6 people who will later reflect on the Opening Dialogue)

        3. Planning the invitation to the Listening Witnesses (at the outset of the group all other participants will be invited to listen and offer Solidarity Notes to the Interview Partner)

        4. Setting the space for the Solidarity Group

III. The Solidarity Group

   A. The sequence of the Solidarity Group

      1. Preparing for the group (participants involved: Interviewer, Interview Partner, Reflecting Witnesses, and Listening Witnesses)

         a. Structuring *enough-safety* and negotiating permission

         b. Outlining the sequence of the group

         c. Describing the overarching intention of the group

         d. Instructing the Reflecting Witnesses and the Interview Partner

         e. Discerning witnessing from audience

         f. Clarifying the role of the Interviewer

         g. Inviting the Listening Witnesses into a listening role and preparing questions for the Listening Witnesses

      2. Opening Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Interview Partner)

      The Interviewer and the Interview Partner engage in dialogue, while the people who comprise the witnessing group are positioned for reflecting. The Interviewer and the Interview Partner have a closed dialogue and the Witnesses are in a listening position.

         a. Inviting structures of *enough-safety* and negotiating permission

         b. Attending to and developing themes elicited by the Interviewer which may become part of the dialogue

               (1) Centering Ethics

               (2) Doing Solidarity

               (3) Addressing Power

               (4) Fostering Collective Sustainability

               (5) Critically Engaging with Language

               (6) Structuring Safety

      3. Witnessing Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Reflecting Witnesses)

      The Reflecting Witnesses are invited into a reflecting dialogue with the Interviewer, and the Interview Partner is situated in a listening position.

      4. Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Interview Partner)

The Interviewer and the Interview Partner dialogue centered upon the reflections of the Reflecting Witnesses.

5. Considering an Open Conversation inviting all participants into an unstructured conversation about the experience (participants involved: Interviewer, Interview Partner, Reflecting Witnesses, Listening Witnesses)

6. Closing the Solidarity Group (participants involved: Interviewer, Interview Partner, Reflecting Witnesses, Listening Witnesses)

   a. Closing the Solidarity Group

   b. Inviting Listening Witnesses to finish writing their Solidarity Notes and offer them to the Interview Partner

3. The Solidarity Group: An Imagined Practice Example

Here, I offer an imagined practice example of the Solidarity Group which directly follows the outline of the Solidarity Group. The purpose of the Solidarity Group outline and this imagined practice example is to lay down the bones of the Solidarity Group.

The Solidarity Group practice follows from a commitment to the Guiding Intentions of Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Addressing Power, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Critically Engaging with Language, and Structuring Safety, which serve to describe my ethical stance for *doing justice*.

The overarching purpose of the Solidarity Group is promoting collective sustainability. Sustainability literally means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet future needs.[1] Sustainability requires having the resources to go on, which in my experience requires an ongoing aliveness, a genuine connectedness with people, and a presence of spirit. Collective sustainability is upheld by nourishing workers' connections with ethics in their work and in their lives; bringing forward the spirit of social justice, and acting in solidarity with an aim of creating an experience of community while contesting isolation and individualism. The center of this dialogue is collective, and I am inviting participants into group work that holds the entire group at the center. The dialogue aims to be of use to the group by organizing around experiences which resonate or are of meaning to most participants. These experiences may be acts of justice, ethical struggles, startling successes, painful losses, or other occurrences which collectively hold meaning. This is a very different emphasis than organizing dialogues around problems, particularly specific problems of individual workers. In the Solidarity Group the community of workers is the primary resource, not the supervisor. The overarching purpose of promoting collective sustainability greatly informs the process of the Solidarity Group.

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[1] Wackernagel & Rees (1996)

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I originally developed the Solidarity Group for use in therapeutic supervision. I have ongoing relationships with diverse groups of community workers and therapists. In all of these groups I use the Solidarity Group if that seems most useful. Other Solidarity Groups occur as part of training sessions, which may become temporary communities which will meet only once. I have engaged groups as large as sixty and as small as two. There are times the Solidarity Group is not the most appropriate practice and I will engage with other practices which may be better suited to the collective purposes of the folks I am working with. [2]

While the Solidarity Group originated in therapeutic supervision, it has proven useful to diverse groups doing community work. These include teams of teachers in alternative schools, nurse teams at an AIDS outreach program, teams of addictions housing workers, activist collectives, and interdisciplinary medical teams working alongside marginalized people.

The structure of the Solidarity Group is borrowed from Andersen's Reflecting Team.[3] Originally, a Reflecting Team included a group of professionals who were invited to offer their reflections to a conversation between a therapist and client. Andersen's use of the term reflection means "something heard is taken in and thought about before a response is given."[4] Therefore, the Reflecting Team was not part of the conversation between the therapist and client, but took a listening position. Following the therapist's interview with the client, the Reflecting Team offered their responses as the therapist and client took a listening position. There have been many innovations in the use of Reflecting Team, which speak to the creativity and possibility evoked in the structuring of this kind of conversation.[5] Solidarity Groups are inspired by Narrative and Collaborative therapies and are connected to this innovative history of the Reflecting Team.[6] While structure is important, the spirit of the Solidarity Group and its particular usefulness comes from the adherence to the Guiding Intentions.

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[2] Some of these other practices, the Solidarity Team, *people-ing the room*, and the Supervision Witnessing Interview are described later in Other Solidarity Practices informed by the Guiding Intentions.

[3] My tracking of the rich history of Reflecting Team practice begins with Goolishan's Family Impact Teams (MacGregor *et a.l*, 1964), the work of the Milan Team, (Boscolo *et al*., 1987) and of course the work of Tom Andersen who gave this specific practice its name (1991, 1995 in Freidman).

[4] Andersen (1991), pp. 12.

[5] Harlene Anderson and Per Jensen (2007) dedicated their expansive book *Innovations in the Reflecting Process* to practitioners in what they called the "reflecting process movement". Other practitioners who have particularly influenced my engagement with Reflecting Teams include: Davidson & Lussardi, (1991), in Andersen; Katz, (1991), in Andersen; Madigan & Epston, (1995), in Freidman; and especially Michael White (1999, 1995), whose Intensive Trainings in Outsider Witnessing Groups I attended in Adelaide, Australia. See also my previous writing (2001) for use of the practice in Cultural Witnessing Groups.

[6] White was inspired by the possibilities of the Reflecting Team and informed by Meyerhoff's ideas of Definitional Ceremony (Myerhoff, 1978). She believed that people require an audience for the stories of their preferred identity, and she called the performances of the story telling Definitional Ceremony. White used the Reflecting Team structure in his Definitional Ceremony (White, 2007).

Preparation for the Solidarity Group

The Solidarity Group is structured differently depending on how and why I am invited in, my relationship to the participants, their relationships with each other, the purposes they hold collectively, the clients they work with, and the social contexts in which they work. In this writing I am going to describe the context of an imaged Solidarity Group to demonstrate the ways my actions in this type of group are shaped by my intentions. This imaginary example comes from the compellation of many real experiences of Solidarity Groups.

Let us say that I have been called by Joe who is the Contact Person for a nonprofit organization, Youth Power Society, which is mandated to work with at-risk youth in various capacities including education, life skills, independent living and substance misuse counselling. A youth they worked with two years ago has died of a drug overdose, and this has brought several workers to Joe asking for some help with burnout. Joe has called me in response to the workers' present requests. Joe got my name from a worker who attended a course I instructed some years back. I am familiar with the organization as I have trained many of Youth Power Society's workers in different capacities overtime. As part of a series of practices which I begin to think of in relation to this team's contexts, I consider constructing a Solidarity Group. I ask Joe if he thinks his team is up for this kind of experience and if he thinks the Solidarity Group practice might be useful.

Provided this preliminary discussion is welcoming, I next try to ensure that the Solidarity Group will be of use. The practices which follow from this intention begin as soon as I am invited to work alongside the team, and continue to play an important role throughout the process. I engage in conversation with Joe and ask him why he has called me, and specifically why he has called me now. My aim here is to get some clarity on how I can be of use. To do this I will need to know what experiences are resonating collectively for the team. I ask Joe what he believes the team's hopes are for the Solidarity Group. The experiences which precipitate the dialogue may have to do with the team's desire for sustainability, or to move forward together to confront a struggle that connects them. When I meet with the group I catch them up on this conversation with Joe.

I begin to consider inviting people into the roles of Interview Partner and Reflecting Witnesses. Here I am working to develop a group that will serve the purpose of the group which entails engendering connection and promoting community-making dialogues, and making room for multiple voices. I look for people who are interested, committed, and connected to the purposes for which the group was convened. I engage in these intentional practices of invitation, which means that I am purposeful about inviting people into the process in line with my ideas about sharing public space, privileging different voices, and also keeping in mind the purpose of the group. I think about who is going to be in this conversation with me from the Youth Power group in terms of multiple locations including gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation. I also consider the formal positions people hold in relation to each other and their access to power within the group. I aim to invite people whose voices are most often heard into reflecting positions and avoid asking for volunteers or engaging in turn-taking to decide who will be in the roles of Interview Partner and the Reflecting Witnesses. I want to avoid anyone experiencing

themselves in a token position or a position of being asked to represent a cultural group. I balance this with an intention of making space for people who may be in marginalized locations.

I am open with the group about my reasons for making invitations to certain people and about my attempt to be accountable for my choices. I may invite the wider group into conversation about this.

Because we are working with an orientation towards justice in this work, I want people to reflect about the possible meanings and impacts of language. This invites people to reflect on the possible impact of their language use before speaking on issues they may talk about loosely or in unguarded ways in other contexts[7].

Inviting the Interview Partner

In choosing an Interview Partner I am mindful of my intention for the conversation to be of use to the entire group. Depending on the size of the group I may invite more than one person into the role of Interview Partner. Usually I invite no more than three people, but most often I interview one person. If I am inviting more than one person, I usually ask people from different locations within the organization or team, such as an administrator, a front-line staff old timer, and a newcomer to the organization. In the case of Youth Power, I am going to interview one person. It may be that I know something of a person or that they have said something to me or others that has resonated and seems to be the stuff, which would make it a useful conversation. This is something that the group connects with collectively or something that would be useful for the group to witness. I have asked Jinder to be my Interview Partner because she was one of the people who asked Joe for this training. She is an online supervisor, so has some power but is not in charge. She is one of several people in the group from a minoritized cultural position, and greeted me openly and let me know this group was important to her team.[8]

Jinder's personal issues will not be at the centre of the group, as I am not trying to find out who has a particular problem to bring forward. I prefer to invite Jinder into the role before the group meets. If that is

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[7] Speaking openly about differences in power, for example naming transgendered and queer communities as less privileged in a culture of heterosexual normativity, gives people a heads up about what may transpire in the dialogue. It is an invitation to some to hold their own counsel, while others may experience this as an indication that a respectful and hopefully *safe-enough* conversation may follow.

[8] If Jinder were one of a very small minority of people from culturally minoritized positions at Youth Power I would be at risk of replicating tokenism by centering her out as the Interview Partner. Gender, and other locations work the same way. Groups of Community workers often have few men on staff. In this group I have invited one of the few men onto the Witnessing Group, as I do not want to silence men, but I would be hesitant to invite a man to be the Interview Partner as making more space for men in this context is something I would decline.

not possible and I need to invite her when we all come together before the group, I ask privately so that she has room to say no without coercion. I assure Jinder that she can revisit this decision to participate at any time throughout the entire process, and I endeavor to situate myself in a way that she experiences the possibility of withdrawing her participation without consequence.

As part of the invitation I give Jinder a short verbal outline of what will happen in the Solidarity Group so that she has a better understanding of what she is agreeing to participate in. I explain why I have invited her into the role of Interview Partner and I clarify that she doesn't need any advance preparation as we are not working around a particular individual problem, but rather are organizing around something of use to the group. She is not being asked to present a "case". I explain that according to Joe the group has struggled with a youth's death, with a high level of staff turnover, and that there was some past interest in working collectively more in line with commitments to social justice. I let her know we may speak about her relationship with ethics, struggles, justice, and her sense of sustainability. I let her know the intention for the group, and specifically the intention of the dialogue to serve and connect the Youth Power group. I explain that she will actually not be the centre of all that happens, and that it is my responsibility to have a useful conversation.

I ask Jinder if there are any people present who would be particularly useful Reflecting Witnesses for her in terms of helping her feel *safe-enough*. Here I am borrowing on her relationship of trust with those Reflecting Witnesses. I also ask if there are Reflecting Witnesses she feels would contribute meaningfully to the conversation. Jinder tells me that Susan, a Manager at Youth Power, has been supportive of her and has backed her up in respectful ways. I also ask Jinder if there is anybody in particular who may not be useful to have as a Reflecting Witness, but she says she is open to everyone in the organization.

Inviting the Reflecting Witnesses
As in the invitation to the Interview Partner, I take time before the group begins to invite people into the role of Reflecting Witness. I prefer to do this in enough-privacy for people to be able to say no to me, or to say yes to me and have *enough-safety* to let me know of any reservations they have. I assure them that they can revisit the decision to participate in this role and I hold myself to this.

Susan is being asked to be a Reflecting Witness as a result of input from Jinder. I let Susan know this, as I am openly borrowing on the respect and connection of their prior relationship. This may be experienced as an obligation on the part of the Reflecting Witness to lend their support to the Interview Partner. I try to frame this as an invitation, but the request from Jinder to have Susan serve as a Reflecting Witness speaks to a pre-existing relationship, and I am open about that. I also invite Mariah and Mike because of the diversity they reflect regarding age, position in the organization, cultural background, and who they appear to be connected to in the group.

I will invite all of the remaining members to be Listening Witnesses. I will give them specific questions prior to the Opening Dialogue, and invite them to offer their written reflections to these questions as Solidarity Notes to Jinder following the group. Part of my purpose in inviting the Solidarity Notes is to weave the Listening Witnesses into the conversational community.

I am very purposeful about setting up the Solidarity Group. I do several things overtly to let people know what is expected of them in this work. I let them know that they share responsibility for getting what they will find useful from the experience. By this I mean that I invite people to physically move so that they can hear the dialogue, to make sure they can see everybody. I let them know that we are planning for this group to be an hour long, and that I will keep to time as a practice of accountability. I invite people to go to the bathroom and turn off their cell phones, because it would be hard on others if people were to get up or phones were to ring during the group. I tell them that drinking may be acceptable, if we agree to this collectively, but no eating. Sometimes people ask to be exempted from this saying they are just finishing a muffin or really need to eat something. This is an opportunity for me to be very clear that I am going to hold us to the agreements we have, so I model that by saying:

> I really mean no eating here.[9]

Saying this with humor opens it to be something other than judgment or shaming while maintaining my connection to clear expectations. This also structures safety as Jinder and the Reflecting Witnesses are observing me and may make meaning of this. I will indeed step in, resisting the politics of politeness, to invite the group to honour our agreements.

At this point, before we begin the opening sequences of the Solidarity Group I inform everyone that Jinder will be the Interview Partner and that Susan, Mariah and Mike have agreed to be the Reflecting Witnesses. I also let everyone else know that they are also invited to participate as Listening Witnesses. At this point, I tell them they are in a non-speaking role. I invite people to get up and grab a piece of paper and a pen, should they require notes to be better able to attend to the specific words and phrasing of other people. I let the Listening Witnesses know that they will need to have a piece of paper that will serve as the Solidarity Note they will give to Jinder at the end of the conversation as well as any paper they may want to keep for their own use.

The Solidarity Group in Action

It is important to formalize the opening sequence of the group by acknowledging to all of the participants that the Solidarity Group is beginning. I invite people once again to move their chairs so that they can take responsibility to both see and hear all other members of the group. This invitation to move in invites a commitment of the body to the conversation, and usually is accompanied by a last scurrying around and then the creation of a quiet space to speak into.

I extend the permission to decline engaging in a Solidarity Group to myself as well as to the participants. If I believe or sense that there is not *safe-enough* to go forward with the group, I will engage in another practice that could be more useful and less risky. As the Interviewer I cannot promise or create safety alone, but I believe I have the responsibility to respond to the presence of risk by not inviting a group to occur. Usually, I catch the Contact Person up on this in our earliest conversations, saying that I may or

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[9] I am using a different font to demarcate when I am speaking directly in real-time to the Solidarity Group members.

may not use this practice based on how much safety I believe we are co-creating when we get together as a group.

In the preparation for the group I act in line with my intention of creating *enough-safety* and negotiating permission in all of my interactions with all of the participants. There are several things I do to promote safety. I attempt to welcome everyone personally, possibly shaking their hands, and making a real effort to learn their names. If there is someone I know personally in the group I do not catch up with them at the beginning but make time for them at a break so that I am not monopolized and am more accessible to the entire group. I pay attention to the energy in the room and respond immediately to any concerns that I may pick up on. I may ask several people if they are looking forward to the day and if they are up for having this kind of conversation. I always have a backup plan in case there is not *enough-safety* or permission to move ahead in a good way with the Solidarity Group.

Group Preparation

I begin by explaining the sequence of the group and identifying everyone's different roles:

> We are going to begin with the Opening Dialogue, and I am going to be speaking with Jinder. We are not going to pretend that you are not there because that would not be safe. We are going to be very mindful that you are there and that's going to inform what will be said and unsaid in this part of the conversation. Jinder and I are going to speak as if we were behind a wall, and the purpose of this is to allow the Reflecting Witnesses to have some linguistic space in which they can consider their reflections. While I am speaking to you now, you are all engaging with me by nodding your heads and all kinds of other information to let me know you are fully attending to my speaking. In inviting the Reflecting Witnesses into a reflective space we are going to interrupt that attention, so the Reflecting Witnesses do not respond immediately.

> Following my Opening Dialogue with Jinder I am going to join the Witnessing Group, Susan, Mariah and Mike, and we will have the Witnessing Dialogue. In this second part of the conversation, Jinder will be spoken of in the third person and while this may seem awkward it is important in order to offer her a reflective space so that she does not have to be in dialogue with us. If Reflecting Witnesses speak directly to Jinder I will help bring you back to the structure so that she does not need to respond in the moment. During the Witnessing Dialogue it is Jinder's role to witness the conversation. While I am speaking with the Reflecting Witnesses, we will speak as if we are behind a wall and will direct our conversation just to each other.

> Following the Witnessing Dialogue with Susan, Mariah and Mike[10], I will again join Jinder and the two of us will reflect on the conversation the Reflecting Witnesses had. Metaphorically, we will be behind a wall together again and will not speak directly to the Reflecting Witnesses. The purpose of this is to create a reflective space for the Reflecting Witnesses.

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[10] I use first names often, offering them to the group, as everyone may not know each other. The Interview Partner, for example, may feel awkward if she can't remember the name of the Reflecting Witnesses. I write everyone's names down quickly like a map, and refer to people by name in line with the intentions of Structuring Safety, and making the conversation useful.

I may then draw a diagram of three concentric circles and as I am describing the three dialogues I draw arrows connecting the conversations.
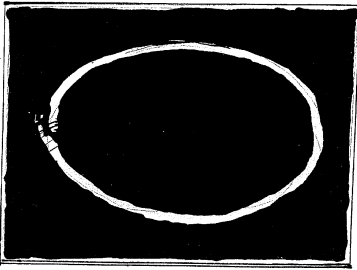
The conversation actually gets smaller not bigger. Jinder and I talk, which is this first outer circle.
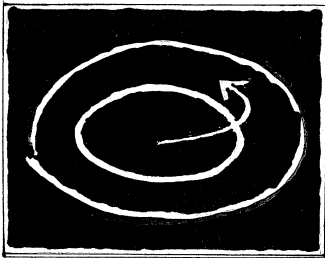
The Reflecting Witnesses reflect on that conversation which is the second smaller circle tied to the first circle.
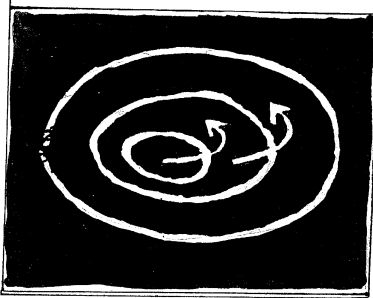
The third circle represents Jinder and I reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue.
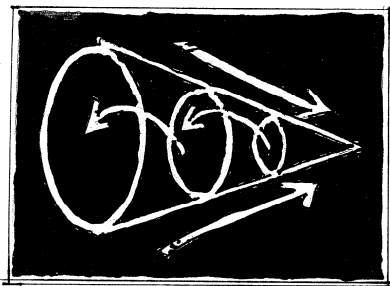
In fact, the three conversations get smaller, as we only attend to what stood out in the earlier conversation. It is as if these three circles were in a telescope getting smaller.
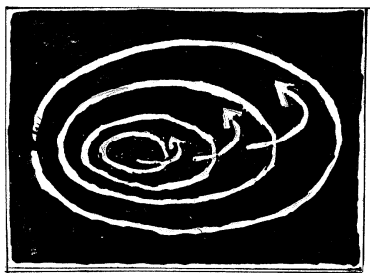
Following this conversation, we may all come together (here I may draw the smallest fourth circle on the diagram inside the previous three concentric circles) and have a conversation about the entire dialogue. At this time the Listening Witnesses can consider what they will write in response to the questions I have put up on the black board. I will go over those in a moment.

I usually seek confirmation that people have an understanding of how the structure works and we clarify any misunderstandings. I speak about my intentions for what everyone gets from the group and the meanings of doing this work. I make clear that it is my responsibility to address the purposes of the group. Jinder, as the Interview Partner, is responsible only to get what she needs from the conversation.

> The centre of this conversation is you, as a group, the folks who work at Youth Power. My thinking is that you do not need to be the person speaking for a group to be of use to you. I am going to be looking for our points of connection, and my hope is that the conversation will evoke sustainability, connection, community and solidarity. I'll begin by speaking with Jinder around these themes, and it will be my purpose to weave all of us together throughout the dialogues.

Instructing the Interview Partner and the Reflecting Witnesses

My job here is to give Jinder and the Reflecting Witnesses enough information so that they know what I am asking them to do, and they know how to do it.

> Suzanne, Mike and Mariah, I am inviting you to attend to what stands out for you in my conversation with Jinder. What arrests your attention? Or moves you? What do you connect with in the experience? Do you have any curiosities about the conversation?

I may also invite them to share any questions or line of questioning they may have followed had they been in the role of Interviewer. In this way the Reflecting Witnesses resource the Interviewer by offering alternative possibilities which may be useful to the Interview Partner and to the group as a whole.

> I am looking for embodied reflections, meaning, that what stands out for you Mariah is connected to something in your work or your life. And I invite you to think about and speak to us about why you connected with that particular part of Jinder's dialogue.

I let them know that I will be joining them for the Witnessing Dialogue as I do not leave this dialogue to chance. I will assist them by asking questions to help connect their reflections to specific words or actions they witnessed. I make clear that we are not having a second conversation on the same topic, but are closely attending to what stands out for us in the Opening Dialogue. I let Jinder know here that she is invited into these same witnessing practices when we witness the conversation of Mike, Susan, and Mariah.

Discerning Witnessing from Audience

I concisely clarify the difference between a witnessing stance and an audience position.[11]

> We are all positioning ourselves as Witnesses in this conversation and not as an audience members. Audience positions invite judging, evaluating – as good or bad, offering advice, being entertained. [12] As an audience we might congratulate or commend Jinder. A witnessing stance is quite different from an audience position, and invites an alongsideness, an accompanying of Jinder, and looking for points of connection. Witnessing invites naming, connecting with and responding to our experiences, without needing to solve the problems or smooth over discomfort.

Clarifying the Role of the Interviewer

I let people know that I am going to assist with the structure of the conversation. I will be interrupting if they break the structure by beginning to talk directly to Jinder, or if they are slipping into audience as opposed to witnessing ways of being. I let them know that if judgment shows up, either positive or negative; I will name it and ask them a question to invite them back into witnessing. [13]

> It is very important that the conversations are connected to each other. I may ask questions of our Witnesses to help them consider their reflections if Jinder is not being witnessed, or if the conversation seems to be leaving her behind. An example of this kind of question would be, "Susan, what exact words did you hear Jinder say that are connected to what you are talking about right now?". I will be taking a very active role here with a hope that it not be experienced as a shaming or corrective practice, but rather helping us to be of use to each other.

I make known the positionings I hold as the Interviewer, and most especially I clarify that I am not neutral in this conversation, but have definite assumptions I work from.

> I believe solidarity and working from a position within community are great resources to us in our work, and I am openly attempting to position the group in a *just* way. That's why I use this Solidarity Group process.

As the Interviewer I engage continually with *reflexive internalized questions*. Throughout the Solidarity Group, I attend to the following questions fluidly, and listen to any discomfort in my body or thinking as a resource, as news to me, that I should slow down and address these *reflexive internalized questions*:

- ➔ What am I paying attention to right now? Why?
- ➔ What am I resisting or declining right now: curiosity, smoothing it over, solving problems, politeness?
- ➔ How am I attending to power in this dialogue in this moment?
- ➔ How am I positioning myself for accountability in this moment?

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[11] Cody (2001)

[12] White (1997)

[13] Roth (2007)

➔ How am I practicing de-centering myself in this moment in the dialogue?

Inviting the Listening Witnesses into a listening role and preparing questions for their reflections

At the outset of the dialogue I let the Listening Witnesses know the questions they are being asked to respond to in written form as Solidarity Notes for the Interview Partner. *Witnessing questions* are contingent upon the context of the particular group. Here are a few candidate questions I often use: [14]

➔ What part of the dialogue captured you or moved you and what parts of the dialogue did you most connect with?

➔ What part of your life or your work at Youth Power, or your ways of being had you most connecting with the dialogues with Jinder and the Reflecting Witnesses?

➔ How might your relationship with your work or with your life or with the youth you work with at Youth Power be informed, transformed or somehow different for having been invited to bear witness to this conversation?

I often write these questions on a black board if that is readily available. The *witnessing questions* are offered as an invitation, and I give the option of declining this part of the experience. I also let people know they may want to put their name on their responses or they may not. I also let the Interview Partner and all other participants know that the written reflections, which I call Solidarity Notes, are an offering from the Listening Witnesses. The Interview Partner may respond to the Solidarity Notes in whatever way they choose.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of preparation work prior to the Opening Dialogue of the Solidarity Group. Preparation invites practices of safety and respect by making expectations clear. It also gives participants the information they need to know in order to have the group be useful. It is important not to rush the preparation work. I consider it part of building relationships and not as an obstacle to getting onto the "real work". Avoiding the need to intervene in the midst of a Solidarity Group is offset by the engaged quality of the work of preparation.

The Opening Dialogue

During this phase the Interviewer and the Interview Partner engage in dialogue, while the people who comprise the Witnessing Group are positioned for reflecting. The Interviewer and the Interview Partner have a dialogue and the Reflecting Witnesses are in a listening position. My main tasks in the Opening Dialogue are to invite safety and respect and create a useful conversation for the group by bringing certain themes forward.

A. Structuring Safety

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[14] The use of candidate words or candidate questions comes to me from the supervision practices of David Epston (personal communication, 1999). Sallyann Roth developed this term for a Public Conversations Project workshop on *Inquiry as Intervention* (Roth, personal communication, 2009).

As part of structuring safety, I aim to co-create relationships of *enough-safety* using practices such as continually negotiating permission.[15] Here are some *negotiating permission questions* I might begin with to engender safety and promote Jinder's autonomy:

> ➔ Jinder, what had you saying yes to my invitation to being interviewed today with the Youth Power group?

> ➔ What ways of knowing yourself have you trusting that you will be able to say no to me if I ask something that is not okay?

The following is an example of a *structuring safety question:*

> ➔ What will it take for you to be able to say no to me if I ask you a question that's not alright?

As the Interviewer I endeavor to develop a rich capacity to hear no in the myriad of ways in which it is conveyed. Anything short of a heartfelt yes is a sign for me to slow down and re-negotiate permission.

Another aspect of structuring safety is attending respectfully to time. It is important that the dialogue ends before people get up and wander off. To promote respectful listening and attending in the practice I need to ensure that the group ends at the agreed-upon time.

Questions asked in the Opening Dialogue invite particular themes to be attended to, and decline other themes. Here I will lay out themes I am trying to bring forward and the types of questions I ask with a hope to accomplishing this. A caution: The questions offered here are written with the purpose of illuminating the themes and the overarching intention of the Solidarity Group. Questions may do the work of more than one task, but for the purposes of making clear the themes attended to in the Opening Dialogue of the Solidarity Group the questions have been categorized. Within the dialogue of an actual Solidarity Group the themes will be interwoven and fluid, the questions will come forward from within the dialogue and will be created in response to voices other than just the Interviewer. The questions offered here are related to questions from actual dialogues in Solidarity Groups

B. Centering Ethics

A primary purpose of the Solidarity Group is to bring forward the Interview Partner's relationship with ethics. The dialogue attends more to Jinder's ethical positioning, (her relationship with ethics and possible struggles and small successes) than to solving her discomfort or the specific problems of any case. To serve this purpose I may ask a *witnessing question*:

> ➔ Jinder, where do you recognize your ideas and practices of ethics being most alive in your work alongside youth?

As the Interviewer my work is to bring forward the history of Jinder's relationship with ethics. If we had brought forward her ethic of "deep respect" in response to the last *witnessing question* I may create a line of *ethical positioning questions* such as:

> ➔ Jinder, when you say you appreciate that you engage with a "deep respect" in your work with youth what do you mean by "deep respect"?

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[15] Johnella Bird (2004, 2000)

- ➜ Who in your life would know of your relationship with "deep respect"?

- ➜ When did "deep respect" first show up in your life?

- ➜ Who were the teachers or mentors who supported your relationship with "deep respect"?

- ➜ How do you keep this relationship with "deep respect" alive in your work Jinder?

- ➜ Who in your life and work supports your relationship with "deep respect"?

- ➜ What difference does this relationship with deep respect make for the youth and co-workers you work alongside?

Another purpose of the Solidarity Group is to bring forward the socially constructed nature of relationships with ethics: ethics are something we do together, they are not individual projects. The following *communalizing questions* serve to bring forward accounts of these understandings of relational ethics:

- ➜ Who are the people in your life who have contributed richly to your relationships with ethics? What have they specifically brought to your engagement with ethics?

- ➜ Would it be news to these folks that they have made these rich ethical contributions to your life and your work?

- ➜ How might you catch these people up on the contributions they have made to your relationship with ethics? What meaning do you think they would make of that?

Part of the work of ethical positioning is to create space for struggle, inviting Jinder to speak to any experiences of what I refer to as spiritual pain. By spiritual pain I mean the pain that comes from working in ways that are not in line with our ethics, and which may in fact be opposed to the very ethical positions that brought us to this work. To accomplish this I make room for listening for struggle, and ask *inviting accountability questions*:

- ➜ Jinder, when you're speaking now of your shame about not wanting to hug dirty teens, of thinking they were ripping off the system and not deserving of help, what meaning do you make of the holding on to this shame, this act of not being the person you wanted to be?

- ➜ How has the holding on of this discomfort re-membered you with the commitments to justice you've spoken of so powerfully?

- ➜ What would it say about you if you didn't feel this shame? What might the absence of shame mean for your work with youth?

Contextualizing questions can be useful in contesting individualism in relation to certain ideas:

- ➜ Do you think you invented the ideas of not trusting poor people, poor teenagers? Where do you think these ideas come from?

The purposes of these *inviting accountability questions* are to hopefully re-member Jinder with her personal and collective ethical positionings and help move her closer in line with her own commitments for *just* practice; not to smooth over her discomfort, shame her, educate her, or invite confession. It is possible that an enabling shame may be brought forward, a shame which does not paralyze Jinder, but

invites her to respond differently. [16] With an aim to promote witness, not confession, as the Interview Partner I prioritize the speaking of enabling shame and spiritual pain, and commit myself to bringing this forward to the Witnessing Dialogue if the Reflecting Witnesses do not respond to it.

C. Doing Solidarity

Attending to the theme of solidarity requires inviting Jinder to consider if she is accompanied, backed up, and held up in her struggles. *Acting in solidarity* questions serve to bring forward the people, ideas, and re-memberings[17] that accompany Jinder and the meanings she makes of these relationships. The work is aimed to bring forward affinities, where Jinder experiences herself as holding shared ethics and these *acting in solidarity questions* attempt to thicken the telling of these moments of mutuality.

➔ These ethical positions you've spoken of; "being decent", holding yourself to account, and naming your own acts of injustice; how do these positions accompany you in your work? What difference does it make that you can now put words to what moments ago you said were only vague feelings? How does speaking of these positions here change you relationship to them?

➔ This idea you got from your father of "being decent", is that an idea that accompanies you in your work with youth? How does the idea of decency show up? What difference does being accompanied by this history of doing decency make in terms of the meanings you give your work?

➔ What experience from your life is connected to this ethic of justice you spoke of? Do you have a re-membering, a vivid picture you can access to hold on to this ethic? How is the holding of this picture of justice useful to you and the youth you work with?

People-ing the room questions attempt to foster solidarity by bringing forward the people who are alongside us in the work. These questions promote practices of *people-ing the room* meaning connecting with community, ideas, people, and experiences in various ways as a resource to the worker in the moment.

➔ Have you thought to invite the grandmother you just spoke of, who has passed on, into your work with youth, to be alongside you in the conversation, to help you with this "dark aloneness" you experience?

➔ Who might you *people the room* with? Are there folks you'd invite alongside for different purposes?

➔ How might you find ways to bring supportive folks from your team into the work with you? Would *people-ing the room* with people in solidarity with you be of use to you? How might it be useful to the youth you're working with?

➔ What differences might *people-ing the room* make in relation to your struggle with "aloneness" and the isolation you spoke of?

Another aim of this dialogue is to inquire about solidarity that is not so apparent and for the Solidarity Group to be a practice of solidarity itself. To bring these purposes forward I might ask *these acting in solidarity* questions of potential or dormant relationships of solidarity:

➔ Is it possible that there is more "back-up" here than you experienced at the time?

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[16] Jenkins (2005, 2006)

[17] Madigan (1997)

- ➔ What do you do that lets others at Youth Power know they can depend on you in these ways you respect in yourself? Would others know of your desire to be more in solidarity with them? Or would this be news?
- ➔ How might you act differently following this conversation to make your own solidarity with others more apparent to them? What first small things might you say or do differently that others would notice?

I describe the dialogues which comprise the Solidarity Group as communalizing dialogues. By this I mean a dialogue that makes possible the doing of community and contests individualism. [18] Part of the work of the dialogue is this attending to community which invites an inquiry of Jinder's cultural sites of belonging.[19] Here culture is used expansively, to include sites of belonging, such as the culture of musicians, or the culture of spiritual communities.

- ➔ Where do you experience being most belonged?
- ➔ What cultural sites of belonging do you hold? How are these important for your work?
- ➔ How do you experience this belonging? What differences does it make for you?
- ➔ Are all of your cultural identities welcome in your work? You may want to hold your own counsel on this question, but I think it is important to reflect on.

Another task here is to bring forward the qualities, capacities, and ways of being which Jinder experiences as qualifying her for her work at Youth Power. Often Interview Partners respond to questions of what qualifies them for the work with a litany of their academic schooling. The intention of these *communalizing questions* is to historicize Jinder's capacities in relation to her family, communities, and culture.

- ➔ What qualities and ways of being do you honour in yourself as a qualification for your work with youth?
- ➔ If I were to ask a young person who worked with you what it is about you that is most useful to them, what might they name? Is this news to you, or have you considered this before?
- ➔ What is the history of these qualities in your family, culture, communities?
- ➔ How do you hold on to these teachings from your community, culture? How are these teachings of use to you and the youth you work with?
- ➔ What difference does it make if your Instructors and Supervisors are the only ones credited with giving you teachings? What ideas and people and practices get left out when formal training becomes all of what qualifies us for this work?
- ➔ Do you think you have been a part of helping someone else do this work? In what ways? What teachings from your family, your community, and your culture have you brought to Youth Power? Have you considered this before? What does it mean if you haven't?

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[18] Martín-Baró (1994). My article, *Weaving threads of belonging: the Cultural Witnessing Group at Peak House*, outlines this approach to witnessing work alongside a community that self identifies as part of "the culture of lesbians" (Reynolds, 2001).

[19] For a thicker description of the centering of culture in community work see Prowell (1999), Richardson (2005a, 2005b), and Tamasese (2001).

Work in the margins with youth facing exploitation could invite Jinder, and the community of folks at Youth Power, to be captured with ideas and practices that they are the only professionals who truly care for youth. If this antagonism is indeed present and brought forward the role of the Interviewer is to invite Jinder (and the group as a whole) to consider a position of solidarity. The social contexts that support problems can be invisibilized if workers are competitive towards each other, and don't look to the structures that support oppressive practices. In an attempt to make these oppressive contexts visible I ask *contextualizing questions* that name structures underlying the work, and attempt to bridge alliances between workers who are often pitted against each other for scarce resources.

➔ Do you think it is possible the Child Protection Workers you're speaking of have different meanings for the decisions you're talking about?

➔ Who or what is served by your fellow workers being what you called "pitted against Child Protection Workers"? What is not paid attention to when Child Protection Workers are only seen this way? How does this "pitting of Youth Power against Child Protection Workers" benefit or harm the youth you work with?

➔ How would your relationship to your work and with sustainability be different if you held onto that idea we just spoke of that other workers didn't train to do this work in order to be oppressive?

➔ What structures are the Child Protection Workers you speak of up against in relation to making more *just* decisions? Might you be interested in asking them about these struggles? Is it possible Youth Power is up against some of the same systemic problems, I don't know this, but I am interested in what you all might have in common here?

D. Addressing Power

An important piece of the work of the Solidarity Group is to address power. This intention addresses both witnessing resistance against practices that are possibly exploitative or oppressive, as well as witnessing acts of *doing justice* that can both invite dignity and be experienced as liberating.[20] Both belong in the dialogue, as naming acts of resistance without bringing forward acts of justice can be a limiting practice, and help construct stories of futility and pointless struggle.

I prioritize Jinder's engagements with a spirit of social justice by asking *witnessing questions*:

➔ Jinder, when you were speaking just now of your hope in having social justice more present in your work, what is your hope, your intention, in connecting social justice with your work with young people at Youth Power?

➔ What is alive in your work at Youth Power, which you or others would recognize as connected to these commitments to social justice, which you've been speaking of?

➔ When you honour the spirit of social justice in your work, what difference does it make in your relationship to your work, the way you think about your work or experience it?

I am using what I will refer to here as the language of social justice in this practice example, but I want to be cautious that I do not impose this language, and I follow the person's language closely. All of these terms may not fit for people, may alienate them, or reach too far outside of their experience to be useful. I

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[20]Reynolds (2008, 1997); Wade (1996)

often offer the language of social justice, but I pick up on people's own words and meanings. Without this caution it is possible that I could impose meaning and distance myself from the community workers I am trying to serve.

I ask *re-membering* questions to make space for the celebration of small acts of justice that would go unnoticed without our finely attuned attention:

> ➔ Are there any moments or particular events that you hold on to Jinder, to help you re-member that there are small acts of justice in your work? Can you describe a special moment that honours justice to me?

> ➔ What difference does it make in your relationship to your work that you can re-member this small act of justice? What difference does it make if we don't attend to this small act of justice, if it goes unnoticed, or gets judged as not significant-enough in the face of the larger problems we're all up against?

Witnessing resistance is attended to by asking for richer accounts of the many small ways community workers take actions in line with their commitments to dignity and justice. These *witnessing questions* attempt to bring forward these specific accounts of resistance:

> ➔ What theories, practices, or professional ways of being have you had to resist in order to hold on to this spirit of social justice which is alive in your work Jinder?

> ➔ In that consultation about a youth you resisted the use of "addict" in describing this young person. What ideas are you taking on when you take this stand? What ideas are you standing up for?

> ➔ Is this "resistance to labels", as you call it, a risky thing in your workplace and with other professionals? Or is it common? Given that you say there are some risks in doing this, insisting on language that dignifies young people, what do you think it says about you that you continue to do it?

> ➔ What difference do you think this small act of resistance makes for you? Your relationship to work? The young person who is spoken of in a more dignified way? Your co-workers at Youth Power?

Again, I am using what I will refer to as the language of witnessing resistance in this practice example, but the language must be useful to the person. Deciding if an action is an act of resistance is a matter of judgment for the person, not for me. I do offer some language around resistance, but I do not want to impose meaning, or use language that is uncomfortable or not a fit for the person.

E. Fostering Collective Sustainability

An important purpose of the Solidarity Group is promoting and fostering experiences and knowledges of sustainability for both the Interview Partner and all participants in this Solidarity Group. The task here is to bring forward some specific moments when Jinder experiences herself as being of use, the times when she has a knowing-in-the-bones that her work, and the work of Youth Power, makes a difference.

> ➔ Jinder, I am wondering if there is a particular story or event or moment that you can recall, which sustains you in your work? Can you tell me about this moment? What meaning does this particular moment hold for you? Why would you have chosen to have this particular moment witnessed here as opposed to all the other moments which sustain you that you could draw from?

➔ Often when teams get together for groups similar to this they are all about problems, and we have been speaking of very specific struggles that you are in Jinder. But, what meaning does this conversation hold for you when there is room for more than deficit and struggle? What ideas and practices are you resisting by taking space to put what sustains you at the center of some of this conversation?

A *communalizing question* here embeds Jinder's relationship with sustainability within her community:

➔ Who are the Witnesses to these sustaining experiences in your work? What difference does the presence of these Witnesses make in connecting you with sustainability in your work with Youth Power?

Re-membering questions can also be of use here with a purpose to hold on to moments of sustainability:

➔ How can you be reminded to connect with this particular moment that sustains you in moments when the doubt you spoke of takes hold?

Another purpose of the Solidarity Group is to investigate how the work of Youth Power comes to be understood as the individual and personal responsibility of community workers. The work here is to invite Jinder, and the community of Youth Power workers, to consider their understandings of what gets called burnout, and the degree to which burnout is constructed as a story of personal deficit. *Contextualizing questions* can be of service here:

➔ Jinder, when I spoke with Joe about creating this dialogue he spoke of shared concerns about large staff turnover at Youth Power. I am thinking of this because you have just brought up your fear that this work might be "too hard" for you as an individual, that you might "burnout". Given this large staff turnover, do you think it is possible that maybe it is not something about you, as an individual, that is getting talked about here as "burnout"?

Deconstructing questions aim to unpack ideas that go un-investigated, and un-contested in much of common language and practice. These questions are of use here to invite Jinder and the people at Youth Power to problematize some ideas that may be siding unfairly with negative judgment.

➔ In this profession, when we talk about a person "burning out", what do you think we mean by that? Are we siding with ideas that people aren't tough enough? How would it be different if we gave each other permission to move to different work, take a break, and put more of the load on the community and not the individual workers? What would that look like, what difference would it make?

➔ What kinds of stories are told about the people who leave the work at Youth Power? Is someone allowed to leave this work or is it an obligation? Do you think it is fair that workers are judged in these ways? Who and what gets let off the hook, if it is up to workers as individuals to be able to handle this difficult and as you've said "heartbreaking work"?

➔ Jinder I am wondering how ideas that you are "not up to this work" individually might be different if we used different language — if we were to acknowledge that you might not be "burning out" you might be "blown up". Is it possible that society, the community, the lack of resources, the "great need" that you've been speaking of, plays a large role in you possibly planning a break from this work?

At this juncture the themes of sustainability and witnessing resistance are interwoven, and it may be useful here to ask a series of *witnessing questions* and *acting in solidarity questions* about the resistance Jinder and the team at Youth Power put up against what gets called burnout.

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The following *witnessing questions* bring forward and attend to the meanings workers give to significant experiences where their work has enriched their lives and their relationships with others in expansive ways. The Solidarity Group aims to open some space to witness the ways in which we are informed, transformed or somehow different for doing this work.

> ➔ Jinder, you've said this work "adds to my life", what do you mean by that? In what ways has your work at Youth Power added to your life in meaningful or expansive ways? What is it that you think might have been added?

Circular questions[21] invite us to consider the alternative or different views others may have of us from our own perspective. Here a circular question does the work of inviting Jinder to consider how a youth she works with might see her. This witnessing can be expansive in terms of Jinder's experience of her preferred self.

> ➔ If I were to ask the young woman you were just speaking of what it was about you that was most helpful to her, what do you think she might say? Is this something you've considered before? How does this young woman's story of you fit with the kind of worker you want to be? What difference does this knowing hold in terms of the contributions your work brings to your life?

F. Critically Engaging with Language

This work is dialogical, meaning that responses flow from each other. My questions come from the person's responses, not a predetermined list of questions. An aim of the dialogue is to attend to the arresting moments when words, phrases, and ways of speaking spontaneously capture our attention.[22]

> ➔ Jinder, I am caught by your language, when you say "a deep respect" what are you referring to? What meaning do these words hold? What do you do that lets you know you're acting inline with this "deep respect"?

> ➔ Jinder, when you said the youth you work with "just need a home" that just struck me as really important. Is it? I felt your voice strengthen, or resonate differently. What is the meaning you give to this "just needing a home"? Say more about what "home" means here?

The Solidarity Group's orientation for social poetics invites embodied dialogue, meaning an attending to the body, to the movements of the collective group, and to the dialogue that is happening outside of speaking. I think of this as the body speaking the relationship. I do not withhold my own embodied experience, as it belongs in the dialogue and I don't construct it as a personal experience. To achieve these aims I may ask Jinder these *embodying questions*:

> ➔ When you spoke of your "deep respect" just now Jinder I feel some energy coming up my legs. Do you have any experience like this?

> ➔ When you speak of your spiritual pain in losing this youth to heroin and you put your hand to your chest, right now, what does that mean to you? Where do you attend to this pain in your body?

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[21] Tomm (1987, 1985)

[22] Anderson & Jensen (2007); Katz & Shotter (1996). These writings connect with Garfinkel's ideas of attending to unique moments in conversation that are "seen but unnoticed" (1967). I am also influenced by American anthropologist Stephen Tyler, who attends to "the said and the unsaid" (1978).

➔ Everyone in the group seemed to move in towards you in some way, leaning in, attending closer, when you spoke of your father's legacy of "deep respect". Did you experience this moving-in? What meaning does this moving-in hold for you?

Witnessing Dialogue

Following this Opening Dialogue between Jinder, the Interview Partner, and myself as the Interviewer, we move to the Witnessing Dialogue. The Reflecting Witnesses are invited into a reflecting dialogue with the Interviewer, and the Interview Partner is situated in a listening position. At this point, I physically close with the Interview Partner and move towards the Reflecting Witnesses, often moving my chair. I will invite the Reflecting Witnesses to arrange themselves so that they can see each other and see me and say something like

> Can everyone see each other?

This invites people to commit their bodies and attention to the Witnessing Dialogue.

The initial intention of the Witnessing Dialogue is to make space for the Reflecting Witnesses to openly engage with each other, and to respond to each other's speaking when they're moved to do so.

> My hope is that we can be in dialogue together, meaning we can jump in and join with what others have said, without me necessarily directing things. I don't want us to take turns or read our lists... would that be okay? I will offer questions, especially if we digress and are leaving Jinder's conversation. What did you hear or experience that captured or moved you? What stood out for you?

Reflections that are close to experience bring specificity, and I offer *microscoping questions*, to assist in keeping the reflections smaller, and more attuned. My aim is to promote a close attending to the speaking of the Opening Dialogue.

➔ What specific words or phrases did you hear Jinder speak just now that connect to this reflection?

➔ When you name that feeling of trust, Mike, what did you see Jinder do or say specifically that has you naming trust?

The Witnessing Dialogue brings forward the themes of the conversation which are most useful to the entire group, and to serve this purpose I ask *weaving questions* that invite the wider group into the experience.

➔ I am wondering about the community at Youth Power. Were there any themes Jinder spoke to that you think are concerns for the community, more about us all as opposed to being about Jinder as an individual?

➔ Mike, you are moving in agreement with Susan on this, Mariah this also stood out for you. Do all of you think this idea of being "pitted against Child Protection Workers" is an issue for the community of Youth Power, not just an individual issue that the folks speaking in this group share?

If something useful has not been picked up by the Reflecting Witnesses I will introduce the theme into the dialogue and offer *witnessing questions* with an aim to invite the Reflecting Witnesses to attend to this theme:

➔ Did anyone else hear the pride in Jinder's voice when she spoke of the teachings of her grandparents? It had me thinking of my grandparents' teachings also, and of how much I have

learned from working with youth that I credit to schooling – did anyone have any reflections on that?

➔ Was anyone caught by the profound silence after Jinder spoke of losing a youth to heroin? It seemed to arrest us — I am not sure how long it went on because I was in it. What did any of you make of that silence?

A purpose of the Witnessing Dialogue is to invite the Reflecting Witnesses to embody their reflections, to connect their own experience with their reflections. These *embodying questions* attempt to serve this purpose:

➔ Mike, you picked up on what you've called the "quickly built trust" of the conversation, and I am wondering why you picked up on this, how do your experiences connect with this?

➔ What is it about you Mariah that has you naming the "great care" Jinder holds for the youth and saying it is the most important part of the conversation for you?

Weaving questions serve an intention of connecting the Reflecting Witnesses with each other, with Jinder, and with all of the folks of Youth Power:

➔ Mariah, Mike is speaking to the feeling he has of connectedness with Jinder's "in the belly fear" for youth, and I am wondering if that stood out for you as well?

➔ Susan, you're nodding and seem to really connect with what Mariah is saying here, what are you most connecting with?

The Witnessing Dialogue aims to ensure that the Interview Partner is witnessed, meaning that we hold the Witnessing Dialogue tightly to reflections of what was spoken of in the Opening Dialogue, and do not engage in a tangential conversation on the same themes. If this happens I may use these *inviting accountability questions* to bring us back to the Interview Partner and the intentions of the group:

➔ That's a neat thought Mike. I am not going to follow it now, as it seems dis-connected to what Jinder spoke of. But I am wondering what specific words you heard from Jinder that have you wondering about this?

Inviting accountability questions can also be of use if judgment, either positive or negative, or advice giving show up.

➔ Mariah, it sounds like you have some strong ideas of how Jinder should deal with the Child Protection Worker in that instance. I am wondering if you have any knowings of Jinder that have you trusting she might have some of her own ideas, or that she might be dealing with this in ways that are being missed in our conversation.

In this dialogue, the Reflecting Witnesses may do the work of attending to lines of inquiry that were not attended to by the Interviewer. Rather than understand this as evaluative or corrective, the emergence of the Reflecting Witnesses' alternative ideas can be understood as a resource to the Interview Partner and to the group, also to the Interviewer. I actively promote, invite, and make space for relational expertise[23] to come forward. The group is more of use if better questions are asked and some of these better questions will come from group members. This is understandable as Susan, Mike and Mariah hold cultural

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[23] Anderson (2008)

knowings of Youth Power. I try to attend very closely and with humility to these alternative and most often useful offerings. This collaborative process makes use of the multiple perspectives and options of the conversation which could be silenced. The following *witnessing questions* attempt to bring forward these curiosities and alternative not-taken paths:

➔ Was there anything spoken of in my conversation with Jinder that wasn't attended to that was important to you?

➔ Are there any curiosities you are engaging with, questions that you may have for Jinder, perhaps on parts of the conversation I passed over?

Similarly, Reflecting Witnesses can often speak to an unnamed presence.[24] They may name therapeutic love that they tracked in the conversation, even though the word love may not have been spoken as the doing of love was preformed. These reflections that speak to the unnamed presences also reflect a social poetics, and in their most useful appearances can work to weave the group together in a language outside of words. The task of attending to these unspoken presence reflections may be served by these *naming questions*:

➔ Susan, that is really interesting that you've tracked a theme of Jinder's humility. I hadn't named that, but as you spoke I could see the path of humility in Jinder's speaking. Mike, Mariah, does this fit for you as well, what do any of you make of this relationship with humility?

➔ Was there a specific moment in the conversation that connects to this love you're naming Mariah? The word love wasn't spoken I don't think. What movements or silences or words did you notice that have you naming therapeutic love?

The Reflecting Witnesses are invited into multiple positions, initially as part of the community of solidarity for the Interview Partner, but another task of the Interviewer is to ask questions that engage the Reflecting Witnesses as witness to their own experiences. These *reflexive witnessing questions* attempt to serve these purposes:

➔ Susan, what meaning did you make of Jinder's description of your support as "heart felt"?

➔ Did this surprise you or is this something you know about yourself?

➔ Did you know your "heartfelt" support held these meanings for Jinder? What meaning does this hold for you?

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue

Following the Witnessing Dialogue between the Interviewer and the Reflecting Witnesses, the Dialogue moves back to the Interview Partner and the Interviewer. This dialogue between the Interviewer and the Interview Partner is focused upon the reflections of the Reflecting Witnesses. The work of this third part of the dialogue is to bring forward the themes that have been addressed and connect them to each other and to everyone participating in this community-making dialogue. To accomplish this, Jinder's reflections

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[24] This practice is inspired by what Geertz (1973) and White (2000a, 2004) refer to as the absent but implicit.

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as the Interview Partner are prioritized, as opposed to focusing on reflections from the Interviewer. Reflections may be more meaningful for the community of Youth Power coming from Jinder.

> ➔ Jinder, what did you hear or experience that captured or moved you? What stood out for you?

> ➔ When Mike spoke of a similar struggle with getting a youth back in school, did you know Mike was in that struggle alone? Do you think it is possible there is often more solidarity than we're aware of in the moment?

This dialogue attends to the witnessing of all participants in the witnessing group, Mike, Mariah and Susan. While I prefer the Interview Partner to reflect upon the speaking of each of the Reflecting Witnesses, I will speak with an aim to ethically and genuinely witness all participants. I may invite Jinder into the reflection using *witnessing questions*, or I may offer a reflection. This could be a risky conversation if Mariah was not mentioned, or if none of her reflections were picked up on. If any of the Reflecting Witnesses are not themselves witnessed, the group can function as a ritual of exclusion.

> ➔ When you say that you experience yourself as "really being heard" Jinder, I am wondering if there was anything Susan, Mariah, or Mike said specifically that supported the "being heard"?

> ➔ I noticed Susan said she was supported by you in a hard moment Jinder, and I am wondering if you picked up on that, if it had any resonance for you?

> ➔ I felt accompanied by Mike saying he also had "dark moments" of thinking this work might be too hard. I thought his voice was pained and I saw his eyes get glassy, and I had to restrain myself from getting in the way of hearing what he was saying. Did you make any meanings of this?

> ➔ Did you catch the tone of voice Mariah spoke with when she was naming love in the conversation? That moved me. I felt connected to her when she spoke in that shaking way.

I ask Jinder to speculate on the usefulness of this group for all the folks at Youth Power. The Interview Partner is taken out of context in a way by the structure of the Solidarity Group, and the use of *communalizing questions* aims to both position the group as the centre of the dialogue, and de-center the Interview Partner while returning her to the community.

> ➔ Jinder, do you have any ideas or thoughts about how this whole dialogue might be of use to the Listening Witnesses, everyone who hasn't spoken in the group? How might witnessing and not talking be of use do you think?

> ➔ Do you have any predictions or speculations of how this Solidarity Group might be of use to the community of Youth Power? Both for the people who work there and the youth you work with?

> ➔ Do you hold any specific hopes for the workers and youth at Youth Power that have been amplified in this group? What might they be?

Amplifying difference questions aim to bring forward preferable differences the dialogue may make for Jinder and for the youth she works with.

> ➔ How might this conversation make a difference for you in the future in relation to inviting back-up, support, and being of use to other folks at Youth Power?

> ➔ What differences might this conversation make for the youth you work with?

> ➔ This is a different kind of conversation. I am wondering if this is a new experience, being witnessed here with these folks? Are there other times or places in your life where you've been attended to in this way?

➔ Now that we're at the end looking back on this dialogue, still of it but not in it, are you okay-enough with your decision to be interviewed? How has this been for you?

The Open Conversation and Closing of the Solidarity Group

Depending on the makeup of the group and the reason for meeting I may invite everyone into an Open Conversation at the end of the Solidarity Group. The purpose for this would be to illuminate the practice itself if that is what people are interested in. It would also create space for the Listening Witnesses to participate more directly in the dialogue, possibly reading from their written reflections, the Solidarity Notes. My preference is to not invite an Open Conversation. I am cautious, in the situations when we do engage in an Open Conversation, that we not bury the work of the group in more talk, or engage in new themes that are not connected to the dialogue. However, naming possible places the dialogue might have gone could encourage further and enriching conversations to follow.

It is important to me that the Solidarity Group has a structured ending. Often I leave space for the Interview Partner to speak and then I propose that it is a good note to close on.

> That sounds like an interesting idea Jinder, and who knows where this dialogue will go when you pick that up with your team? I am wondering if you would be okay ending here, or do you have anything else you'd like to say now at the closing? Thanks for doing this Jinder and thanks for trusting me enough to do this. Thanks Susan, Mike, Mariah. I appreciate your reflections and what you've brought to this dialogue.

> Is everyone ok if we end here? For now that is. I hope some of this dialogue might be picked up by all of you in the near future. You might catch some people up on the group, most especially the youth who we spoke of here. And follow up on paths of the conversation where we didn't go. Let's all be mindful of our collective confidentiality, and most especially what Jinder and our Reflecting Witnesses have shared, and of the youth we spoke of. Thanks to the Listening Witnesses. You can finish writing your responses if you choose to and give the Solidarity Notes to Jinder in your own time.

Following this closing up talk I usually stand up and that physically ends the group. I want the dialogue to hold its own, and not get invited into deviating questions of process or about me personally. I get up, stretch, and invite everyone's bodies to leave the group. As a practice of accountability I try to be the last person leaving the room, so that there is space for people to approach me, especially if they have concerns or need a response from me about something which happened in the group. There is talk amongst folk as we move out or to the next activity, but the Solidarity Group now stands on its own.

Leaving behind the imagined community of Youth Power, I want to highlight some key understandings of the Solidarity Group. Central to the dialogue are themes connected to the Guiding Intentions of Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Addressing Power, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Critically Engaging with Language, and Structuring Safety

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The Solidarity Group dialogue is not ever expanding or unfolding, but in fact gets smaller and smaller attending closer and closer to the details of what has occurred, as if a flashlight were moving from a powerful floodlight to a finely pointed beam. Unlike a stone which falls into a pond causing concentric circles to ripple outwards, the Solidarity Group conversation becomes tighter and tighter as if the ripples were an inverse telescope.

SOLIDARITY GROUP DIALOGUE
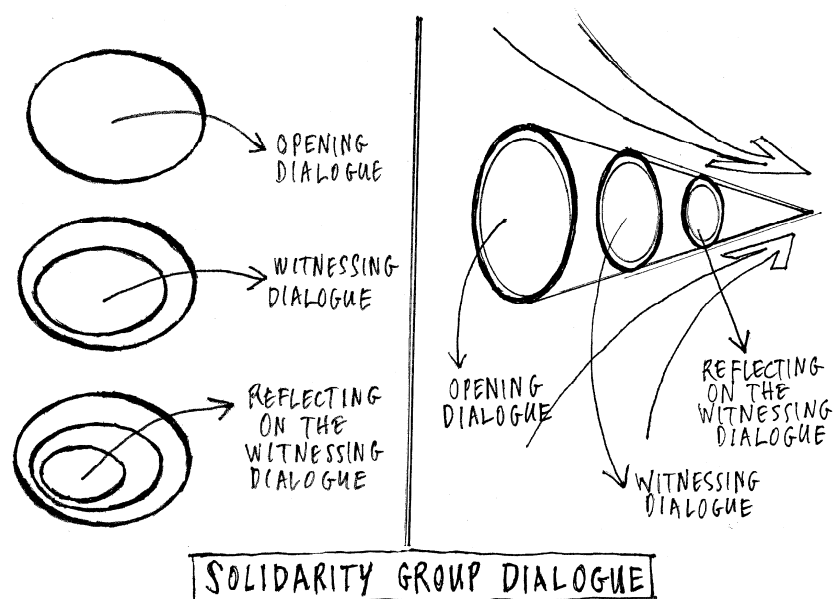
At the same time as this structure invites a small and closely-attended dialogue there may be multiple and expansive dialogues resonating from the Solidarity Group. All of the participants are having their unspoken experiences. Following a group, many conversations may roll forward, people who have been spoken of in the group may be caught up on the impact they have had, and conversations with clients may be different in ways that are connected to the group. The Solidarity Notes from the Listening Witnesses may evoke other dialogues. So while the structure of the Solidarity Group is a telescoping smaller-making

tight, and closely attuned dialogue, the Solidarity Group also promotes communalizing dialogues, expanding in unpredictable ways.
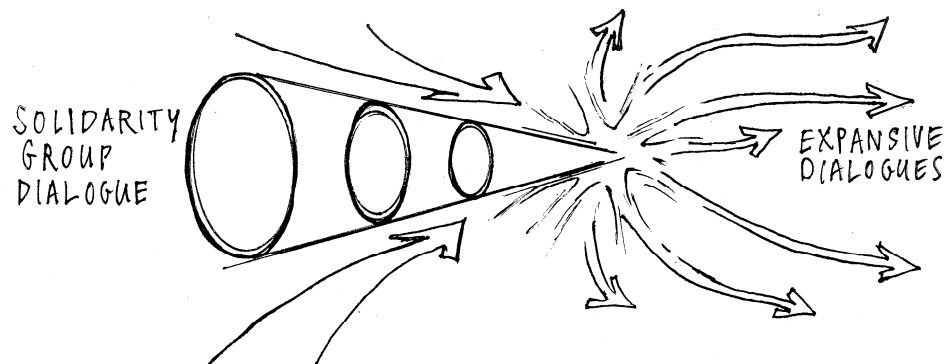
4. The Spirit of the Solidarity Group Practice: The East Van Crew

The bones of the Solidarity Group have been laid out in the last writing of the imagined Solidarity Group. Here my purpose is to breathe life into the bones and bring forward the spirit of the Solidarity Group. I am going to engage with real-time storytelling[25] in hopes of offering an intimate experience of the Solidarity group of the East Van Crew.[26] The purpose of this writing is to invite an experience that is as close as possible to having participated in a Solidarity Group. This embodied re-telling of this Solidarity Group is not a transcript. I have made concerted efforts to be able to portray a more complex re-telling of this dialogue.[27] Despite all of these practices, which I believe have added to the richness of the re-telling, I am in no way making a claim that this is a true account of the East Van Crew's dialogue.[28]

In this re-telling, as with the last imagined practice example of Youth Power Society's Solidarity Group, I follow the Outline of the Solidarity Group closely.

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[25] I was invited into real-time storytelling by Arden Henley (1994, 1992), who credited the idea to the work of David Epston (1989) and most particularly David's inspiring story of *Dory the Cat*.

[26] The members of the East Van Crew have been invited to use their own names or to choose a pseudonym for this writing, and to locate themselves as they choose in this footnote. They have all been invited to offer a critique of this writing. This crew takes its name from the neighborhood we proudly refer to as the Republic of East Van (Vancouver), although all of the members do not live or work there. The crew includes: Todd Ware, Downtown Eastside Housing Support Worker; Sandra Taylor, Family Therapist Supervisor; Andrew Larcombe, Mental Health Counsellor; Julie Tilson, Addictions Clinical Supervisor; Rosa Arteaga, Manager Battered Women's Support Services; Hilary Morfitt, Youth Counsellor; Alli Rice, Substance Abuse Therapist; Michele Maurer, Clinical Coordinator Early Psychosis Intervention Program; and Corinne Logan, Addictions Counsellor.

[27] I have used multiple recordings of the conversation, written responses from all of the participants, and re-watching a video recording with the Interview Partner, Todd.

[28] Quotation marks and a different font are used to denote that the words and ideas belong to a particular witness, but I have changed words and grammatical constructions in line with an intention of making this conversation sensible to the reader. The dialogue did not necessarily occur in the order in which it is offered here.

1. Preparing for the Group (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Todd; Reflecting Witnesses, Sandra, Rosa, Andrew, Julie, Hilary, Alli, Michele and Corinne)

The East Van Crew is the name loosely adopted by a group of folks who were invited into a Solidarity Group that occurred for the purposes of this writing. I invited people who were known to me as students, colleagues, supervisors, and allies to participate in a single meeting Solidarity Group, a temporary community if you will. Despite being a diverse group of folk with a multiplicity of social locations, all of these practitioners work alongside people in the margins of society who are exploited and oppressed. This group included people who work in the domains of mental health, social housing, substance abuse, family counselling, public health, and anti-violence. Some of the group knew each other well, other people were known only to me.

In a telephone conversation prior to the Solidarity Group I invited Todd, a Downtown Eastside housing support worker, to be the Interview Partner. Speaking privately to Todd ahead of time gave him the space to decline this invitation without having to say no to me in public. I was open with Todd about why I asked him to be the Interview Partner, stating that we had worked alongside each other for almost a decade and I had never interviewed him. Any of the people I had invited into this Solidarity Group would be useful to interview, and I hold to an intention that the purpose of the group was for the community collectively, not necessarily for the Interview Partner as an individual. I was attending to multiple commitments in asking Todd to be the Interview Partner. I know Todd to be engaging, humorous and genuine, so it was reasonable to expect that he would be forthcoming in the Opening Dialogue. Also, because his work comes from nonacademic places, Todd seldom takes up public space and had less access to power than many other workers. I knew of some of Todd's life experiences of resistance. I wanted to make room in this temporary community for different kinds of knowing.

I invited all eight other participants to be Reflecting Witnesses. This is a large number to try to engage dialectically, especially as they are not all known to each other. Usually, in Solidarity Groups of this size, I would invite some people to serve as Reflecting Witnesses and I would put others in the role of Listening Witnesses. The Listening Witnesses would offer written reflections, which I refer to as Solidarity Notes. With this particular group, I felt that it was *safe-enough* to invite everyone to serve as Reflecting Witnesses because everyone was known to me, and this community was meeting at my invitation, not as a response to any crisis or struggle.

Some of these folks had participated in Solidarity Groups before, for others it was a new experience. We had a quick round of introductions and located ourselves in relationship to our work. I then outlined the sequence of the Solidarity Group.

2. Opening Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Todd)
The Interviewer and the Interview Partner engage in dialogue, while the people who comprise the Witnessing Dialogue are positioned for reflecting. The Interviewer and the Interview Partner have a closed dialogue and the Reflecting Witnesses are in a listening position.

> Todd speaks of having enough trust to participate in this group as the Interview Partner based
> on our working history and the respect between us. He also picked up on my suggestion that
> he invite some people who he thought would serve as useful witnesses to him. This creates

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more safety for him within the group. Todd invited Alli, with whom he has solid working and social connections. He says that he could not speak to the trust of everyone because, "I don't know these people, how are they going to perceive me and judge me?" Todd names the riskiness of being interviewed, saying "the room is full of many unknowns" but, borrowing on the trust of others, he is willing to be interviewed.

"My job is to assist in housing the poorest people in the Downtown Eastside (of Vancouver). The people I serve cannot be using drugs, as this is an abstinence-based program. If people relapse their housing is at risk. It's a battle". Todd talks about "people struggling with addiction, poverty and other problems. I am up against watching people cycle from treatment, incarceration, homeless, detox, treatment, incarceration, homeless, detox". He speaks of his desire "to help people run their own lives – It's a struggle". There is silence and then Todd says emphatically "I need to figure out a way to help people get what is in their hearts".

I ask how Todd tolerates situations when people do lose their housing and his head comes up abruptly, he looks me in the eye and corrects me with determination, "I don't. I don't." He mentions many tactics "to try to keep people in housing, but you know, I can understand at times people can't be in housing because they put others at risk. But what I cannot accept is that that is where my care stops". I ask if he did not tolerate people losing their housing, what did he do. Todd says "my high expectations can lead me to a place of despair. I set myself up for failure. This person was housed but now I am the person kicking them out".

I ask Todd how this gets constructed as a personal failure of his when the United Nations repertoire on housing is saying the country is not doing enough about housing and that it is a world level problem? Todd responds, saying "I exist in a community, in a society, and in a neighborhood. I cannot find it possible to believe that with so much privilege there is so much poverty". He sees it as "a responsibility that all human beings get their basic needs met" and says "my passion can lead me to really hard places. To despair and loneliness".

After a long silence, Todd talks about "living in poverty" himself and "being at a 7-11 deciding how many calories I can get for eighty cents, because I am that hungry", and about his experiences of, "standing at lineups to get shelter, and to get cheques. The place my history can take me to is both good and bad". I ask if this was okay to talk about, because it is so painful and immediate and connects his life so closely with the people he's working with. "My story is not necessarily their story, but as a person of colour, with my history, I can connect to pieces of it. My hope is to use my own despair, my own sorrow, my own hard feelings to try to help others. It's important to me. It is a passion and a drive".   He spoke as if this was a natural response and so I say that everybody who's been humiliated in life doesn't respond by treating others with dignity. I ask Todd what it meant that he responded to his own experiences of indignity, as a person of colour in poverty who was not always seen as a person, by trying to dignify others. There was a pause and then an awkward laughter. Todd says, "I haven't always tried to dignify others. Anger, violence, drug use and other things that were very negative were around for a long time in my life".

Todd tells the story of, "a very large angry man, who came into our Downtown Eastside office and was leaning over the desk, yelling at the receptionists to the point where they were going

to call the police. I intervened and I invited the gentleman outside".[29] Todd speaks of how careful he was with "my tone of voice and the way I held my body. I tried to make myself appear smaller because I'm a big guy. Fifteen minutes later the gentleman told me what was really going on for him".

Todd connects this with a time he was "going into a ministry office and was really disrespected". A sad silence is felt, and then Todd continues, "It's just that time, sometimes for people. Making time to support people with their own dignity". Todd returns to the story of the angry man in his office and said that," Making time is what made it possible for him to talk to me. Once I listened to the gentleman's issues, I agreed that they were valid". I ask Todd what it was about him as a person that allowed him to dignify that gentleman. Todd says, "I have been angry in a welfare office. I have been yelling at receptionists to give me my money." Todd followed up his conversation with this gentleman by "going in and speaking with all of the workers at the desk as they were all women, because for the most part they were quite reasonably afraid". What stands out in the experience for Todd is "if we can carve out making time for people and find out what's really going on for them we don't have to phone the police. This person doesn't have to go to jail." I ask Todd what it might have been like for him, if someone had been able to see that dignity in him, when he was struggling, in the moments that he was the person yelling at a welfare office. Todd says, "It would have been really helpful. Nobody there invested any time or any engagement in me".

I asked where the teachings are in Todd's life "to work for my heart and really help people develop". A rich silence follows. "My mom". Todd continues, "My adolescence was full of negative choices. When I decided to get my life in line a lot of those teachings came from my mom. The person she was in my life, the way she was invested in my life". The Twelve Step[30] community also had a huge impact because "people genuinely took an interest in me not destroying my life". I ask him to name these folks who've invested in him and honoured his feelings, and people who thought he could be different. Todd says "Gord. He worked for the John Howard Society and he intercepted me on the highway I was driving on". He also names "some gentlemen who took time for me at the treatment center I went to. I think about them every few days". I ask if Gord knows about the kind of impact he has in Todd's life. With a quiet smile, Todd says, "I see him all the time. Whenever I see him I start to cry. Every time, every time, every time". I ask what it might mean to Gord to have Todd in his life, and Todd says," if I give to other people what he gave to me? A lot". "I truly value him because he took time", and was "giving time of himself".

Emotion is thick in the air so I ask Todd how this is going for him, and if it is okay to keep talking about Gord. Todd agrees. I ask if he thought there was anybody walking around with stories about him the way he held stories about Gord. Todd says "this is where I invite humility into my life". I acknowledge that it is very hard to sit in front of this question.

Next, I ask Todd if he ever thought he would be the kind of person who could promote that kind of change for others. Very quietly, he says "yeah". There is a pause. He says, "Okay, here's

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[29] Todd's use of the word *gentleman* captured me, and it mattered that Todd spoke of this person in this way; it was an unusual phrasing, telling us more about the humanity Todd looked for in this man who was behaving angrily. This diction also said something significant about Todd.

[30] Alcoholics Anonymous, (2001)

my day. I got a call from a friend in the morning saying he's got a guy who's a tattoo artist. Asks can I give him a call? He's in trouble. And I give him my number, and tell him to call anytime." I ask who knows about Todd's willingness to help immediately, and he speaks of his daughter, of his family. "I help people get clean and I support people staying clean, and I give them energy and I give them time".

When I ask Todd who in his life would know that he would some day be doing this work he names his mother, his brother and his father who'd passed away. He says that his father always trusted him, always believed in him. "When I was in trouble my dad bragged that I was the

fastest sprinter in the neighborhood – he just always believed in who I was, and he just had nothing to talk about for a good decade" laughs. Later, when Todd got free from drugs and alcohol his father came to celebrate with him. Todd remembers, "the ear to ear grins, and excitement and love. It was the best." Following a quiet moment, Todd says, "It's harder to talk about this than it is to talk about the hard stuff in my life".

I bring us back to earlier in the conversation when Todd was sitting straight up in the chair and saying emphatically that he cannot tolerate that people are being put out of housing. I ask who would expect him to do any more for people. Softly he says, "nobody would".

Todd recalls a recent conversation with his supervisor where Todd said "give me the leeway to do this and this and watch what happens in two years in terms of what we're able to do for people. I just believe that." When I ask where that faith comes from he says it is a good question. There is silence, "I don't know. It was developed by the people I was around when I was first clean, there was an absolute desire and a drive and a passion . . . When I walk into a house with a person and with their new building manager, and that person starts to cry because

they're in a safe place with locks, their own stove, their own fridge – It just fills me, it just fills me".

There is some quiet. When I ask what Todd is thinking he reflects, "I cannot imagine how anyone could ever say they have nothing left to give. How do you ever say 'I have nothing left to give'?" He laughs, and then he chuckles. Then he laughs again as if it is entirely inexplicable to him. I join Todd's humorous energy, telling him that he has me really curious about how he's going to keep having something left to give. Who is going to help him have something left to give? Who is alongside him in those times when someone has to be put out of their house, or when he puts someone out of their house. Todd's response begins slowly, "I guess the therapy would be my sixteen-year-old kid Angie saying 'hang out with me, spend time with me' ". There is a long pause, "I don't know. I will be reflecting long and hard after this dialogue about that".

There is a thought-filled silence. I take accountability for suggesting Todd needs to find a way to

tolerate what he says is intolerable – that people can't be housed. This question I asked could work to accommodate us to a social structure where people are not housed. Todd responds animatedly, "I just wrote a paper for my Social Welfare class and in it I say we have to "infiltrate the rooms where policy is being developed". He reflects, " I have a love and passion for front-line work. Sandra is one of the best counsellors I have ever worked with, and she has taught me a great deal. But at some point in my career I can see myself leaving frontline work and being in the room where policy is made". When I ask about his hopes for engaging with policy, Todd says, "Maybe we can change things. I just have to travel with my homeboy optimism."

The Reflecting Witnesses are invited into a reflecting dialogue with the Interviewer, and the Interview Partner is situated in a listening position. The Reflecting Witnesses may refer to parts of the conversation that were not included in the re-telling of the Opening Dialogue.

I say that I'd like us to have a conversation with each other now, not directed by me. I ask the Witnesses to jump in and respond to what moved them in the conversation I had with Todd. Sandra reflects that it is interesting that "we ended travelling with homeboy optimism, because when you asked Todd about faith and where it came from he was quiet". Sandra wonders "what it would be like for Todd to do this work if he didn't have that faith". When Todd and I were talking about how he would not tolerate that people could not be housed, Sandra says "that is the faith that is able to sustain Todd". She says faith "was like a community that believed in him. Like Gord".

Julie holds her notes out to us. They are covered with drawings of hearts and the words heart, heart, heart. Julie says, "I do not doubt Todd's relationship with sustainability because there's this depth of heart, heart-fullness. Todd spoke as if he were in the business of not kicking people out of housing. It's like he is in the business of going heart-to-heart".

Julie is reminded of a story: "It's about three or four years ago in Minneapolis in the heart of winter. I am walking down the street with a friend, we just hooked up for coffee and it was cold. It was *cold* (laughing). This kid walks by us, and she had just been to a flower shop or something and she had this bright bouquet of flowers and I am like *dude*, how do you go out in the three below Fahrenheit Minneapolis winter with flowers? That's amazing!" Julie says that when she heard Todd talk about heart this image emerged. "Todd goes into the midst of despair, in the frigid cold, and he has the warmth of his heart, and he just keeps going".

Rosa connects with "Todd's real desire to find out what is at the heart for people, and where they are at, because that is how our teams work with battered women".

Alli connects with "the gratitude that people showed in their tears of joy about having their own stove, and having a safe place". Rosa picks up on this as she is thinking "about the tension between working with heart, and on the other hand feeling powerless, thinking of despair". She tracks the conversation as "moving from despair, to strength, acknowledgment, history and background, and then to despair again. Except that now at the end there is a strength or something powerful in the despair". Rosa credits the dialogue, the exchange between Todd and I, with changing the experience of despair to gratitude, "Somehow something powerful happened". Rosa joins with Todd in "having powerful feelings about the work. In my work with women, sexual abuse, violence, trauma, it doesn't stop for us". She speaks of the never ending work of running support groups, supervising co-workers from nine to five, "it's one story after another and we can get with thinking when is this going to stop? But I know I can keep on going because of course, we can navigate from despair to gratitude".

Sandra says "we are sometimes pathologized as workers for being with despair, when in fact sometimes that despair has been helpful". Julie connects with this, "It doesn't stop at despair. This told me a lot about Todd, because I just met him, that he doesn't stop at despair. And that despair moves him".

Rosa speaks of "the huge difference it makes for me. I feel excitement and happiness when I find other workers who bring passion to their work". "Housing is a huge problem for the women

we work with." Rosa says "we can imagine people working in housing not caring about whether or not women get housing". I name how easy it is for workers to imagine the people working elsewhere don't care, and yet when we get together in a room that never seems to be the case.[31] Rosa agrees with me, saying, "I was surprised about his passion and level of commitment. Listening to Todd is going to help me become free of these assumptions that I have about other workers".

Julie says "as a white person I am listening to Todd as a man of colour, and I have ideas that that might inform some of his understandings of despair". I ask Julie why she picked up on this. She mentions that I had picked up on it and that she is alongside me. For the team she works with in the Downtown Eastside "It is very important they have an understanding of broader cultural narratives so the work does not become a personal burden. I don't hear Todd saying this broader social analysis is bringing him down. For him it sounds like it is about justice and it doesn't sound like he's taking on helping people as a personal project".

Michele is arrested by Todd's use of the phrase "investing in people". Because she has never met Todd before, "I wasn't sure that I would connect with him, yet as soon as he began to speak I felt very connected". The group responds with nodding heads, Hillary corroborates that she also felt an instantaneous connection alongside Todd. Michele speaks of connecting, "about being up against systems and huge organizations, and how I re-connect with my humanity when I am investing in people. Connecting with people makes a difference when I have to be a bad guy sometimes in my job too ". She says." connection is strength. Connection is a resistance to despair when things get overwhelming in our work. And what I heard most clearly was Todd's

commitment to connection with investment – investing in people".

Alli follows the two threads she tracked throughout the conversation, which are "Todd's initial focuses of creating relationships with people who have power, and working with people to get what is in their heart". She names the continual "investing in people, and giving back and giving time" present throughout the conversation.

Sandra interjects, "I love the fact that Todd's faith and belief in the people he works with includes his co-workers and clients, because it doesn't sound so much like us and them. When it comes to policy, he's saying I am a part of this; I am accountable to my community and to my people. And I love that he said, 'I can generate conversations that are going to one day change this policy'. I thought I better remember that! And stop. And give people time. I am going to do it tonight, with my mother! ". Throughout this speaking, people added verbal agreement, and connected glances.

Corinne is struck with "how the conversation flowed, connection and hope emerged from the conversation and I am wondering how that is different for Todd now than at the beginning of the conversation". She wonders what might be different for Todd in terms of how he considers working in a system he spoke of as rigid and inflexible. "The flow of the conversation moved from discussion about the work, then it became personal, and then emotional, and this all emerged from telling the stories of connection". Corinne says, "I was with emotion and

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[31] My positioning here speaks to one of the underlying assumptions I hold for all social justice work, which is that there is always more solidarity and we can see. Again, this is not truth, but it is has been a very helpful and sustaining assumption for me to hold.

experienced that pain, especially when you brought in the larger context of the political and social needs underlying the work Vikki". "This is a crisis, and there is pain".

Andrew says, "I work with many of the clients who try to access the housing that Todd is connected with, and I have been involved in trying to house people for an extensive period of time. These clients, who struggle with mental health and addiction, also struggle with the very difficult requirements they have to meet in order to secure social housing. And I am just so blown over because I did not hear any resentment." Andrew is surprised because "the people who make policy are not the people who have to do the dirty work with people. The people who make policies are not where Todd is, they're not where I am". I mention that Andrew's body actually moved back powerfully as he spoke of being blown away in witness to Todd. Andrew says he is "struck by Todd's response, not just an absence of resentment, but also a desire to be one of the people in relationship with people who make policies and be in a position to change policies".

Michele picks this up and says, "I love the idea that Todd wants to be a policy maker. And hey, I want him working with me. It could be where I am connecting in the work. I am looking at myself. Moving up, moving out of front-line work with clients. Did I move to a silly place? And yet the policymakers I really respect are the ones who can still connect with their despair". Michele responds to "hearing policymakers spoken of in respectful and hopeful ways, which I am struck by because it happens rarely. In fact, often policymakers are thought of as 'bad people'.

Todd makes space for me to think there's humanity in all those places – to think that there is humanity in a policymaking office, that there's humanity in me and there will be humanity in Todd when he makes policy". [32]

Michele continues, connecting her thoughts to earlier reflections, "Like you were saying Rosa, it's easy to think the person in another job is a bad person, but it's not helpful to think in us and them." "They are me. I am them. I could be one of them, sometimes I am".

Andrew names "how powerful it was hearing about Todd's intervention with the gentleman, as Todd referred to him, who was yelling. Todd's response was to move alongside this guy when the system could have responded by very conveniently removing him and there would've been no memory or trace of him. I am hearing that solidarity that he had. What's really important is that we make a service helpful. In that moment Todd was the embodiment of making a service useful. I was struck that when he came back he talked to the women workers who are subjected to this. I felt a certain kind of dignity because Todd could respect what it was the women had gone through. This man had lost his capacity to treat others with dignity and Todd tried to restore something". I ask Andrew, why this stood out for him. He responds that if Todd had not invited some accountability to the women he would have just been doing "business as usual for men. Todd understood how the women had themselves been victimized by the oppressive behavior of this man, while holding compassion for this man and making the service of use".

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[32]As the interviewer I am struck by Todd and Michele's ability to act in solidarity when it is hard, when there is seduction to blame others and to elevate ourselves righteously. Michele acknowledges the humanity of all workers, moving into them, and offering a real critique that can move things forward in a way that can foster social change, and is in line with a collective ethic that can be more useful to clients. Michele and Todd are connecting around the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power and the duty of the witness to work to change the contexts of oppression.

Julie addresses Andrew, "I appreciate that you, as the only man on the Witnessing Dialogue, were the one to point this out. I thought, wow, Todd gets it: he holds himself accountable to the men and to the women. We have got to deal with it on all fronts. It is not an either or, that was huge to me. I was super touched by that. And then I was wondering what the experience was like for Todd, we didn't even talk about whether or not he might have felt afraid".[33]

Rosa speaks to her connection with Todd's compassion in this incident, "his understanding of the importance of body language, and the acknowledgment of compassion in the body – looking the person in the eye".

Hillary follows a thread she tracked throughout the conversation, "Initially Todd was talking about how it is really important for him to connect with people and that he has a real experience of competency working with youth. But now working with adults he's wondering, "How do I do that?" Ahhh, then we get this great story about the gentleman. (Everyone chuckles, laughs.) Todd is immediately there for him, and then now, he thinks, 'maybe I have the potential to be there with policy makers as well', so there's all this competency there".[34]

Rosa names that as the Interviewer, I was accountable for my inappropriate question, which was "trying to make Todd tolerate people having no housing. Todd resisted the bad question". She said it was "huge learning to see the Interviewer correct themselves". Michele credits Todd with being willing to disagree with me, "he told Vikki she got it wrong". Michele says she thought Todd needed to explain to all of us the depth of his conviction in his investment with people, and "I appreciate that as the Interviewer you heard that and said later, 'Maybe I am the one who has a problem with that'. It opened space for him to hear you say that he might have something to reflect on in terms of continuing to have something to give".

Alli positions herself as having "the luxury of knowing Todd in the context of which he talks. When you were saying Julie, that you were amazed about Todd taking steps to be accountable for women in the workplace, I didn't even notice that, given that Todd was the first person working beside me years ago, to show me what it means to be an honourable man. I carry that with me wherever I go – there's my bar! ".

Alli's comments draw verbal and embodied affirmations from the group. There is a rich and appreciative silence, which Alli continues speaking into, "And I can name fifteen people that Todd is 'the Gord' to". I acknowledged that that is a nice turn of phrase, and offer the verb 'to Gord'. Alli responded with 'or to Todd'.

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[33] Julie attends skillfully to the risk Todd may have experienced as a man which had previously gone un-named. My preference is for the Guiding Intentions of the practice to be brought forward by the Solidarity Group participants themselves, just as witnessing that comes from the participants is of more use than that coming from the Interviewer.

[34] The Reflecting Witnesses offer three different accounts of the tracking of the conversation; Rosa analyzed the movement of the conversation from despair, to strength, acknowledgment, history and background, and then to despair with strength; Corrine attended to what emerged from the flow of the conversation, from work, to the personal, and then emotional, and she noted that the path was through re-telling stories of connection; Hillary tracked the conversation in terms of Todd's relationship with competency, first with youth and then adults, and finally the potential competency of working alongside policymakers. These three accounts were not weighted against each other or judged, but witnessed as part of the possibilities of multiple re-tellings of Todd's story.

Sandra says "it was cool how the conversation ended with something cool, the fact that Todd said he needs to think about still having something to give when he leaves here. Some feelings came up for me as well. Where do we reach out? That's something that we all need to keep thinking about". This is met with a heavy silence by the entire group, with connective glances and moving of bodies.

I feel this was a good time to end the witnessing reflections, especially as everyone seems to be sitting with the tough question of how we will all continue to have something to give. I ask if anyone had any other thoughts, and after pondering whether or not he should take more space Andrew says, "Just that it's tough sometimes to have to be the person who says things that people don't want to hear. All of us struggle with that as workers, yet Gord was the person to tell Todd's mother, 'Don't give him any money' ". Andrew speaks of, "the importance of being able to say 'no' to people, the respect in not letting things slip by". I reflect that it is significant that Andrew picked up on this, as I hadn't in the Opening Dialogue.[35] I wonder aloud if hearing Todd say that Gord's "no" was so important to him getting his life back could be useful to all of us, the importance of a "*just* no".

4. Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Todd)

The Interviewer and the Interview Partner dialogue centered upon the reflections of the Reflecting Witnesses.

When I ask Todd what he most connects with in the conversation, he says, "I can feel everyone's enthusiasm". "The energy in the room spoke to passion." While he has participated in other Solidarity Groups I have facilitated, this was the first time Todd served as the Interview Partner. Initially he had concerns that it would be too much about him. After listening he realizes people connected in their own ways and brought up questions for themselves.[36] "Like Sandra saying that she also has emotions brought up and she is also walking away with very serious questions she's going to ask herself. Everyone connected the conversation to their own work and to themselves. Personally, that really interested me".

I invite Todd to bring forward what he heard anybody say that stood out for him; he says "a lot" followed by a thought-filled silence. Todd is concerned that he cannot remember specifically things people said. He asks to read my notes and does so.[37] He also says there was a lot going on for him.

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[35] This is a rich example of a Reflecting Witnesses serving as a resource to the Interviewer.

[36] This is important because the Guiding Intentions require that the Solidarity Group dialogue be of use to all participants, not just the Interview Partner and directs the Interviewer to look for common themes that resonate with others in solidarity. Todd's reflections here let me know that I am in line-enough with these intentions as the Interviewer in this particular Solidarity Group dialogue.

[37] I purposefully used every person's first name in the first few minutes of this part of the dialogue with Todd, as everyone was not known to him. I believe that knowing peoples names invites us to more easily witness their reflections. I also purposefully name everyone so that they are witnessed in a particular way.

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I name that Sandra said emotions came up for her also, but she kept her own counsel about that and no one asked her about that. This interests me because there's always this expansiveness afterwards, people follow-up with different pieces of the conversation, expanding it in ways that we cannot predict and cannot be caught up on.[38]

After more silence, Todd says, "the idea of heart is what stood out most", and I say Julie named heart in the conversation. I say that Corinne named the pain of the conversation and said that she was with pain herself. Pain was present, but it doesn't get to be the whole story, as Rosa mentioned when she was tracking the path from despair to a strength that came from despair. Todd nodded and said, "Yeah, yeah".

This is followed by a silence that I feel is awkward. I attend to the different qualities of silence. The rich reflective thought filled silence earlier is honoured and made space for, this silence, which I feel may be informed by Todd's embarrassment for not remembering people's names or specific things they said, is worth interrupting. I collaborate with Todd around the meaning of this silence. I respond by asking Todd if he is struggling to remember specific words and he says," Yes". I bring forward Hillary's comments, speaking to the competency with youth moving to competency with adults moving to "I am going to set policy". Todd laughs out loud. He says, "It is what it is".

I speak of Rosa saying how important it was to hear that someone working in housing is with despair about it, because all she hears is that there is no housing. Rosa said she and others working with women who have suffered violence, can get with thinking that housing workers don't care. She said it is much more useful for her to be in solidarity with other people, that we all have to do this together. I mention that Michele connected with Rosa about how easy it is to think other workers don't care. Todd responds," It was really beautiful when Rosa was speaking. It was weird, because I don't know her. I was awed. She was speaking how my brain thinks; you're trying to make sense of why I can't house people. She reminded me how I have got to slow myself down; I have got to think about this."

Todd is struck that Andrew picked up on his acts of accountability to women, and Todd wants to be clear, "I was a perpetrator of violence myself and never considered the impact of my behavior on women". He connects that past behavior to his "really paying attention now to men's violence and women's fear". I bring forward Alli's comments that Todd is the man who set the bar for her in terms of men's accountability. So there is more than one story about this. Todd says, "The story is more interesting than you know because actually Alli is one of the people that brought me into accountability". Todd is, "interested that Julie brought up whether or not I had any fears getting involved with an angry man. That is an energy that I know, and it's not an energy that I like". I say it is interesting that we can talk about this in a binary of men's power and women's risk of safety, but Julie, a woman, brought up the fact that men are also at risk from men's violence, so it is more complex an issue.

Todd steps into the bouquet of flowers metaphor Julie offered. "That was beautiful, beautiful. Twenty below Fahrenheit, Minneapolis, I was there. I was there! I was seeing nothing but

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[38] I believe that the expansive possibilities of the dialogue are parts of the *Secrets of the Universe* (McFadden, 1984, pp. 73) which we can only have faith in and trust. There is no evidence or proof possible or required for this to be a helpful way to think in line with sustainability.

snow, concrete buildings, beautiful flowers, and I was there." I invite Todd to think about his meaning of this metaphor and how he could hold on to it, and re-member Julie talking about the warmth of his heart in the middle of a cold environment.[39]

I speak of several people picking up on despair, specifically Rosa speaking about the movement away from despair, Sandra talking about despair not being a reason to despair, and Michele speaking about good policymakers being people who are still in touch with their despair.

Todd notices that everybody was nodding their heads when Andrew named the absence of resentment and Todd thinks that was connected to the conversation about despair. I connect this with how everyone is taking a collective position against despair. Todd agrees, saying this was "because it doesn't help us in our work with clients".

There is a silence in which Todd has been pondering the question he said he was going to take with him after the conversation, "the question of how I'll still have something to give over the long haul, and who is going to stand beside me. Sandra was right onto it; something is going to shift a gear in Todd's head. And I'll call somebody; (laughing and breaking the structure of the dialogue, he addresses the entire group and makes direct eye contact with most folks) I'll call all of you! It's a drive for me". Here Todd is resisting the structure of the Solidarity Group itself, which is a fine idea in this instance, when ethics require that we do so.

I speak of how important it was to have Gord witnessed in this conversation. I tell Todd that although I do not know Gord, I realize now, from inside this conversation, that without Gord, I would not have been able to work with or know Todd. In a real way, Gord has given all of us the possibility of Todd. Todd and I are holding each other visually and the respect between us is palpable. Slowly and thoughtfully he says "oh yeah".[40]

Silence follows and Todd is in a quiet space. I pick up the task of witnessing the witnesses. I recount that when I asked Todd if he had been "someone's Gord" he was able to acknowledge that, but Alli really backed it up for us, as she has the names. I speak to the fact that there is a hope that those folks, for whom Todd is "the Gord", are in some way *giving it back* [41] as well. I name that this part of the conversation flies in the face of despair. I name that Alli is present because Todd asked for her to be here, and that she holds an on-the-ground witnessing to the kind of work that Todd does.

Todd says, "I really appreciated the part where Sandra brought forward, 'giving time' ". I connect this with Todd speaking about his own mother being the person he credits as his teacher for many of his preferred ways of being. Todd's mother is witnessed in this conversation and I wonder aloud what it might be like for Sandra's mother to get caught up on this conversation, as she is the person Sandra said she wants to give time to.

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[39] Of interest to me as the Interviewer is the fluidity of time that is invited into the dialogue. I invite Todd in the present moment to imagine Julie alongside him across time into an imagined future, despite the fact they have no shared past.

[40] Gord is witnessed in this conversation, although he is known only to Todd. This is an expansive act of witnessing, and in line with the Solidarity Intentions of Doing Solidarity, and Fostering Collective Sustainability. I am an embodiment here, of one of Gord's *Secrets of the Universe* (McFadden, 1984, page 73).

[41] Alcoholics Anonymous, (2001), Narcotics Anonymous (1988)

5. Considering an Open Conversation inviting all participants into an unstructured conversation about the experience (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Todd; Reflecting Witnesses, Sandra, Rosa, Andrew, Julie, Hilary, Alli, Michele and Corinne)

At this point I do not usually invite participants of the Solidarity Group to have an Open Conversation. My reasons for this hesitation are in line with the purposefulness of the Solidarity Group's structure, which is designed to create a smaller and closely attuned dialogue. My fear is that the complexity and Guiding Intentions that guide the Solidarity Group dialogue could be lost in the weight of more words falling like a dump of snow. However, there is a great deal of energy and connection in this group in this moment, and no one is getting out of their chairs or making any moves with their bodies or their languaging in preparation to leave. I am attending to my own curiosity about what these participants saw in the practice of the Solidarity Group that speaks to the Guiding Intentions that provide the scaffolding for the group.

I invite the entire Solidarity Group into an unstructured Open Conversation.

> Julie jumps in saying "Its cool Sandra kind of named this meeting 'giving time, making time', because that's what this Solidarity Group is. It's carving out time and space to have these conversations, but in particular its *sacred* time and space*, healing* time and space, *connecting* time and space, and *intentional* time and space. There was a great deal of intentionality in this Solidarity Group".

> Rosa speaks to the "pre-existing unity... the hidden places of unity in existence before we met as a group, even though we do not necessarily know each other. The fact that you ran this group with people working in community work with oppressed and exploited people working to make change in line with social justice principles is powerful. The choice of the community here lends itself to solidarity." And Rosa speaks to the fact that she believes "there has to be something beyond a pre-existing unity and that comes from the structure". Julie says there are "shared principles within this group that the work relies on". Todd says, "When you started the conversation Vikki, and asked everybody if they were good to go, I did not need any verbal responses – you could feel it. There was something already going on, that we had created".

> Hillary and Alli both speak to their initial insecurity about whether or not they had anything to contribute to this conversation, as they are new workers. Hillary speaks of the "shift-in-feeling" she experienced over the course of the dialogue. "The Opening Dialogue offered many points of entry into this community as my story touched Todd's". When the conversation moved to the Witnessing Dialogue "I knew that the conversation had nothing to do with individual brilliance and years spent working in the field . . . I made the shift to feeling like I was part of the group, had something unique and of value to contribute and, therefore, was an important part of the developing community". "When you (gesturing to Todd and I) were reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue and spoke specifically to the reflections I had given, this sense of solidarity, the idea of community building really struck me".

> Alli says, "Initially, I looked around the room and there are some really smart people, policymakers and university professors. It was intimidating, but exciting at the same time. I developed a different appreciation for the concept of solidarity through this experience, and instead of measuring myself down, now I am inspired to realize there are so many others in the

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helping field who have similar ethics and are spread out in different resources. I have allies in this work, and it is important to know there are others who are just as inspired and just as passionate as I am".[42]

Michele concurs with Rosa's ideas of unity, saying that, "in this (Solidarity Group) work there needs to be willingness by all participants to risk". Everyone agrees that it could be a risky conversation. Michele speaks of "more than the risk of speaking out loud, and our fear of saying something hurtful, but that there is no place to hide in this structure, so that not speaking is also a risk".

Todd says he felt the safety of the group was most important," how it's set up in the language used and the permission". Todd says," I have talked to lots of professionals in my life and no one keeps asking me throughout the conversation: 'Is this going okay? Is this useful?' ". Michele adds that she believes the transparency she witnessed throughout the dialogue offered some safety and accountability. Julie speaks of how important she thinks it is for Todd to have Alli in this conversation, for him to have chosen some allies who would be the most useful witnesses for him.

Sandra says "the key to the safety of this group is having the Interviewer participate in both the Opening Dialogue and the Witnessing Dialogue. This has a direct influence on why some things didn't happen in this dialogue, such as advice or cheerleading".

Julie says she noticed, "The attention Vikki gave to the body language of the Solidarity Group". I speak to an important distinction as I am not just connecting language to the body, but really responding to the body's languaging. Julie tracks this saying, "the attention to embodied language was literal and metaphorical and I noticed you asking people about the meanings they gave to this".

Michele resonates with the "immediacy of the dialogue", the "in the moment" attending to the conversation and "the fact that it cannot be rehearsed". Sandra connects with this, naming it an "organic conversation, you began by saying I don't know what we're going to talk about and that is absolutely key".

Todd says, "Activism is part of it. It is not just the job", and speaks of the group taking action collectively. He says, "This came from the talk about policy, and Corinne talking about pain and the real structures of poverty that are the background of our work". Todd does not identify as an activist and this Solidarity Group has not changed that, but it has invited him to make a connection with activism in the work that he does, and this connection holds meaning for him in line with his ethics.

Andrew says "this meeting spoke of solidarity and intentional community" as many folks were unknown to each other prior to the Solidarity Group. This work evokes some poignant questions that Andrew shared with the group; "How can we carve out solidarity in a society where alienation is so pervasive and so tangible? I am struck by the contrast this dialogue offers, and how do we do this on broader levels? How do we make this happen for broader social change?"

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[42] Alli's analysis speaks to my assumption that there is always more solidarity that we know of, and I am curious what difference this Solidarity Group might make for all of the participants in terms of having some faith that there are other workers they do not know that also share some collective ethics.

6. Closing the Solidarity Group (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Todd; Reflecting Witnesses, Sandra, Rosa, Andrew, Julie, Hilary, Alli, Michele and Corinne)

> I invite all of the Reflecting Witnesses to allow me to copy the notes they have made for their own use in tracking their reflections for Todd. I sincerely thank all the participants for the extensive amount of effort it has taken to get together, and for their continued energy and presence. I thank Todd specifically, as he is the person who has been in the most vulnerable position, and Sandra who provided the site. With this I collect my notes together, and get out of my chair, inviting other people to begin the leaving.

> I linger with Andrew's question, "How do we make this happen for broader social change?" This question offers a springboard that invites possible responses, and multiple and expansive dialogues which may resonate outward from the Solidarity Group: people such as Gord may be caught up on the witnessing of their lives that is unknown to them; Rosa may catch her colleagues, who work with women who experience violence, up on the solidarity she feels with a housing worker; Michele may be more shouldered up or accompanied in the policy rooms she participates in. It is also possible that Andrew's invitation to create social change could be picked up in a practical way and promote some small and real differences for the people these practitioners work alongside.

5. Furthering Talk on the East Van Crew's Solidarity Group

Following the Solidarity Group of the East Van Crew, I invited all of the participants into furthering talk centered on their resonating experiences from within the Solidarity Group. [43]

There were multiple responses to this inquiry; Todd and I met and watched the video of the Solidarity Group together and then had a discussion; Rosa and I hooked up for coffee, and Sandra and Alli had extensive phone calls and visits with me; and most folks e-mailed me a series of reflections and responses[44]. All members of the East Van Crew responded to this invitation to further inquiry. I appreciate their support for me in the writing up of this work. The meaning I make of this solid response from all members of the group is commitment to the group as a whole, and relationships with integrity and collective ethics.

Some of the reflections offered by the participants follow. What I attend to in this writing is bringing forward reflections that capture me, and reflections that speak of the work of the Solidarity Group in new or meaningful ways. The reflections are arranged under the headings of emergent themes.

The Role of the Interviewer

> Rosa: Vikki, you try to make yourself as invisible as possible... all of your thinking is transparent and yet you are invisible. The most important part of the structure was visible.

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[43] This languaging, furthering talk, is borrowed from a collection of essays under the same name, edited by Canadian collaborative practitioners and educators, Tom Strong and David Paré. Their writing has been a companion to me throughout this writing, and has informed my process of inquiry (Strong & Paré, 2004).

[44] I sometimes offered a series of Expansive Inquiry Questions to participants following Solidarity Group. These questions can be found in the appendix. The Expansive Inquiry Questions merely served as an invitation to open dialogue, not as a formalized research structure.

Andrew: Vikki so de-centered herself that I became absorbed fully in Todd's story.

Hillary: It was important that Vikki added her reflections as the Interviewer. Had you as the Interviewer not offered any personal reflections you may have situated yourself outside of the group as the "leader", bringing a division of power into the room and impacting the sense of solidarity that developed among the group.

Hillary: As the Interviewer, you acknowledged that your question, about how Todd can tolerate people being put out of their housing, was your own stuff. You acknowledged that getting Todd to a place where he can be at peace with, or okay with this most challenging part of his job, people losing housing, may not be what he wants or needs. I felt this acknowledgment on your part demonstrated accountability in terms of the power imbalance inherent in the group, and subsequently may have created more space later in the conversation.

Andrew: The question that stood out for me was, "are there people walking around who have you in their lives, like Gord is in yours?" This question and the responses to it seemed to bring together Todd's autobiographical reflections on the work we all do to "make the resources helpful" (Todd's words) for our clients.

Michele: You invited the story of Todd's passion and commitment and looked for how he stands up to the injustice of the housing crisis. I think the Interviewer's positioning as someone who believes in the resistance of people is a principle of this work.

Andrew: What Vikki did to make the conversation better was make room for ethical challenging. Most important was the safety in the room, from this context of safety and respect Todd's story emerged with all of its political and social nuances. He seemed at ease discussing his experiences of poverty and racism, which says something about safety.

Corinne: When Vikki introduced the social context I felt closer to what was being said, because poverty, homelessness, addiction, and mental health are all issues that touch me very deeply in my work. I felt I was able to connect to the space Vikki and Todd were occupying, to feel like I was part of this now, not simply a member of the audience but also a participant .

The Role of the Interview Partner

Julie: Todd did several things that made the conversation more useful for everyone: he asked for clarification or otherwise let Vikki know when a question didn't make sense or he needed a different question/phrasing in order to respond in a way that was meaningful for him. He was funny and told relevant stories to underscore his meanings.

Michele: I am thinking Todd needed to explain to you, to us, the depth of his conviction and the investment he makes in people as part of his completing the circle of "just care" that his mother and Gord invested in him. He was willing to disagree with you with your wondering about his stance of not tolerating injustice.

Corinne: Asking Todd how he tolerates the situation at work felt like a powerful question, marking a critical turning point in the conversation moving the discussion from a description of the work place to a level that recognizes and honours connections between personal and social realities. Vikki paid attention and gave voice to the reality of having to tolerate injustice in some work settings. Todd may not have been encouraged or invited to name these realities in other contexts.

Julie: Listening to other Witnesses was useful because there is a sense of connection and validation when they comment on similar things, but there were things I had either missed or that I had heard differently because of my social location/experience/just not attending to the same thing – these comments help me think about how to listen to other dimensions of a conversation.

Hillary: Alli gave "testimony" about her experiences of Todd. This was important to the other Witnesses.

Corinne: It was inspiring and enriching to hear other Witnesses' thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the conversation. Where we are situated in the world has a tremendous impact on what we paid attention to, what we heard or didn't hear, the ways we interpreted our experiences, and how we responded. Mutual understandings began to emerge. There was a willingness to listen openly, honour our diversities and learn with each other.

Alli: Other people's reflections got me thinking about the same conversation in different ways, thinking about my work or life, and that I was in a whole new place with the Opening Dialogue based on these reflections.

Michele: I appreciated that different things had drawn the attention of others in the Witnessing Dialogue. It was nice to have more minds tuned in as their reflections on the gender and race dynamics rang true for me, though they hadn't been primarily in my attention that day. They may have been another day. It felt like having a group to witness the conversation was a luxury, to be able to reflect with multiple brains!

Sandra: When I am positioned in a place of witnessing, listening and reflecting, I immediately take that position seriously, wanting to experience the conversation with an open heart, respect, thoughtfulness, and curiosity. I wanted to give something to Todd and I acknowledge as a gift what I got in return. The reflections from the other Witnesses gave me insight in terms of what I pay attention to, and how my responses were similar but also different from others. Paying attention to those differences is important.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue

Andrew: The Witnesses' reflections deepened the meaning of the Opening Dialogue in a *smaller* way.

Hillary: As the Interviewer and Interview Partner reflected on our conversations the conversation appeared to get smaller and increasingly centered back to Todd's story. Many of the Witnesses revealed stories of similar or shared experiences regarding their work. But this did not make the conversation wider. I think this was because connections between Todd's stories and our stories emerged. When we located or connected our own unique experiences to Todd's the conversation did get smaller and perhaps more meaningful.

Andrew: It was important that Vikki made sure that everyone's contribution was acknowledged.

Hillary: None of the Witnesses' contributions went unattended which contributed to a sense of solidarity amongst the group. Listening to these reflections from Vikki and Todd was different than just being in the Witnessing Dialogue, it helped in the building of a community of support. It was not so much about locating individual experience, but doing solidarity between everyone in the room.

Room for Struggle and Discomfort

Corinne: Vikki repeated the word "tolerable" a few times, and explained later that she'd been thinking how can we make it, (the work situation), more tolerable so that there is less despair and more hope. Later, she suggested that it might be okay instead to stay with these uncomfortable and distressing feelings. I wonder how it felt for Todd to hear that it is acceptable (perhaps necessary) to experience distress, that we don't always have to move away from it, at least not right away, was it a validation? Was it also helpful to hear that there was recognition of the need for support and change? To me, it felt like an invitation towards a stance of compassion, an invitation to act compassionately, even in contexts that explicitly/implicitly discourage it.

Rosa: We were not talking about solving the problems of an individual worker's life, or solving the problem of one person's housing, but acknowledging that we are always part of the society. Not just healing individual client's problems, but always connecting to the problems for justice and society. This work, the Solidarity Group, is also not individual but always related to the group.

Michele: I connected early on about, "how do you tolerate having to tell people to leave

housing" – I connected with my job when I have to say no, when I feel the discomfort of being on the "no" side of the situation, though it is easier to be on the "self-righteous" advocate side of things demanding that others say "yes". I reflected, as I have done many times as a parent, this is a place of responsibility that is different from where I began my career and my life, yet important. I joined with some of the pain I recently experienced reflecting on when it's right to be the bearer of the "no" and when to be the advocate for "yes". This is not a static position, but requires flexibility and continual weighing and reflecting. The conversation made room for this to be more complex than yes/no. There was mention of a "just no", saying no with justice.

Solidarity

Alli: I began to appreciate the concept of solidarity in a different way. Todd said he would feel safe if I was present in the conversation. Todd and I have a history both socially and professionally. We learned about postmodernism and Narrative Therapy together, and supported each other at times when those more academia learnings tried to silence us and what we know. I know that we are allies, and sometimes in the midst of professional groups we remind each other, sometimes verbally and sometimes in action, that we are committed, capable, helpful, counsellors.

Andrew: I was connecting to what Rosa said about pre-existing unity. We were all people called to the same work sharing similar values.

Michele: Listening to Todd and Vikki, I found myself wondering if connection is the antidote to despair. I was also thinking about Sallyann Roth's work about polarization, when we use dichotomous language or follow "us/them thinking" it develops resentment which feeds despair and isolates us from the "other".[45] I was thinking that connection and "investing in people" is again a kind of antidote to these experiences. I found myself feeling quite happy being in the group of Witnesses, feeling quite connected in the experience.

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[45] Roth (1993)

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The Role of Social Poetics

Corinne: The conversation felt like a dance, a graceful arrangement of words, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. It was complex, emergent, exciting. There was a sense of safety combined with an element of risk inherent in exposing oneself to others.

Hillary: Todd started with his reservations about being open and naming risk and then went on to share his experiences. Todd's risk invited me into a place of honour, into a sense of respect for him, with this respect came a willingness to take risks myself and situate my reflections, and to do my part to keep the group safe. Ah, this is Solidarity. I can see why you said this would be so much easier to *dance*. I so wish I could draw you a diagram right now with a whole bunch of circles and arrows or maybe ripples.

Michele: "Rich", I found myself saying yes inside when you used that word.

Rosa: The conversation was moving all the time, the bodies were engaged, and people were engaged in the process. I connected the Solidarity Group to ideas from Popular Education, as we are more creative in a group than as individuals. [46] Moving around, the structure of different conversations, the group became more creative. The absence of judgment made it not scary to do this. This creativity speaks to our awareness of power, why we are doing this work.

Rosa: It could have been longer, we could have done eight groups and had everyone interviewed! That would make it better for sustainability.

Being of Use

Julie: I wonder what difference this conversation will make for everyone who participated, including Vikki.

Michele: I felt hopeful hearing that someone else in the room aspires to be part of the policy makers' conversation. I sometimes feel afraid of losing my humanity or my passion on the way to policymaking. I am more determined to continue on this risky path, knowing that some other passionate people think it's possible and even desirable to infiltrate those rooms. I am wondering how much of this connecting that I felt took place in the group was your intention. I wonder if this is just the place you've naturally started to go to in your work, and it's a good place, or if your conscious purpose in the interview is to enhance and foster connection between people. I am just curious.

Andrew: For me, moments like the ones we shared are important for surviving the alienation of modern life in a capitalist economy. Maybe there is something like a temporary utopia

happening in Solidarity Group – the utopia that is founded on the good structures of safety.

Rosa: Things are already better because I know Todd.

This practice of furthering talk in relationship to the East Van Crew has allowed the participants of that Solidarity Group to have the last word on the experience. These reflections mark the closing of the description of this generative and spirited Solidarity Group.

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[46] Freire (1973)

6. Following Threads of Intention: Focused Re-tellings from Solidarity Groups

Here I engage with some small and focused re-tellings from several different Solidarity Groups. I follow a single thread from the tapestry of a dialogue to invite an experience of a specific Guiding Intention in practice. This is an artificial thing to do because, like a rhizome, the Guiding Intentions are indivisible, and do not occur in isolation. My purpose in separating one strand from the rich weaving of the conversation, and separating one Guiding Intention from the collective ethical stance, is to offer a clearer view of a complex process. Another purpose of following threads of intention is to make clear that there is no formula for the Solidarity Group. The dialogue is different and emergent every time. While the possibilities for the dialogue are multiple, the Guiding Intentions which provide the scaffolding for the dialogue are clear.

The Guiding Intentions include:

- A. Centering Ethics

- B. Doing Solidarity

- C. Addressing Power

- D. Fostering Collective Sustainability

- F. Critically Engaging with Language

- G. Structuring Safety

The re-tellings all follow the structure of the Solidarity Group:

Opening Dialogue

Witnessing Dialogue

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue

As a practice of accountability, I do not keep all of my participants' names confidential, so that their knowings are not subsumed by me as the writer. This is, however, not an unproblematic practice, nor is it neutral. Participants of some Solidarity Groups involved in this writing are limited to using pseudonyms for issues of safety and in response to their locations of marginalization.

I use quotation marks when appropriate, and a different font to differentiate the speakers and credit the ideas to them. However, this is not a transcript, and I am not claiming these re-tellings as true accounts. These threads are taken out of context. I am cautious about any inferences made about the people and the conversations given the fact that I am following only one de-contextualized thread from a richly woven fabric of dialogue.

A. Centering Ethics

Here I follow stories from two Solidarity Groups in order to illuminate the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics.

The first group is the Collaborative Community Practice Group of Ottawa, which is comprised of folks doing different jobs, but with shared commitments to collaborative practice and ongoing supervision and training. I was invited to facilitate a Solidarity Group for this practice community by the clinical supervisor David Paré.[47]

I attend to Don's experience as the Interview Partner, and his struggle with righteousness, particularly in relationship to other workers. This thread names the spiritual pain which follows when we are not acting in accord with our ethics. I have a video recording of this Solidarity Group, which contributed significantly in bringing forth the specific words of the participants.[48]

Opening Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Don)

> I ask what is at the heart of Don's work, and he says, "I am a 'rage against the machine' kind of guy" and speaks of "the ways that institutions in larger systems sometimes 'do to' clients". He talks about "responding to people getting caught up in systems by advocating for them, maybe standing with them". (Another thread of the conversation follows this rage against the machine positioning when it is of use to clients and holds them at the center).

> I ask how Don keeps rage against the machine out of the way, in the times when it was not the most useful thing for people. He pauses, "Perhaps I wouldn't know because I'd be raging against the machine". I ask about the times the raging against the machine might make it hard to put the person at the center and Don responds, "sometimes I can go overboard when I am talking about the education system and just going on about how the system keeps huge dossiers on people full of negative stuff. But the education system does wonderful things too; there are marvelous people in the education system." When I ask why Don thinks it might not always be a good idea for him to rage against the education system he says, "well those people have to use it. I feel like sometimes I have pushed my out rage, way too much."

> Here I attend to Don's pain and ask him to track its presence in his body. I negotiate permission and Don chooses to continue following the thread of the spiritual pain he is experiencing. Don says, "I could rage against the machine or perhaps it would be healthier for me to come in and work alongside the people working in that system, stepping in a little closer, because their reality is the exact same reality I am facing".

> I ask Don if he has any thoughts about why we divide ourselves off as professionals and start to rage against the machine at each other. He responds, "I am thinking it had something to do with starting to think my ideas are the right ideas". I ask Don if he thinks people go into the

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[47] The origins and intentions of this community of practice are illustrated in an article by David Paré (In press).

[48] Don Baker is using his own name, and the other participants in this Solidarity Group have also agreed to have their names used and the context of the group revealed. The Reflecting Witnesses in the Collaborative Community Practice Group of Ottawa are Pam Storey Baker, Judy Brooks and Susan Kennedy. There were three Listening Witnessing involved in this Solidarity Group as well; Francine Titley, Linda Smith and David Paré, but their thread is not picked up in this re-telling.

education system to get students under their thumb, and we both laugh. Don says, "Of course not, people went into that work because they were passionate about it; maybe learning impacted their lives positively".

I tell Don this conversation has me thinking about the times that I put my politics and my own agenda, particularly against other disciplines, at the center, letting him know this is something I fall into also, and that I have some shame about that, because it is not how I want to be. Don joins with me.

I ask about the autonomy of clients and where their voices are if Don is with righteousness. Don says, "It's about me. It's about my righteousness. That's really getting away from the client being at the center". I say that it sounds like Don wants to move away from rage against the machine when it gets in the way of clients. Don agrees, "This righteousness can get in the way of what people want".

Witnessing Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Reflecting Witnesses, Susan, Judy and Pam)

At the beginning of the Witnessing Dialogue Pam speaks. "I have a visual image of seeing Don standing alongside people and how different this is from thinking of him standing on a box". Pam connects with Don saying, "I was most interested in watching out for righteousness... I think in my work when I get caught around righteousness it's about that expert position...the expert trap and a laying down of the law kind of thing". I ask about the correlation between expertness and righteousness.

Pam talks of the times they are asked to be experts, and ideas of professionalism that don't serve clients, specifically "policies we have to uphold". I acknowledge that it is very complex and that the word floating above our heads is power. Susan says, "nobody wants to be in the expert role". I say that it is the work some people are given to do and ask how that connects with righteousness.

We talk about the fact that children do die. In some families children are not safe. We name the need to address the injustices that put some children more at risk. We acknowledge that, as a society, we leave the care of children at risk to Children's Aid. They have to protect these children and then we accuse them of doing it. At the same time we acknowledge that government interventions are not a good-enough response. Everyone agrees that this is a hard position to be in.

Judy acknowledges "there was a lot of dynamic tension in the conversation. The righteousness Don is experiencing, his pain, happens alongside his openness so there is not just one story".

We talk about the usefulness of the Collaborative Community Practice Group to all of its members and the clients. We talk about how this community can help everyone stay away from righteousness, and how they can help Don stay more in line with his ethic of putting people at the center.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue (participants involved: Interviewer, Vikki; Interview Partner, Don)

Don acknowledges that the witnesses have come "close to the things that I valued in our conversation...Susan helped me remember that other workers have humanity. They might be the agent of the state, and they have to do this drastic thing – intervening in someone's family,

and it really resonated with me that I need to cut them some slack. If I am raging against them, what service does that do anybody? So that was a really powerful thing."

I bring forward Pam and Susan's conversation about the reality of children being at risk, and the tough job Children's Aid has. Don says, "I couldn't stand doing that job", and he puts his hand to his heart and shrugs visibly, shaking his body. After some silence, he says, "I would also be making assumptions that people love going into someone's family and snatching children and what kind of thing is that to do on my part?" I ask Don if that means he has some new understandings that social workers do not want to take children from homes. Don says, "Well, I am thinking now that if I am in too much of a rage about that, or being too righteous about their jobs as opposed to what I do, there's no room for a real critique when families need me to back them up". I say I thought the Witnessing Dialogue took a position of solidarity with those other workers even though they were not present. We name that being in solidarity doesn't mean we don't advocate for families, or that we blindly agree with the removal of children. Maybe we move in and try to keep the child at the centre, not our antagonism as workers. We name the fact that children are at risk because of the contexts of an unsafe society. Don says, "And these are the people who have to do that... I would like to work much harder at a kind of celebrating of what they are aiming to do, it as a worthy goal to keep families safe and together".

I bring forward Susan's comments about the Collaborative Community Practice Group, "being able to fall down together", and Don says, "That is going to have some power for me when I have to work with others, especially when I start to feel righteous when I am working with others".

Don speaks of Pam's image "Of me standing up *with* clients as opposed to standing up *for* clients, and I liked that language. It brought clarity to my mind about what I *sometimes* do as opposed to what I *want* to do". I ask if this could be an image he could remember to help keep his practice in line with his ethics, and Don agrees.

Don says, "I was interested in the conversation you had with Pam about the difference between expertness and righteousness, when you were talking about power". I bring up the fact that Pam says she struggles with the same thing, not a battle with righteousness, but slipping into expertness, and that I also struggle with that. Don responds, "I think that if you become righteous too long you become an expert about your righteous ideas...This conversation just brought it into focus about how if I am being righteous, I better watch out because maybe another day from now I'll be an expert. And I don't want to be an expert."

I bring forward Judy's remark that there was a "collective sigh" about the collectivity of these ethics, these ways of being, and how the group is a resource to everyone. I name my excitement when Judy spoke about the shared ethics of the group. Judy used the words "energy" and "electric". I say the conversation seems to be about trying to stay out of the way of people exercising their own power, exactly what Don is trying to do in his work with people. Don responds, "I was really connected to what you and Susan and Judy were saying about power, the connection with Pam's 'expert trap', and not wanting to righteously do power-over on clients".

Informed by the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics, I create space to dialogue around the spiritual pain Don experiences when he is not in accord with his ethic.   While we have not vanquished Don's discomfort or cured him in any way from the times raging against the machine is problematic for clients,

the group has taken a collective position that we all struggle with righteousness and the "expert trap" as Pam called it. We also collectively took a position of solidarity with workers in other roles, and stood alongside Don for those times when he is not in line with this ethic and is taken up with righteousness: Discerning rage against the machine from raging against workers.

With righteousness out of the way there can be more space for a necessary critique of abuses of power that do happen by workers within systems. It is important to note that the fabric of the conversation also honoured Don's ethic of "standing up for what you feel is right" and times that Don stood alongside clients as they choose to " rage against the machine", as well as the importance of his collaborative community in enacting collective ethics.

There were some significant things that did not happen in this dialogue which are directly related to the intentions that support the work. For example, I declined an invitation to smooth over Don's pain or to avoid his pain. Everyone connected to the spiritual pain of our shared struggles against righteousness and for solidarity. I also declined an opportunity to join with Don in righteousness. The Reflecting Witnesses declined judging Don, up or down. Being judged positively is still being judged. In a Solidarity Group, this judgment, positive or negative, is not in accord with practices of witnessing. [49] These important absences were significant in constructing the meaningfulness of this dialogue.

The second re-telling connected to the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics is from a Solidarity Group which took place in the context of a multidisciplinary consultation group. I facilitate this group on an ongoing basis. This re-telling comes from my session notes of the group, as it was not recorded, so I have few direct quotes. [50]

This thread of intention also follows the Guiding Intention of Centering Ethics. This dialogue attends to the spiritual pain which follows when we are not acting in accord with our ethics. The intention of centering ethics is tracked, this time from the perspective of a Reflecting Witness, Lisa.[51]

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Steve)

> Steve speaks of a particular discomfort that he feels in relation to his work. When I ask where he experiences this in his body he says "Here" he puts his hand to his heart," in my chest". There is a lot of silence after he names this. He is in a work environment where he is required to ask what he believes are "truly humiliating questions" of people, before he has created any relationship with them. He is questioning his ability to continue with this paid work. He feels entirely impotent in changing the structure or systems at work, and he believes his clients when

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[49] Roth (personal communication, 2008)

[50] In the next two examples of Solidarity Groups, Lisa and Tina have both decided to use pseudonyms and so I have used pseudonyms for other members of their Solidarity Groups, and I have not revealed specific details of the context of the dialogue. These different responses to the practices of confidentiality reveal different locations of access to power as well as differing levels of familiarity and trust with me.

[51] Lisa agreed to share her story, and specifically chose to use pseudonyms. This decision was a result of the vulnerable nature of what I asked her to share, and I would imagine for other reasons for which she is keeping her own counsel.

they tell him that "this kind of information is only going to be used against us". Steve names this discomfort as a spiritual pain and connects it in relationship with the practices that are so far from his ethic of "dignifying others".

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witnesses: Lisa and others)

When I invite Lisa to witness Steve's experience she makes public the fact that she was considering holding her own counsel as she is feeling some distress. Following a big breath and a long silence she speaks to her own pain, and while she connects it to Steve's pain, she also believes that it is something different. Lisa says that in the moment she is coming to realize that she may be asking intrusive questions, but that "I was never distressed by this", and in fact "I never really thought about it". Lisa speaks to the strangeness of "Beginning to feel uncomfortable with the absence of my discomfort". She asks us all if this makes sense and everyone assures her it does. There is a pregnant pause, and I am curious if some folks are expecting me as the Interviewer to smooth over Lisa's discomfort. Instead I ask her what it might mean if she began to notice herself refusing to smooth over her own discomfort whenever it shows up. Lisa writes the question down but doesn't speak to it.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Steve)

Steve picks up on Lisa's discomfort, and is a bit curious that I did not try to comfort her in relation to it. There is silence. Steve speaks to a new connection he feels with Lisa, and says that the absence of her discomfort is a reminder to him that he wants to hold his own discomfort close. When I ask Steve how his own discomfort might be a resource to him, he positions himself alongside Lisa, suggesting that both of them can be informed by this discomfort to remember their own ethics. I ask him what it might mean to Lisa that he takes a position alongside her as opposed to judging her. Steve says he respects Lisa for choosing to share her struggle with the group. He says he would not be in line with the spirit of our community if he met her discomfort with judgment.

This thread has been chosen from the fabric of this Solidarity Group to illustrate the usefulness of the dialogue to the Reflecting Witnesses, not just the Interview Partner. Lisa does not need to be the person being interviewed for the group to be of use. All participants of the group including myself, can benefit from the conversation without speaking to this particular issue. This re-telling also addresses my practice of witnessing spiritual pain while resisting rescuing the person. I have also invited all participants of the Solidarity Group to consider their discomfort as an invitation for reflexivity, and a questioning in the moment, to consider if they are practicing in line with their ethical stance.

B. Doing Solidarity

This Solidarity Group occurred as one practice of supervision with a group of counsellors who humorously refer to themselves as *Super-group*. These folks come together monthly from different places of work to enhance and sustain their practice.[52]

The threads I am following in the fabric of this Solidarity Group highlight the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity. Two strands of this dialogue, which can be differentiated but are also of course woven together, are tracked here as they both follow from the same intention of Doing Solidarity. Specifically I attend to community-making and the Solidarity practice of *people-ing the room*. As well, I attend to tracking the history of the Interview Partner's qualifications for this work.

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Alfred)

Alfred speaks about the usefulness of this group to him. "When I come to this group it really helps me, especially because of the isolation of my work. And I think that Mau was talking about how we all felt this magical pull to be here".

I ask what is at the heart of Alfred's relationship with his work and he replies, "I think justice, yeah. Although I don't always achieve that I don't think. But I really try to make it the center of not just my work but my life, my way of being." I ask about the history of this idea for Alfred and he says, "I think you as my instructor in my Master's program".

I feel discomfort and heat. I laugh nervously and ask Alfred if he seriously thinks that it was in his master's program that he learned justice. After a long pause with silence Alfred responds, "When you put it that way probably not". There is a pause again. "There's a redeeming quality about my dad that I share, and I kind of hang onto that piece. He is doing what he thinks is right and I really respect that about him. He's true to what he believes is justice. My mom has a lot to do with it too; I am really touched by both of them." When I ask how his parents' relationship with justice touches him Alfred says," I think as my dad is aging he is more in line with justice and that touches me. But what touches me more is my mom as she suffers a lot from being silenced and yet she continues the doing of justice. I imagine how hard is that? To have your voice silenced but also still carry-on".

I ask Alfred what he means by justice and how he judges whether or not he is *doing justice*. Alfred says, "I pay attention to what's going on for my clients. That's how I do it. Whether they think there is something going on that's *just*. At the same time, it's hard for me because I have a great respect for authority; I believe that you have to follow authority somehow, always. That's sometimes a struggle for me when I disagree with authority". I ask where that always following authority comes from, and after a long silence Alfred looks away. Finally he brings his head back to the conversation and says "to tell you the truth I think that always following authority comes from colonization because I am a Hong Kong person". I ask how the history of colonization informs always following authority and Alfred says "in post-World War II my mom and dad and grandparents went through a lot. They were just fighting for a piece of the pie because you've got to survive for your family. It is very honouring for me to see that because

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they gave us the possibility of doing something more with our lives, so that we can choose careers. They couldn't choose careers, right?" I ask him about the connections of his parent's teachings about justice in his chosen work, and Alfred reflects but keeps his own counsel.

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witness: Kashmir, Mau, and Alisen)

Alisen says, "I am connecting with what Kashmir said about Alfred saying that he learned about justice from you, Vikki, at university. You laughed and it was very awkward laughing and I wondered what you were feeling, because I share that with Alfred. You were our teacher, and you did have a lot to do with having us pay attention to justice and our ethics. I was wondering about that laugh though, what was going on for you, if that was uncomfortable to hear?" I respond to Alisen's question by saying I am uncomfortable with the idea of being credited with the presence of justice in the life of any person. Particularly with Alfred, whose parents and grandparents survived the colonization he spoke of, and who sacrificed to teach him about justice.

Alisen continues, "I am thinking about isolation, and that Alfred and I are both less isolated in our work, even though we work in different organizations, because of some of the ideas we share. We can feel less alone. I was thinking about what you call *people-ing the room,* Vikki, when you asked how Alfred could bring people in.[53] I haven't consciously been doing that, but this conversation reminded me that I want to *people my room* more consciously". I ask Alisen what she heard Alfred say that has her connecting to this. And she says, "Just his thoughts about the magical pull to be in this group. This is once a month and I get so much out of this group, how can I bring more of this in a real tangible way into my counselling spaces?... he used the word magic and some of that *people-ing the room* I think creates some sense of magic". Mau jumps in, "I love that you picked up on that Alisen, *people-ing the room*. I am going to think about that too".

Kashmir connects with the conversation. "At the end of the conversation Alfred said that he was struck with how much respect there was in this room, and how we were going to be alongside him when he's facing those tough things and would be in isolation. I was proud that he spoke of this group that way."

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Alfred)

Alfred begins, "I was really interested in what Alisen and Mau were saying about connection. I was thinking yes, I belong here in this group, you know? I know it meant the world to me, it was like one of the defining moments of my life I have to say, to find a place where you belong and people believe not exactly the same things, but that's also what makes it great, but also having similar goals and values in placing clients at the center". I ask Alfred what he meant by that defining moment and he says, "Finding out that there's room to be on board with your principles, and that other people will stand by you. That you're not in isolation about that. I know Mau was talking about how she had a moment of realization that she was not alone". I

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[53] The Solidarity Practice of *people-ing the room* is described later in Other Solidarity Practices Informed by the Guiding Intentions.

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ask Alfred what difference it makes that the other members of this group share those values. He says, "It makes a great difference for me because it's also acknowledging that you can give all that you have and do all you can, and sometimes structures and powers are just there. But maybe you can take a little chip off. And that's all you're going to contribute. But then maybe the next person will come along and pick up that hammer or whatever tool they have." I ask if that was new thinking and Alfred said "Yes, to know we share in this more, instead of shouldering the load alone. I don't have to take down Goliath right? I was listening to Kashmir talking today and thinking she's on the same path as me."

Alfred continues, "It was interesting to hear Kashmir and Alisen talk about authority and power. It was interesting because I think Alisen is really spot on with things at times." I ask what Alisen said that had him thinking she was spot on and he says "she was spot on about your discomfort in replicating power and authority. I appreciate Alisen saying that you helped us name justice. But yeah, my parents are really my path to justice". I add that Alfred said his culture and his grandparents also made a contribution. I say that I was acknowledged by Kashmir and Mau as a person who is articulate about justice in relationship to the work. I thank Alfred and the witnesses, as this holds meaning for me.

Alfred says "I was writing down everything everyone said and then I got this sense, it is all about possibilities of justice in connection. We share some values, but we have important differences as well. I got really curious about how Kashmir, Mau and Alisen find their path. What does it say about them or about us as a group that although we're different we find all these different paths towards justice? I wonder if it would be a useful conversation to have about how we each have different paths to justice. How we hold on to these things and how we keep on evolving them? For me it's more like, how do we grow them? There are people that help us grow that, and nourish it, and you feel more alive. I need to do more of that". I ask Alfred if he thought this was connected to Alisen talking about *peopleing the room* and he says, "Oh, yeah, I can do that. I can bring all those people with me to help me grow this".

At the end of the dialogue I thank Alfred for naming colonization and acknowledge the pain I witnessed. He says, "I think it was almost more painful for my parents. I have to honour my parents with that justice part. It was a way harder life for them." There is some silence and then Alfred says, "Just like with our clients the situations our clients are in are harder, much harder".

Following this thread I attend to the Guiding Intention of Doing Solidarity, specifically community making, by tracking the history of the Interview Partner's qualifications for this work, and inviting this community to engage with the practice of *people-ing the room*. Many community workers are quick to attribute their qualifications for their work to academic institutions and instructors. In this thread of the conversation I invited Alfred to historicize his connection with justice to his culture, within his communities, and specifically to his family members and their experiences of colonization and immigration. I had a role in inviting ideas and practices of ethics and justice into the practice of this group of therapists, especially as their instructor at a Masters level. However, the idea that I would be credited at the expense of Alfred parents and grandparents is not only personally discomforting, but also ethically unsound.

Alisen's invitation to engage with the practice of *people-ing the room* followed from my question of how Alfred could use this group he spoke of so powerfully in his struggle with isolation. By picking up on this,

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Alisen invited the entire group, not just the Interview Partner, into a possible future in which we could be alongside each other in these useful and creative ways.

C. Addressing Power

This Solidarity Group occurred as part of training for a group of community workers who identify themselves as members of queer, trans, two-spirited, gay, lesbian and bi communities. Their shared purpose is to promote safety and respect for members of these communities accessing social services. Because it was not recorded, this re-telling comes from my session notes and I have few direct quotes. I was able to consult with both Kris and Tina on their remembrances of the dialogue as a practice of accountability.

The thread of intention I follow in the fabric of this Solidarity Group highlights the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power, and particularly witnessing both acts of resistance and small acts of justice. I attend to Tina's[54] experience as a Reflecting Witness.

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partners: Kris and two others)

> Kris, who identifies as a queer trans-man, speaks of "the queer and trans communities' rich history of resistance against hate inspired violence". He says "Our community is fighting back with the weapons of beauty, humor and pride, waving rainbow flags and tiaras in the face of hate". Kris talks about his "great respect" for the capacity of the particular queer community that he is a part of "to meet hate with love".

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witness: Tina and several others)

> When Tina is invited to speak to what she connected with in the conversation, she names the "excitement" that she witnessed and that she "felt part of". She says "how cool it was to have Kris telling stories of how queer communities have been fighting back forever...For most of my life I have been passive". A long silence follows. Tina speaks into the silence, "Maybe I have been told that I am passive". In response to this speaking everyone in the group moves in towards her. Now that she is thinking about it, she figures that that she has "always been speaking up". In fact, she believes that joining this group has helped her to realize that she's always been speaking out. In particular, she recounts speaking out against the killings of Aboriginal women, specifically the "missing" women in the Downtown Eastside.[55] She connects

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[54] The privilege of being able to use your own name is absent here because of the marginalization of this community. I am using pseudonyms here, in consultation with Kris and Tina, as we do not want the program or the workers to be at risk for sharing their knowings. This collaboration does not, however, smooth over my ethical struggle and discomfort, as they are connected to structures of colonization, racism and heterosexual normativity. I risk appropriating Kris and Tina's voices or silencing them, but there is no innocent or neutral response.

[55] For an account of the context Tina describes see the Amnesty International report, *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada.* The Canadian government's own statistics name that young aboriginal women are five times as likely to die violent deaths than young non-aboriginal women. According

herself to this group because "I am an Aboriginal transgendered woman". Tina begins to tell us about the fact that she had spoken up that very day for other Aboriginal women, "because the bathrooms where we're living have cold floors and the showers have cold water". Tina says she would never have done this before, and that she thinks "Aboriginal women are supposed to be grateful that they even have showers". She says," listening to Kris' excitement and strength, reminded me, a bit, of myself", and that she is pleased with that connection. She also agrees with me that it would be hard to hold on to a story of herself as passive given her continued participation in this group and the speaking out she has done that very morning.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partners: Kris and others)

The thread of Tina's reflections is not picked up by Kris or the other Interview Partners, and so I reflect upon it as the Interviewer, and I position myself in my privilege as a cisgendered,[56] heterosexual white woman in my reflection. I speak particularly to the fact that Tina has carved out space to speak out, yet again, for the safety of Aboriginal transgendered women, this time in this Solidarity Group.

Following this thread, I attend to the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power, and particularly acts of witnessing resistance and acts of justice. There is a witnessing of Tina's resistance, which came forward in conversation through questions that I asked her in her role as a Reflecting Witness. I also acknowledge when small acts of justice occur, as I am more interested in what Tina is for, than what she is against. I did not consider Tina's speaking out for hot water in the showers for Aboriginal women only as protest. Her speaking is also a performance of dignity. I attend to it as a small act of justice, especially in the context she is speaking of, in which she is silenced as an Aboriginal transgendered women.

Tina's reflections are also picked up in this writing because they illuminate the usefulness of the Reflecting Witness' position, attesting to the fact that we do not have to be the person speaking for the group to be of use. This thread also shows the obligation of the Interviewer to attend to the witnessing of the Reflecting Witnesses. While Tina's reflections were not picked up by any of the Interview Partners, as many threads are not picked up in the Solidarity Group, they may be reflected upon later by all of the participants. It is not an evaluative process, and while there is meaning made of what gets attended to, this does not suggest a dismissal of all of the threads left hanging in the air.

D. Fostering Collective Sustainability

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to Amnesty International, "Canadian police and public officials have long been aware of a pattern of racist violence against Indigenous women in Canadian cities – but have done little to prevent it" (2003), pp.1.

[56] Cisgendered refers to the congruence biologically between my body and the way I am read by others in society regarding my gender. My gender identity is the same as the one ascribed by society. Cisgendered is used as an ally location, instead of claiming that my gender identity is *normal* or *real*. This is a site of privilege often overlooked by cisgendered folks. See Bornstein (1994) for an expansive consideration of the language of sexual identity and transgression. Some of the other terms from the queer and transgendered communities are described more extensively in The Frame.

This Solidarity Group occurred in an ongoing supervision group of community workers. This group was not recorded. The words in quotations are taken from my session notes. [57]

Terri came to our supervision group late as she has been dealing with a crisis in her housing work in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. She considered missing the group as she did not know if she could be fully present but decided that she needed to be with us. Terri had just evicted a young mother from a social housing placement. Terri was brokenhearted, greatly concerned with the safety of this young woman, and questioning her own commitment to continue this difficult job. I suggested that we structure our dialogue as a Solidarity Group. The supervision group generously agreed to this, and we changed our plans.

The thread of intention I follow in the fabric of this Solidarity Group highlights Fostering Collective Sustainability, and the usefulness of our engagements with both despair and hope.

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Terri)

> Terri is experiencing despair and a loss of hope in her thinking about the woman she had just evicted from housing. We name the influence of hopelessness on Terri, and her own experiences of trying to hold on to hope in dark times. Terri "wants to believe in hope", even when it was extremely unlikely that situations can change for the better. I ask Terri what is at the heart of her pain. This is a distressing conversation and Terri's pain is palpable. Terri fears for this woman's safety, and possibly her life. Terri has never evicted a woman and a child, and is wondering about both the safety of this family and how she can continue in this work.

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witness: Andrew and Tara)

> Andrew shares a similar experience of despair in relation to a client. He speaks close to the heart about the anguish of that experience and how he can still touch this pain. We all reflect upon situations in which there is not a great deal of hope that positive change can happen, but there is always the possibility that our participation can keep things from getting worse. We talk of how the absence of things getting worse often does not get paid attention to. Tara is curious about how Terri has tried to evoke dignity and hope in the relationship, and how different that might be for this family who have been evicted many times before. Tara names the injustice of the lack of social housing as an "abuse of power". I am interested in our collective reflections on keeping hope alive in dark times, and how this might serve as a resource to us when we and our clients struggle with despair.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Terri)

> Terri expresses gratitude that Andrew was willing to share experiences that touched her own. The care for Terri and for this family that is present in the conversation holds meaning for her. Tara's questions about Terri's ability to invite dignity and hope into this dark situation has Terri thinking that though this was very difficult work, she might be particularly suited to doing it.

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[57] Terri Smith, Tara Stoll, and Andrew Larcombe have agreed to share this story and use their full names.

> Terri is also thinking about her own capacity to hold on to hope in dark times. Terri acknowledges that it means something that she still has hope that this woman will be housed.

My commitment to the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability assisted me in attending to Terri's experiences of hopelessness without being seduced into a smoothing it over conversation that might have left her feeling better. We resisted having a conversation that would have applauded Terri's many efforts to try to keep this woman in housing. We resisted discussing the woman's responsibility for the eviction. All of these conversations that did not happen would not have witnessed Terri's dark pain, or been respectful of this family. Instead, we accompanied her into a landscape of despair, and found small ways to hold on to the hope that we could continue to try to get out together.

E. Critically Engaging with Language

I engage with a re-telling from a Solidarity Group that occurred in a workshop of community workers to illustrate the Guiding Intention of Critically Engaging with Language. I facilitated this workshop for a social service organization. The participants were somewhat known to each other, though many worked in different programs.[58] I am interested in following this thread of the dialogue as it relates to the relationships of language and power. I attend to the usefulness of investigating words and their use to try to unmask power. I will be following a small thread between the Interview Partner, Emma, and a Reflecting Witness, Lee.

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: Emma)

> During this part of the dialogue, Emma uses the word prostitute, while speaking about a client. I ask if the word prostitute is a word the client would use to describe herself or, if it is a word Emma is using about the client. Emma pauses, and asks me why I am asking this question. I respond that I believe there is a difference between a word a person chooses for themselves, and a word that others use to describe them. I ask Emma what she thinks of this. Emma says she is unsure about what that has to do with the word prostitute. I ask Emma if she would be okay using the word prostitute about this client if the client were present in our conversation. Emma reflects for a moment and says she is not sure she would use that word if the client was present. And now she is wondering if she should be using this word at all. There is a long and seemingly useful silence. Here the dialogue moves in a different direction.

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witness: Lee and others)

> Lee picks up on the inquiry into the word prostitute and talks about her preference for the word sex worker or survival sex trade worker. There is some discussion about the differences of these nuanced words. Several people join in this part of the Witnessing Dialogue and there is

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[58] I have purposefully obscured the details of this organization and of the participants as I have been unable to seek their consent. I have chosen to engage with this re-telling because it resonated with so many of the participants in a useful way. I believe it is *safe-enough* to re-tell this aspect of the Solidarity Group based on the performances of safety present that day.

an extensive consideration of the term prostitute in relation to this client's identity. There is also a witnessing of Emma's humility in considering the possible impact of her language.

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partners: Lee)

> Emma is blown away that one word, which showed up in a very small part of the Opening Dialogue, created so much response. She notices that despite the fact that the dialogues were rich and useful, this is the one thing she is drawn to. She had not considered how much power was behind the word prostitute. Alongside her appreciation and humility for what she received from the Reflecting Witnesses, and Lee in particular, Emma is excited about her new attention to the power of words. She wonders what kind of difference this dialogue might make in her relationship with this client, and the kinds of conversation they may have connected to the power of language.

I am sure I had a response to the use of the word prostitute to describe or perhaps even define a client. However, I resisted lecturing Emma about the use of this term and instead invited her own inquiry. The Reflecting Witnesses picked up on this, and engaged in a dialogue which evoked rich understandings of the power at play in this languaging. This consideration included abuses of power, invisiblizing violence, and naming which groups in society are likely to be called by this term. There was energy within the entire Solidarity Group about the portal of new thinking that was evoked through looking closely at one word and its relationships to power. The group was able to be of use to Emma, and to each other. She was open to learning, and excited by where this new critical engagement with language would lead her.[59]

F. Structuring Safety

The thread of intention I follow in this Solidarity Group highlights the Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety. I attend to the role of the Interviewer. This re-telling is imagined, although it is based on a compilation of experiences from several Solidarity Groups. I use an imagined practice example here, as I do not wish to shame or humiliate any participants who might be recognized in a closer re-telling. Thus the names and content are also contrived.

Opening Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: John)

John and I talk about his work with people who are marginalized in terms of poverty and lack of housing, and who struggle with substance abuse. John talks about his feelings of inadequacy advocating for clients with other professionals who have more education.

Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Reflecting Witness: Ann, and others)

There is a useful Witnessing Dialogue between the Interviewer and the Reflecting Witnesses. Ann says that she is thinking about her own struggles with a particular financial aid worker, and she begins to tell

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[59] I want to be cautious here that just substituting the words survival sex worker for prostitute does not solve the ethical problems of this oppressive context for clients. Some clients use the term prostitute to self-identify. As well, multiple women's communities are not in agreement on any of this language, and there is no unified position about the complexities of sex trade work.

her story in a detailed way that is not connected to John's story. I try to gently invite Ann back into a witnessing position by asking, "What did you hear John say that has you thinking about this?" Ann responses by evaluating John's struggle and begins to give advice about "What he should do". Here I step up in my role as the Interviewer and direct Ann by saying "Ann this sounds very important and very immediate for you. Right now, our purpose is to really listen to John. Is there anything you know about John that has you thinking he may not need advice, and that he may be up to dealing with the situation, though perhaps not alone?"

Reflecting on the Witnessing Dialogue: (Interviewer: Vikki, Interview Partner: John)

I ask John about his experience of listening to the conversation we just had. I don't use the word witness, purposefully, so that John does not feel obliged to say that he felt witnessed. I ask more open ended questions about his experience of listening to the witnesses, opening a space for any critique he might have or the possibility that he may say he did not feel fully respected. John reflects that he felt that he was understood and listened to carefully, and he expected this respect because this team brought a pre-existing respect into the Solidarity Group. When I ask a question on the margins about his response to my directing Ann back to the conversation, he acknowledges that he noticed this, but that it didn't carry a lot of meaning for him. He also takes the space to say something about his respect for Ann.

Structuring Safety requires that the Interviewer step into the power they hold whenever there are risks to the safety of a group. In this imagined practice example, as the Interviewer, I was required to invite and then later direct Ann in her role as a Reflecting Witness. This example shows the importance of preparation in Structuring Safety for the Solidarity Group dialogue. If I had declined doing this John may have experienced the conversation as belittling or patronizing. He may have felt that he was unqualified for this work in response to Ann's judgment. There are other ways that Ann could offer some of her experience that would have been in keeping with the spirit of the Solidarity Group, such as telling her story in a way that connected with John's story. She could have offered some suggestions in a tentative way. In this example, though, I am responding to her direct judgment and advice giving.

The purpose of following these strands of intention from Solidarity Groups has been to invite a view of the specific Guiding Intentions in action, as the Guiding Intentions are revealed in practice. However, it is important to weave these strands of intention back into the fabric of the Solidarity Group dialogues.

7. Solidarity Notes: Letters from the Listening Witnesses

The Solidarity Notes are the written responses the Listening Witnesses offer to the Interview Partner at the end of the Solidarity Group. [60] As outlined earlier, in preparation for the Solidarity Group, I let the Listening Witnesses know the questions they are being asked to respond to in written form. I ask the

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[60] The history of this practice owes much to David Epston's (1995, 1990, 1989) work with therapeutic documents and what he refers to as letter-writing campaigns.

Listening Witnesses what they connected with in the Solidarity Group, what most moved them, or resonated with them, and how this is connected to their lives and their work.

The Solidarity Notes are an offering the Listening Witnesses make to the Interview Partner. There is no expectation that the Interview Partner engage with these reflections unless they are of use. The spirit in which the Solidarity Notes are written is one of witness as opposed to audience, and the Listening Witnesses have been invited to offer an embodied reflection. There is clear instruction that advice giving and evaluation, either up or down, are not in keeping with this spirit of solidarity. As well, Listening Witnesses may hold their own counsel as the Solidarity Notes are invited, not required.

The Solidarity Notes are the *Secrets of the Universe*[61], if you will, of the Solidarity Group. Without some invitation for the Listening Witnesses to catch the Interview Partner up on the meaningfulness of their connections, the Interview Partner is left to wonder if their conversation has been of use to others. They may be taken with some worry that they may have been judged, evaluated, or seen as a person who takes up a lot of room. The Solidarity Notes may take on an expansive life of their own following the Solidarity Group dialogue. Interview Partners have caught me up on the importance of the Solidarity Notes in terms of keeping the work of the Solidarity Group alive, but more than that, in expanding the dialogue in new and unpredictable ways.

Following a Solidarity Group in which she served as the Interview Partner, Sally St. George[62] called these letters "sacred":

> "I liked the written responses – they were sacred. Actually it took me a while to find quiet time to read them, and that allowed me to revisit the experience (with that same possibility for the future). They reminded me of the best retreats I had ever been to.
>
> What meant the most to me (from both the spoken and written reflections) was how my story and the responders' stories got "tangled", meaning that my ramblings generated new thinking for them, and their responses did the same for me. Also how INTERpersonal it was. Now I feel connected to these folks in ways that weren't there before, and the connection is forever even if I never see them again."

Initially, I included the practice of inviting Listening Witnesses to respond to the Interview Partner with Solidarity Notes as a way to validate their participation and belonging in this community-making dialogue. When several of the Interview Partners caught me up on the meanings the Solidarity Notes held for them, it informed me that the Listening Witnesses' role was more important and unique than I had anticipated. For several Interview Partners, the Solidarity Notes, over time, become the most paid attention-to reflections. I find this inspiring, and very much in line with my faith that we can challenge what gets paid attention to in terms of the worthiness of different types of contributions. Speaking aloud in public is not necessarily the center of what holds meaning for participants in the Solidarity Group.

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[61]This is the title of McFadden's poem, (1984, pp. 73) which is quoted in more depth in the Guiding Intention of Fostering Collective Sustainability.

[62] Sally St. George and Road McIntosh have both chosen to use their own names.

The Solidarity Notes also serve the Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety, as they welcome a response from the Listening Witnesses that can allow the Interview Partner an opportunity to be in on the unsaid that was present. As well, Solidarity Notes offer Listening Witnesses an opportunity to be accountable to the Interview Partner for what they are taking away from the group, so that they do not replicate appropriation. The doing of the Solidarity Notes can invite the Listening Witnesses into positions of witness as opposed to audience, as there is a response and action invited. This is not a passive taking in of the experiences of others, but a weaving in of the Listening Witnesses in the community-making dialogue.

Three years ago Road McIntosh was the Interview Partner at a large Solidarity Group that occurred in a conference setting. In the Opening Dialogue, Road spoke of the connections of his present work with men who have used violence in relationship, and his experiences both as a boy and as a young man witnessing and suffering from men's violence. We honoured his mother's resistance to men's violence, and witnessed his own commitments to trying to be an honourable man. We tracked the actions Road had taken in his life to do something about men's power and violence, and to try to position his life for accountability to women and children in relation to the violence of men. I remember the dialogue as heartfelt and almost raw at times, painful and vulnerable, powerful and inspiring.

For Road the Solidarity Notes were, he said:

> "...an honour. The writings were meaningful to me. I would have felt over exposed, not just a little, had it not been for the notes: vulnerable maybe. The notes thanked me, honoured me and my mother, and acknowledged that what I shared was valid. The notes eliminated the residue I would have experienced if everyone was silent".

The Solidarity Notes also caught Road up on the usefulness of his sharing.

> "Many people reflected on relationships with their fathers and shared their own vulnerabilities with me...The notes demonstrated a depth of feeling that was shared...the listeners were involved, and that was different than having an audience; I would say I was witnessed."

The connections the Solidarity Notes wove between Road and the Listening Witnesses had meaning for Road, some of which was a knowing that he wasn't being judged or advised, and "that was a great thing to walk away with...A record of it...I felt that people were *very* generous in their reflections and sharing with me. More so than they would have been if only asked to share in a group." The Solidarity Notes carve out space for the Listening Witnesses to themselves be witnessed by the Interview Partner. This invitation to the Listening Witnesses allows them to take space that is not public, and so, as Road reflects, share more of themselves, connect with more of Road's story, and be of more use to the community-making dialogue.

The dialogues that the Solidarity Notes engender between the Listening Witnesses and the Interview Partner are not available to the Interviewer, unless some of these folks catch them up following the Solidarity Group, (as Road has caught me up all of these years later). This seems to resonate with the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power because, as the Interviewer, I provide a structure for the Solidarity Group dialogue, but I was not a witness to all of it. Other conversations that roll out in an expansive way following the Solidarity Group make up more of these *Secrets of the Universe* – the parts of my work as the Interviewer of the Solidarity Group that are secret even from me.

Road chose to share his Solidarity Notes with his partner, "I wanted my partner to know what had happened for me, to share in the experience". Road kept the letters and read them on different occasions. They helped him re-member the Solidarity Group which still holds meaning for him. The possibility that Interview Partners may share their Solidarity Notes with folks who were not present in the Solidarity Group invites other preferred witnesses into the ever expanding dialogue, creating a wider net of community, much like "rhizomic organisms growing horizontally into new terrains".[63]

8. The Fluidity of the Solidarity Group: The Flow of Contexts and Formations

In this writing I have shared many re-tellings of the Solidarity Group, and have been explicit about tracking the Guiding Intentions that are the scaffolding for the practice. Here I am going to expand upon the fluidity of the Solidarity Group in relation to the multiplicity of contexts in which it has been of use, and the multiplicity of forms it has taken.

I am engaging with the meanings of the term fluidity informed by queer theory, which speak to a privileging of flow and mutability, and conversely a refusal to be fixed or static, a resistance to definition or explanation.[64] Queer theory invites movement from the fixed and certain to the confused and unstable. In the context of the Solidarity Group fluidity speaks to a capacity to expand and stretch to meet the needs of different folks in particular contexts, as opposed to a mechanized and fixed process that people and dialogues must fit into.

A Multiplicity of Contexts

The Solidarity Group practice has close ties to my therapeutic supervision work. It has also proven useful with diverse practitioners serving diverse clients; and in teaching, training, and supervisory capacities. In some instances the Solidarity Group has been utilized with groups who are not doing formalized counselling or community work, such as collections of activists and members of new social movements. In Activist Solidarity Groups there is not a named client who the work can be held accountable to, but rather a collective commitment to hold ourselves accountable to the shared ethics that are the basis of our social justice work.

In the ongoing supervision of counselling teams who I meet with on a regular basis, I often engage in Solidarity Groups as well as other practices that follow from the Guiding Intentions. Depending on the size of the team, over time everyone serves as an Interview Partner. As well, everyone serves in the roles of Reflecting Witness and Listening Witness. In counselling contexts the participants who serve as Reflecting Witnesses and Listening Witnesses are engaging in the practice of the Solidarity Group with all of their counselling skills welcomed. In these contexts, I experience myself as very resourced as the Interviewer and make more room for the curiosities and questions of both the Reflecting Witnesses and the Listening Witnesses.

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[63] Uzelman (2005), pp. 17.
[64] Butler (1990), Jagose (1996)

At times I use the Solidarity Group practice with teams I meet with on a regular basis. In other cases the Solidarity Group is taken up by a group of people meeting in a one time only event, such as in a training or workshop. Engaging with fluidity is not a neutral act. While the Solidarity Group can be engaged in a diversity of contexts, the importance of Structuring Safety becomes more pronounced for me as the Interviewer in once-only meetings, where everyone is not necessarily known to each other, and I may also be an unknown. In Structuring Safety I always borrow on the safety of others, their knowings of me, and past relationships. In contexts in which I am an unknown, or less known, the process must be slowed down, well considered by me and the participants, and negotiated intentionally.

The Solidarity Group can be used to serve different purposes. I have engaged with the Solidarity Group process to help teams working with exploited youth deal with the death of a client. In this instance, the Solidarity Group was used to serve as an alternative to debriefing modalities or grief interventions. The Solidarity Group has been used in a Visioning Day attended by fifty members of a nonprofit organization. The purpose was to help the organization envision a future in which all aspects of their work are more in line with commitments to social justice.

I have met with a staff team from an alternative high school, attended by the principal, management, teachers, and counsellors, and engaged the Solidarity Group as a path to agreeing on and committing to collective boundaries and ethics. In this particular consultation, the wisdom and knowing of this staff team was able to emerge because of the Solidarity Group dialogue, as opposed to a lecture format that I could have offered as an outside expert. Of course this team held all of the knowing that was required (and as an outsider I did not). The structure which the Solidarity Group offered provided them with a frame through which to speak their collective knowings.

While there are a diversity of teams and organizations with which I engage the Solidarity Group, there is some commonality that I believe is required in order for the Guiding Intentions to be honoured. For the most part, I am supporting teams and organizations that have a mandate and commitment to work with clients who are marginalized and exploited. As Rosa Arteaga commented, following the East Van Crew's Solidarity Group, there is "pre-existing unity", points of some connection and imperfectly shared ethics that lend themselves to the practice of the Solidarity Group.

A Multiplicity of Formations
While I have clearly laid out the structure of the Solidarity Group throughout this writing, it is important to emphasize that the formations of the Solidarity Group are fluid and multiple.

The number of participants who can engage in the Solidarity Group practice is flexible. This is contingent upon the commitments of all group members to act in ways that facilitate a large group engaging respectfully and usefully. I was part of a large Solidarity Group, with approximately sixty members, as part of a weekend training I facilitated with a community of practice group in Philadelphia called The Eccoes Foundation. This group held a shared commitment to an ethic they call "radical decency".[65] I was from

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[65]Garson (2005)

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out of town and unknown to everyone except a few leaders who had met me at an international conference. I trusted that this enormous group could engage in the Solidarity Group practice because of their writings and from their ways of being, including how I was welcomed and how they greeted each other. I had delivered a keynote address the previous night to the same group, and was inspired by the level of engagement, resonance and respect I received. The subject of my keynote was in-line with the Guiding Intentions, and so I now held a knowing of this group, their commonality in terms of pre-existing unity and a hoped-for solidarity. I remember that it was winter, it was cold, and the facility felt like a hockey arena. Yet, when the Interview Partner agreed that everyone could move in as close as they needed to in order to be able to hear, we transformed into a huddled-together mass inside a respectful silence. Despite the outrageous acoustics of the room, no one had a problem hearing anything.

On rare occasions I have engaged the Solidarity Group practice with two participants, and held myself tightly to the structure, despite invitations to be less formal or intentional. One of these groups occurred as an answering to an experience of public attack and shaming a worker suffered while doing community work. In consultation with her I wondered if it would be useful for her to have a witness. Because of the nature of this oppression the community worker felt it was too vulnerable or risky to invite a group into her experience. After some thought and time, she reconnected with me and suggested that we go forward with the Solidarity Group having one ally serve as the Reflecting Witness. The formality and structure of the Solidarity Group dialogue allowed her to be seen in a way that she experienced as both *safe-enough* and of use.

To serve the purposes of some Solidarity Groups I interview multiple Interview Partners. In the Visioning Day I referred to above, in which a nonprofit organization's aim was to envision their collective commitments to social justice, I engaged with multiple Interview Partners. I interviewed the director, a newly hired person, a direct service person, and a front desk person. My purpose was inviting and amplifying a diversity of voices from throughout the organization. These voices brought forward knowings of the organization across time, as some members had been there for twenty years, as well as voices from across the hierarchy of its structure.

Several times I have invited all participants of a specific Solidarity Group into the role of Reflecting Witness. I do this only on rare occasions and for specific purposes. In the Solidarity Group I wrote of in the chapter entitled, Following Threads of Intention, which was comprised of queer and transgendered community workers, I invited three people, who self identify from different locations within queer and transgendered communities, into the role of Interview Partner. My purpose here was to resist putting anyone in a token position where they may be asked to speak representatively. I wanted to make space for divergent voices. I decided to invite all twelve of the other participants in the dialogue into the role of Reflecting Witness, as this group of people all experienced marginalization. I believed that there was a good chance that asking anyone to serve in the role of Listening Witness would be experienced as being silenced. I knew it would be a challenge for such a large group of Reflecting Witnesses to engage in a dialogue. I believed, however, that we would have to submit to this limitation in order to act in accord with the Guiding Intentions of Addressing Power and Structuring Safety. The response from these folks

following the Solidarity Group was positive. This creative formation contributed much to the usefulness of the practice, or conversely contributed to the absence of people being silenced and tokenized.

At times, the formation of the Solidarity Group is influenced through collaborative practice. When I asked for critique from a large group who regularly engaged in the Solidarity Group practice, one of the Listening Witnesses responded that he would like to hear from other Listening Witnesses about what they picked up on in the dialogue. After some collaborative conversation with the entire group we decided to expand the Solidarity Group to include more than an Open Dialogue at the end, and included a sharing of the Solidarity Notes by the Listening Witnesses. This conversation could include thirty people, which does not lend itself well to an interactive dialogue, and makes different requirements of me as the Interview Partner. Following this collaborative change in structure I had to be more directive and attend more tightly to time. I have not taken up this structural change in any other Solidarity Group, and yet the expansive practice continued to work very usefully for this team.

There are limits to fluidity, however, and as the Interviewer I continue to join with the Reflecting Witnesses in accord with the Guiding Intention of Structuring Safety, and to promote the practices of witnessing, weaving and community-making. This requires an active role of the Interviewer in the Witnessing Dialogue as well as the Opening Dialogue.

This writing has tracked part of an actual history of the fluidity of contexts and formations of the Solidarity Group. The possibilities offered by the Solidarity Group invite my curiosity about the ways future participants and practitioners in collaboration with each other will morph, transform, and expand the Solidarity Group over time.

9. Furthering Talk from Within the Solidarity Group Practice

As a practice of furthering talk about the Solidarity Group I invited reflections and critiques from a diversity of practitioners who have participated in Solidarity Groups. The many practitioners who caught me up on their ponderings, curiosities, and experiences of the Solidarity Group helped me articulate the practice. In this writing I am going to share a few of the reflections which captured my attention and intrigued me.[66]

I was attracted to Aileen's new understandings of witnessing articulated in this reflection. Aileen Tierney (from her position as a Reflecting Witness), CEO/Collaborative Therapist, Clanwilliam Institute, Dublin, Ireland:

> I found a new understanding of the word witnessing in the Solidarity Group. We were not only invited to witness the Interview Partner, but all of us were witnessed, and the conversation was about all of us. What witnessing means also became clearer, as we were woven together and invited to a community of sorts. The pieces of the conversation were all tightly woven together,

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[66] Although these reflections are offered in the practitioners' own voices they are not direct quotations. I edited these responses for clarity. The structure for this approach to the inquiry responses is borrowed from a paper by Roth (2007).

and the conversation definitely got smaller and smaller. The solidarity was palpable. I mean that we were all in this work together, and everyone reflected on their ethics and commitments. Ethics are at the heart of the Solidarity Group, which is really different than having a conversation about our problems. I think now that all of this was inextricably connected to the practice of witnessing. What stands out as fresh feeling is ethics and solidarity.

Sally is a researcher, and while I was not surprised that she connected the Solidarity Group to research, I was intrigued by her invitation to think of the practice as a type of ethnography. Sally St. George (from her position as the Interview Partner) University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada:

I think the big difference for me was that the Solidarity Group wasn't problem or dilemma based, so it didn't feel like therapy. I felt more challenged to think philosophically and to ground my answers in the principles I hold (actually that is the direction I am going in my therapy with many families for whom "common sense" or traditional therapeutic practices seem to be failing). I have been reading a book about auto ethnography and the Solidarity Group was more in line

with the elements of a good auto-ethnography – the story of the examination of one's own

experiences in relation to larger society in terms of discourses, other's experiences, history. Maybe a better way to explain is that it was time for a good looking back/looking inward/looking forward for me without the pressure to make any changes or to respond to a dilemma or trouble.

In this reflection Cathy prioritized the Solidarity Group's attention to safety alongside the connections between safety and anti-oppression work. This response moved me as a type of witnessing of my own hopes for the possibilities of community work in general, and the Solidarity Group in particular. Cathy Richardson, (from her position as a Reflecting Witness), University of Victoria, BC, Canada:

The Solidarity Group felt similar to Métis ceremony. It is culturally appropriate for me as an Aboriginal woman to think of safety as a living entity that can be tangibly felt, lived and breathed. Through making space for this, safety's presence was felt. I was moved by the tangibility of the safety you created. I have since tried to emulate this in my work. I love your connected questions about safety , especially asking the Interview Partner to think ahead to how they might feel next week about this decision to speak now, and how that might guide them in the present. I appreciate how you invite the person to acknowledge that they are in front of a witnessing group rather than trying to block them out.

I really appreciate how you structure so firmly the type of feedback offered by the witnessing group. In spite of the best attempts to give clear instructions, I have witnessed so many reflecting teams going askew while I cringe quietly. What tends to happen is that people offer advice or start talking directly to the person, or patronizingly telling them how strong they are. In relation to safety, I guess I'd like to know more about how you interrupt a witness in the moment when the reflections get off-track. A woman was starting to go off in a patronizing way about the Interview Partner and you cut her off, and helpfully questioned her intention immediately. You seem to have a balance of dignity and accountability for this. I was really moved that you addressed this issue of racism and that I, as an Aboriginal woman, didn't have to defend Aboriginal people.

The fresh feeling was talking truth to power, talking about safety as a living entity. The coming together around one person's story builds relationships, solidarity and understanding of the subtle workings of oppression and resistance. The Interview Partner found herself being brave

in response to your creating a safe space for her. This is amazingly powerful. More Métis people are starting to identify as Métis, because there is a tangible increase in social tolerance. When individuals such as yourself push back the walls of racism and oppression to make space for marginalized folk, we can expand into that space and find room to be who we are. This is the safety that helps people to come out of the closets everywhere. It is important that we keep building that safety in society, safe spaces and safe conversations. It is great to see witnessing move into the realm of human rights and life herself.

In this reflection David considers the complexities of solidarity. David also offers his insider critique of what might be different about the Solidarity Group compared to other practices that also use the Reflecting Team structure, such as Definitional Ceremony. David Paré, (from his position as a Listening Witness), University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada:

The notion of solidarity intrigues me. We typically think of solidarity as a bond between a group of people who share an agenda, such as a particular bargaining unit. But your notion of solidarity goes far beyond that and has extended over your career to solidarity with all people who are experiencing oppression, marginalization, and so on. So it makes perfect sense for you to speak of solidarity with the queer community, with people on low incomes, with people on the left of the political spectrum, and so on. My point is that you are <u>also</u> using the term now to apply to a process that might include folks who at first glance appeared to be on the "other side" of this divide. For instance, if the Solidarity Group includes members who we identify more by their <u>privilege</u> than their own oppression, then this is a little like being in solidarity with people on low incomes <u>and</u> people on high incomes.

This is intriguing, and challenging. My sense is that your response to this is to find that shared space where all in the room can express their preferred ethics. So my impression is that you are always able to find a shared ground by joining with people in an examination of their ethics.

You have an additional piece about "spiritual pain" that intrigued me. It is one thing to "thicken" an account of a person's acting in a manner congruent with their preferred values. This is familiar and a central piece of "re-authoring". But it seems to me that you are also interested in talking to people about instances where they have acted in ways that are not congruent with their preferred values. I found that interesting and I am intrigued by the possibility of actually looking for instances of this sort of spiritual pain as a means to a rich conversation about values and intentions.

I also felt that you sort of held onto the ethics of others so that they were not dissed or dismissed. For instance, it can be easy to trash children's aid, but as you pointed out, they too are trying to live out their ethics. I appreciated this because it avoids an either/or stance, as demonizing of some enemy. You ensure the conversation is inclusive... in a sense; you promote solidarity with others, even others who are deemed to be engaged in very distinct enterprises. You took on somewhat of a pedagogical stance at times. You were fairly literal in coaching the Interview Partner to adopt a more understanding view of what other workers are up against.

Another feature of your practice that struck me as different from definitional ceremony was the emphasis on ensuring that the witnessing team is witnessed and acknowledged. In my experience, this is not attended to.

I appreciate the emphasis on ethics. Ultimately, the work seems to be about joining people in thick accounts of their values and intentions. I love how far this is from playing "psychologist"!

The role of social poetics is picked up as central to Bob's experience of the Solidarity Group in this reflection. I remember Bob's ways of being in the Solidarity Group contributing to my invitations for an embodied dialogue. Bob Neimeyer (from his position as a Reflecting Witness), University of Memphis, Tennessee, United States of America:

> I see the Solidarity Group, with its concentric circles, as the construction of a community of concern. The Solidarity Group implemented the principles of community, witnessing, and transparency, amongst others. Collectively, through your guidance, we formed a provisional, but powerful community of concern. Serving as a witness was a moving and refreshing experience, and this was underscored by your invitation for our collective attention to nonverbal and embodied affect. Noticing those bodily responses, feeling their residence in my own body and tearfulness, and being invited to offer them back simultaneously, seemed to validate and amplify their significance.

I received many generous and generative responses from participants of Solidarity Groups. The practices of the Solidarity Group itself, and this writing, are richer for all of these offerings.

10. Other Solidarity Practices Informed by the Guiding Intentions

The Guiding Intentions describe my ethical stance for *doing justice*, and inform all of my efforts to help sustain community workers who work alongside people struggling in the margins. The Solidarity Group, which has been looked at closely, is one practice of many that follows from commitments to these intentions.
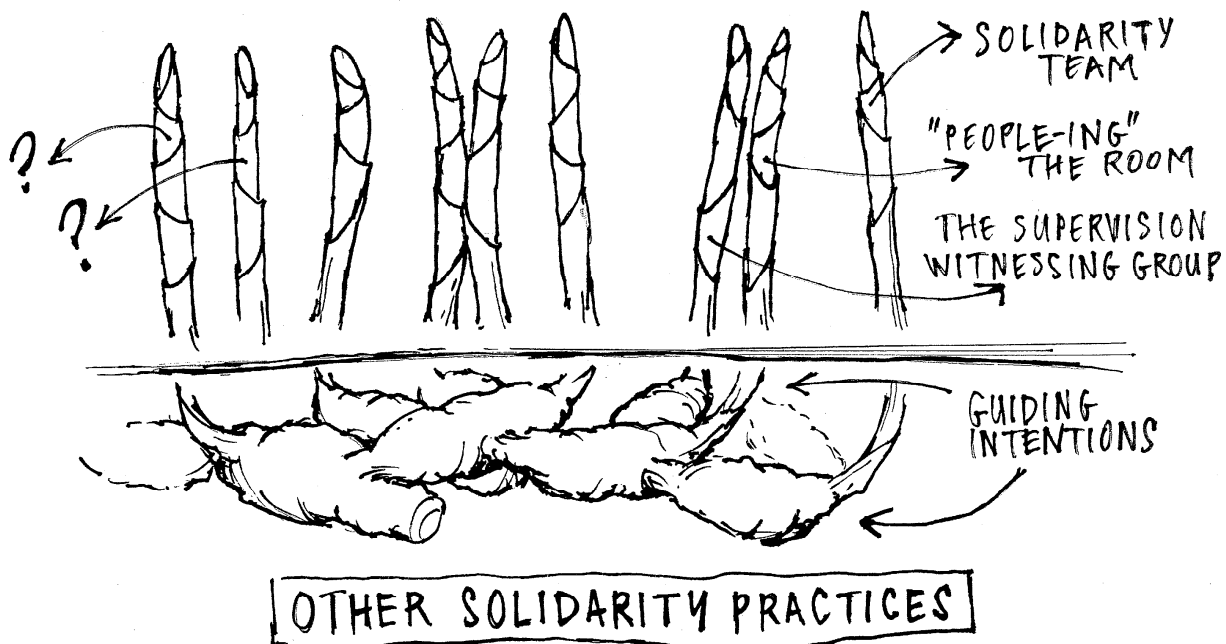
Here I will outline three Solidarity Practices which are related to the Solidarity Group and share the same set of Guiding Intentions:

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A. The Solidarity Team

B. People-ing the room

C. The Supervision Witnessing Interview

A. The Solidarity Team

A Solidarity Team is a group of people who serve as a network of support which shoulders up a community worker and accompanies them in the difficult contexts of their work. This practice was developed in my early work alongside survivors of torture and political violence. It was immediately apparent that I would need to build a team in order to be sustained and of use in the work.[67] The purpose of the Solidarity Team is to contest the isolation of the worker by positioning them within community. I invite community workers to build their own Solidarity Teams. This is accomplished by choosing specific people from their lives, and carrying that team along with them into their work in imagined and actual ways.

Being positioned within a community of choice allows practitioners to access all of who it is possible for them to be in order to be of use to clients. The question is not what would my mentor or a master counsellor say now, but rather, how might I be able to be the most useful practitioner I can be in this moment, with this person, in this context. If I were to position myself in solidarity alongside members of my Solidarity Team, how might I be more useful?

The Solidarity Team is constructed to exist fluidly, across time, and is comprised of people both real and imaginary, who are alive or who have passed on. Solidarity Team members may be intimate to the community worker or be public figures. When I began working alongside doctors, I put Che Guevera on my Solidarity Team because he was a revolutionary doctor committed to the struggle for global justice. Che serves to remind me that I want to be in solidarity with these doctors despite the fact that we have different locations of power in our work. By power I mean the differences in how our knowledge is attended to, how our work is respected, and how we are paid. These issues of class and power are often silenced by the politics of politeness, but they prop up barriers to solidarity that get in the way of us being most useful to clients together. Doctors may have more privilege than I do as a counsellor, but the doctors I am speaking of here have chosen to work alongside marginalized people in difficult circumstances and have earned my respect and solidarity. Che can remind me of this solidarity, which can help us all attend to shared commitments to serve clients.

Solidarity Team members can invite us to collective accountability to the gaps: those spaces in between our privileged locations and the marginalized locations of clients or other workers.[68] For example, in my work with a man who has been violent in relationship I hold a Solidarity Team member who has suffered

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[67] Heather Elliott was one of the therapeutic supervisors of my work alongside survivors of torture and political violence at that time, and it was her suggestion that I would need a team, which prompted my thinking in these directions (personal communication, 1995).

[68] Karen Grant's work on intersectionality has been extremely useful in my attending to these gaps by inviting collective accountability (2008, 2003). Her work is described more fully in the Guiding Intention of Addressing Power.

rape alongside me. This can position me in a community that has a greater capacity to attend to the tension of compassion for him, alongside an invitation of responsibility for his actions. How might my work with this man be different if my Solidarity Team member was in on all of my conversations with him? How might I be better resourced not to lose track of the victims of violence by being in community with this Solidarity Team member?

My Solidarity Team includes Warren, who identifies as Black, and whose imagined, re-membered, and sometimes physical presence invites me to be accountable to my location as a member of the dominant culture (and where I live in Canada that means a member of white culture). I position myself alongside Warren whenever I am working with a minoritized and marginalized person, practitioner or client. [69] I invited Jesse, a person I love who is transgendered, to be on my Solidarity Team. I hold him close whenever I am speaking publicly, reminding myself that I can never really know who anyone is. [70] I do not want to close space for anybody's identity in any of my work. This is true not just regarding issues of gender, but in all domains of identity where what passes for normal is socially constructed.

Cathy Richardson, who self-identifies as Métis, engaged with the practice of the Solidarity Team in a unique way as she gave the opening lecture at a conference. She put three chairs on the stage behind the podium. She invited her colleague, Allan Wade, who is a white man, well published and holds a Ph.D., to sit in the middle chair. On either side of him she placed a book written by other white men who are also well published and held Ph.D.s. Cathy made public to all of us that her purpose was to show that white people, with authenticated and privileged voices, were saying the same things that she was saying as a Métis person. Cathy let us know that she was doing this to remind herself that she knew the facts, and that they were correct. Allan's presence, sitting down behind her, reminded her that she was not crazy, and that there were non-Aboriginal allies who would back her up when she named colonization.[71]

What follows is an exercise I often use to invite community workers into conversations to explore the possibilities of creating their own Solidarity Teams. The exercise focuses on who the members of the Solidarity Team might be, and how the community worker is going to use the Solidarity Team in practice.

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[69] Here I am speaking of Warren Williams and I acknowledge the backup, invitations to accountability, and solidarity he has gifted me with in our sustained relationship across time. Recursively, Warren has told me that I have been of use as a member of his Solidarity Team.

[70] Jesse asked to be identified as Jesse P.

[71] I am using Cathy's examples to illuminate the possibilities of the Solidarity Team, but this practice is also effective in terms of strategizing for backlash in anti-oppression work.

Solidarity Teams offer the possibility of an ever present witness to the epiphanies, small miracles, and moments of meaning and beauty in our work, that may otherwise be lost. Invitations to Solidarity Team members can make explicit our permissioning of each other to connect without the fear of judgment, whether things are going well or poorly. Having a plan of who to call in a crisis is a foot up against despair. Workers have caught me up over time on expansive and creative ways they have used the Solidarity Team to foster their sustainability; both in times of need; and, in rare moments, to bring witnesses to the joy of their work. In moments of despair, when we are lacking in spirit, Solidarity Teams can accompany us, in physical and spirited ways, and re-member us to experiences of competency and usefulness.

B. *People-ing the room*

The practice of *people-ing the room* invites community workers to bring forward the spirit of their Solidarity Team members and is informed by Karl Tomm's ideas of the internalized other.[72] Karl uses this practice in couples counselling where he interviews one partner as their internalized other, meaning their experience of the other person they carry with them. He then checks in with the partner to see if the person has had an accurate experience of them. A wife is interviewed as her husband and responds, speaking in first person, as him. The husband is then interviewed to see if he feels that the wife has understood him. Karl would then interview the other member of the couple as their internalized other: the husband would then be interviewed as the wife and speak in first person as her. To facilitate this, the wife would be called by the husband's first name to invite her into the experience.

I began to expand on the practice of the internalized other when I started working with refugees who were survivors of torture and political violence. These survivors are truly isolated in more than a geographical sense. Many live in extreme isolation in which they have no one to share meaningful greetings in their language or ever touch them in kindness. The level of isolation is extreme, and in an effort to help these survivors experience being accompanied, I invite them to *people the room*. I interview the survivor as one of their internalized others in order to help them re-member some part of themselves that has been lost through the violence of torture and displacement. In one memorable conversation, I interviewed a man from northern Africa who felt that he had lost touch with his courage. When I asked who would be a good witness, and could re-member him as a person in connection with his courage, he introduced me to his mother as an internalized other. He then responded as her to my questions about him. Interestingly, his mother thought that grandmother was a better person to tell the story. We *people-d the room* with his grandmother. She told a beautiful story of this man as a baby, giggling and happily waving at a dangerous snake that had everyone else horrified.[73]

I then expanded the practice from clients to workers. When we lost a survivor of torture to what euphemistically gets called suicide, I immediately surrounded myself with members of my Solidarity Team by *people-ing the room*. I remember the immediate sensation of being accompanied in my tiny, now-crowded and still-empty office. Because I was facing a death, I called forward the members of my Solidarity Team who have been alongside me at executions in anti-death penalty work. I also evoked members who I sensed would best accompany me in this dark moment. I moved fluidly from the experience of feeling accompanied by my Solidarity Team to picking up the phone and methodically attempting to make real-time contact. Stephen, a member of my Solidarity Team, was the first person I

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[72] Karl Tomm's ideas and practices of the internalized other are influential in this work. I was immersed in training, had seen Karl present several times, and was well acquainted with his written work during the development of these practices (1987, 1985). David Epston also writes about this preactice, offering what he calls a New Zealand version (1992).

[73] This survivor gave his permission for me to use this story in teachings, writings, and a key note. His hope in sharing his story was to be of use to me, and help community workers be more useful alongside other refugees.

was able to speak with. [74] He was useful to me in terms of helping me make an immediate plan that included canceling my morning appointments. In my isolation, I was not able to see that I could not be useful in that moment with survivors of torture, many of whom were struggling with suicide.

People-ing the room positions the worker in community, and offers a way to engage with the spirit of their Solidarity Team. It is also a resource that we can share with clients so that they are not alone in their struggles.

C. The Supervision Witnessing Interview

The Supervision Witnessing Interview serves different purposes than the other Solidarity Practices, but is held up by the same set of Guiding Intentions. The Supervision Witnessing Interview is a way of doing supervision in which the supervisor is invited into the therapeutic relationship of the client and counsellor.[75] Similar to the Solidarity Group, this practice also utilizes the structure of Reflecting Teams. The Supervision Witnessing Interview can be of use when the counsellor is not sure how to move forward and when previous supervision consultations suggest that an inquiry into the relationship may be useful. The Supervision Witnessing Interview has also been of use when the counselling relationship has turned a preferred corner, an obstacle has been overcome, or there are qualities of the client that the counsellor hopes to invite the supervisor to witness. As the witnessing supervisor I keep at the centre the care I hold for the counsellor and the client.

I offer three different examples of the Supervision Witnessing Interview in my supervision work with counsellors working on the same team. My purpose is to give a taste of the diverse possibilities of the Supervision Witnessing Interview, and to share experiences that are close to the work. I aim to capture the spirit of the practice, not to give an accurate account of the Supervision Witnessing Interviews. The counselling team includes Iain, Andrew, and Dale.[76] They comprise part of the addictions team in a multidisciplinary primary health care clinic located in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver[77].

Iain and the Methadone Maintenance Support Group's Supervision Witnessing Interview

Iain is an addictions counsellor and has been working in the Downtown Eastside in various capacities for an extensive period of time. When I was hired as the supervisor I asked Iain if I could attend one of his Methadone Maintenance Support Groups. I told him that my intention was to become familiar with his work by asking clients and group members for their thoughts. This made sense to both of us, as it was the clients' view of Iain's work that we both wanted to pay attention to. Iain consulted with the men who

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[74] Stephen Madigan was providing training and some free consultation for my work alongside survivors of torture and political violence at that time through Yaletown Family Therapy.

[75] I am influenced by Stephen Madigan's practice of "Situating the therapists curiosity in front of the family" (1992b, 1991).

[76] Iain Jardine-MacIntyre, Andrew Larcombe and Dale Wagner all generously agreed to share their work and use their full names; the names of clients have been changed to serve confidentiality. Iain, Andrew and Dale's critiques and reflections of this writing has contributed much to its usefulness.

[77] A broader description of the context of the lives of people in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver is given earlier in this writing in The Frame.

made up one of his long-standing groups, and they agreed to have me attend. They were a welcoming group of older gentlemen, and I remember they were very curious to know if I was Iain's boss, as I was "a girl".

I began the Supervision Witnessing Interview by inviting the group members into a conversation about the usefulness of this group to them. I was particularly interested in their continued participation in and commitment to this group as some of them had been coming for many years. I inquired openly about the group's relationships with Iain and his ways of being.

I then interviewed Iain about what the group members had said about his qualities that have been of use to them. Iain was moved by a group member who spoke of the profound meaning he gave to the experience of being able to cry in front of Iain, and to receive compassion and care from a man. The group member had been imprisoned for many years, and had lost touch with many of the gentle ways of being a man. This comment, and much that was said, was news to Iain. He had not asked these questions himself because of his position as counsellor of the group. The Supervision Witnessing Interview inquiry put the relationships of the group members and the group counsellor at the center. The conversation served as a type of witnessing of the group counsellor's work, as well as an honouring of the history of experience which held the group together. There was also a warm re-membering of one of the group members who had died as a result of substance abuse. There was an ongoing commitment by all the group members to stay together in this group in order to stay alive as a testament to their lost member.

At the end of the group Iain acknowledged that I was his boss. I felt that I had been of use to him, and more importantly that I had a richer knowing of him because the structure of the Supervision Witnessing Interview invited the clients he served to let me in on their experiences of him. Following this Interview I invited the group members, along with Iain, to be guest lecturers in my substance abuse counselling course at college. The Supervision Witnessing Interview had brought forward this group of gentlemen's extensive time free from heroin, and their knowledge about many problems. I interviewed this group again in front of my class. Evaluation forms showed it was the most popular lecture in the course that term – which was not a surprise to me, nor, I think to them. The invitation to share the group's wisdom, and provide a further witnessing of their dignity and worth came forward as a result of the Supervision Witnessing Interview.

I invited Iain to reflect on this re-telling as a practice of accountability. What follows is Iain's response in his own voice:

> I'd ask the group be located in the hardcore drug world of the Downtown Eastside, as a kind of context for the guys. Also, and I know I have said this to you before, I think that seeing the guys as persons/people as distinguished from clients is fairly central in how we build rapport and relationship down here and within the group itself. See also: Matthew 25: 35-40. "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36: I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. 37: Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 39: When did we see you sick or in

prison and go to visit you?' 40: The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' ". [78]

Erin go Bragh, (Ireland forever) Iain

Andrew and Denise's Supervision Witnessing Interview

Andrew is a mental health counsellor who has training as a psychiatric nurse and extensive experience in the Downtown Eastside. In our supervisory conversation, Andrew brought forward his concerns about the safety of a woman client.[79] Denise spoke with Andrew of her ongoing struggles with cocaine, and of men who would buy her cocaine in exchange for sex. Andrew and Denise had created *enough-safety* in their therapeutic relationship to address the exploitation and risk Denise suffers in her relationships with men. At this time Denise was in a relationship with an older man who had some money. Andrew was concerned about the exploitation and real danger that Denise was alluding to in her conversations with him. Andrew was consulting with me to invite accountability and have someone standing alongside him as he and Denise navigated her difficult and potentially dangerous situation.

I suggested that Andrew consult with Denise about the possibility of all three of us participating in a Supervision Witnessing Interview. The purpose of the Supervision Witnessing Interview was to have an inquiry into the relationship between Andrew and Denise, and to witness and promote the safety and usefulness of their work together with the purpose of trying to help them move forward together. While Andrew is at the center of my supervision, care of Denise holds the centre for both Andrew and I. Andrew spoke with Denise, who agreed to participate in the Supervision Witnessing Interview. On several occasions Andrew introduced me to Denise. There were some false starts, but Andrew and I backed off and slowed down, wanting to move at Denise's pace. We were prepared to abandon the idea altogether if this was not of use for her.

The Supervision Witnessing Interview began with Denise and I in conversation, and with Andrew in a listening position. Denise and I discussed risk and safety in relationship to men and cocaine, and brought forward much of her knowing of how to stay safe, which she had lost track of under the influence of cocaine. We made some plans for safety, including awareness of women shelters which Denise has accessed in the past. We also discussed fear as a resource. Being afraid in the moment or ahead of time was more useful to Denise than being afraid later. Denise brought forward stories of the usefulness of the counselling relationship with Andrew. When I asked about Andrew's ways of being, Denise spoke animatedly and was specific about Andrew's compassion, his ability to be very present with her, and his ability to understand her. This was especially important because Denise carried many stories about being a person who did not make common sense.

I then interviewed Andrew about the meanings he gave to witnessing Denise's conversation. He spoke of his respect for her and the lowering of his own anxiety as she spoke more about what she knew about staying safe and experiencing fear. I asked Andrew what kept his hope alive for Denise and what kept him

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[78] The Bible, Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 35-40.

[79] This client's name has been changed as a practice of confidentiality.

continually committed to his work alongside her. He spoke of her continued resistances and the many small successes in their work together. The asking of this question in Denise's presence created an opportunity for her to be witnessed by Andrew. Denise has extensive histories of suffering oppression and men's violence. My presence in the conversation, as a woman and as an ally, allowed Andrew to say things that he would not have said alone in a room with Denise. The presence of the supervisor allowed for *enough-safety* in the conversation for Andrew to be more of the counsellor that he aspires to be. The conversation also invited me as the witnessing supervisor to be a witness to both Denise's life and Andrews's qualities as a counsellor.

Andrew reflected upon this re-telling and has offered this response in his own voice:

> The Supervision Witnessing Interview allowed you to bring out into the open the strength of the relationship Denise and I have with each other. By witnessing Denise's experience of being in a non-oppressive relationship with a man, an exception to the many exploitative relationships that she has experienced, you enabled us both to openly acknowledge that we had a good working relationship based on trust. Without you as an interlocutor – and your gender was important here because as a woman in a patriarchal society you can speak to male oppression in a way that I can't – I don't think that I alone would've been able to examine the gendered dynamics of negotiating trust with Denise. Much of our conversation revolved around how negotiating boundaries has made our counselling relationship safe. Your line of questioning about safety and relationships with men brought some great moments where we were able to confirm Denise's acts of resistance. We talked at length about boundary setting as an insurance policy in anticipation of risk, and as an act of resistance in situations of immediate threat.

> The next week I asked you to join us again, without prior planning but with Denise's permission, because Denise reported a violent incident where she was the victim of a man. I remember feeling somewhat overwhelmed by her news and I felt a bit stuck as to what to suggest. You came in and your questions of me in front of Denise helped me get unstuck. I think that the issue of gender was important here too. She was fearful and I think that having another woman in the room was important for me, and hopefully for her, because it added an element of solidarity to the support that I was able to provide. By this I mean that as Denise was the victim of an act of male violence you were able to open up a conversation about safety that I alone might not have been able to.

> Peace, Andrew.

Dale and Shelley's Supervision Witnessing Interview

Dale is an addictions counsellor on the same addictions team as Iain and Andrew in the Downtown Eastside clinic, and has extensive experience in residential treatment settings. In a supervision consultation, Dale spoke of his concerns about the ability of men counsellors to work alongside women who had experienced sexualized violence and oppression from men.

Like Dale, many of the men that I supervise are concerned about their ability to be accountable-enough to work with women who have experienced violence by men. I would be very discomforted if men counsellors were not concerned about their ability to be accountable-enough alongside women in these situations. I also believe that, at times, great opportunities could be lost if women clients are not given the

opportunity to have a respectful and dignified relationship with a man counsellor. Men need to work hard to position themselves accountably in relationship to man's violence. However, I do not believe that any woman counsellor is necessarily better than any man counsellor. Humility and real-time supervision are extremely important, whether the counsellor is a man, a woman, or a transgendered person; I believe this is true whether the client who has suffered violence is a transgendered person, a man or a woman.

In particular, Dale was talking about his work with a woman client, Shelley, who had been brutalized by men in the past and recently. I felt there was a great resource available to Shelley in working alongside a man counsellor who held an intention of gender accountability. From prior supervisory consultations, Dale and I thought it was a useful idea to structure a Supervision Witnessing Interview. Dale invited Shelley and she agreed that it might be a useful conversation for her. Part of the intention of this interview for me as the witnessing supervisor was to place Dale's intention of accountability to women in front of a woman client.

In our Supervision Witnessing Interview, I began by consulting with Shelley around her counselling relationship with Dale. Shelley spoke of the respect and dignity that she experienced. We had a rich conversation about the possibilities of Shelley being in one relationship with one specific man where she believed it was unlikely that she would be sexualized, propositioned, oppressed, subjected to a man's evaluation of her body, or disrespected in a gendered way. Shelley talked about this as being a very different experience from her life and let me in on a thumbnail sketch of her previous experiences with men. This included survival sex work and other sexualized violence. When I asked her what was present in her relationship with Dale, she spoke of respect and some new hope for her that there was a small possibility of some men behaving towards her in a different way than she had experienced in the past. We talked about her knowings in relationship with men and how she did not want to let go of any of that, while she also held onto the small hope that some things may be different in the future with some men.

I then interviewed Dale about what he had witnessed in Shelley's interview. He spoke to her holding on to hope of some future relationships with men that would be *safe-enough*, and the meaning that held for him. He spoke of the qualities that Shelley brought to their counselling relationship and her ability to trust him enough to even speak with him given that he is a man. When I asked Dale what kept his hopes alive for Shelley, he recounted some profound stories of resistance. There stories spoke of her strength and her ability to stand up to man's power by using her intelligence and life experience.

In this Supervision Witnessing Interview, I decline the invitation to put Dale upon a pedestal for being an accountable man, which he did not want and would have been extremely discomforted by. Instead we witnessed Shelley's ability to work alongside a man given her wisdom about the way many men have been with her in her life. As the witnessing supervisor, I was available as a witness to Shelley's ongoing resistance and wisdom. Dale was also witnessed as a *safe-enough* man at this time, in this particular counselling relationship with Shelley. The Supervision Witnessing Interview provided a structure and some safety for this conversation to occur. Without this structure Dale would have been limited for being inside of the relationship and also for speaking the questions from his position as a man.

Dale reflected on my re-telling of this Supervision Witnessing Interview, and this is written in his voice:

The consideration of engaging in a Supervision Witnessing Interview was initially a discomforting one, as I was hesitant to be so vulnerable. However, this was precisely where I needed help and why I had raised my concerns about my work with Shelley in our individual supervision. By participating in this process I sought to be less alone in the concerns that I held about my work with Shelley as she was a strong woman who had faced horrors that were foreign to my life's experience – mostly committed by people of my gender. She had developed ways of relating (particularly with men) that reflected this hard won wisdom. I was acutely aware of the need for our counselling relationship to be *safe-enough*. It was difficult to open up a dialogue with Shelley about our counselling relationship, particularly because it had the potential of replicating her previous negative experiences with men – namely that I would be seen as just another guy wanting something. The Supervision Witnessing Interview allowed a safe means of putting our relationship on the table for discussion. In response, Shelley spoke positively about her experience of safety and being respected. While I didn't need to hear this to continue engaging in a respectful manner (although it was confirming), it seems that it gave Shelley explicit permission to talk about our relationship. More than permission, it gave Shelley an experience of doing so with my supervisor there to witness and affirm the value of her perspective.

This reflection reminds me of the power of this experience and renews my desire to look for opportunities to offer the Supervision Witnessing Interview experience to my team, as I am now in a supervisor role.

Cheers, Dale

These examples of the Supervision Witnessing Interview have fluid structures and formations. Unlike the Solidarity Group, at times people speak from the listening positions in the Supervision Witnessing Interview. I am much looser about this because of the intention of the Supervision Witnessing Interview, and because the people who speak out of turn are almost always clients. I make much more allowance for the presence of their voices. This fluidity in structure is different from the Solidarity Group, which is tightly structured. The Supervision Witnessing Interview does not have to be facilitated by the counsellor's supervisor. A colleague or ally can serve in this role. Having a witness from outside visit and interview from a different location holds the relationship between client and counsellor at the centre.

These three Solidarity Practices, the Solidarity Team, the practice of *people-ing the room*, and the Supervision Witnessing Interview, are all informed by the same Guiding Intentions as the Solidarity Group. Practitioners are invited to re-configure, re-theorize, and re-create these Solidarity Practices in order for the practice to be of use in different contexts.

11. Conclusion to the Solidarity Group Practice

The Solidarity Group practice has been described fully through the use of an outline, an imagined practice example, and an intimate description of the East Van Crew's Solidarity Group. Conversational threads from particular Solidarity Groups have been followed in order to reveal the Guiding Intentions which outline my ethical stance for *doing justice*. Other practices, which I include under the umbrella of Solidarity Practices, have been described, and invitations made for the development of new practices which follow from the Guiding Intentions.

Supported by the ethical stance outlined in the Guiding Intentions, Solidarity Groups serve as community-making dialogues to assist community workers to hold on to a sense of aliveness and engage a spirit of solidarity within contexts of social injustice and extreme marginalization. Solidarity Groups assist community workers to work in accord with collective ethics by inviting collective accountability, and witnessing our resistance against the ways society is structured unjustly. We look at the ways we can abuse our power and the ways our work is a site of liberation for us.

Solidarity Groups promote sustainability by creating intentional community, and by witnessing the transformations this work brings to the lives of community workers. Practitioners working in contexts of extremity – extreme scarcity and extreme need – can experience this work as shoveling water. The familiar prescriptive story of discouragement, burnout, and isolation is often told. Solidarity Groups bring forward countervailing stories that witness small acts of justice-doing, and bring forward the ways we have sustained each other.

PART III: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

1. Witnessing my experience: Trying to hold on to a fish that is morphing into an octopus

In the work of promoting sustainability and *doing justice* alongside community workers who struggle with clients living in the margins, I developed a particular ethical stance. This theorizing has been described in this writing as the Guiding Intentions: Centering Ethics, Doing Solidarity, Fostering Collective Sustainability, Addressing Power, Critically Engaging with Language, and Structuring Safety. The ethical positioning for *doing justice* was my response to the suffering, indignity, and violations of social justice that was the context of much of the community work I was involved in. I feel a spirited solidarity alongside bell hooks, who wrote, "I came to theory because I was hurting".[1]

Although this ethical position was and continues to be imperfect and only partially formed, I was compelled by dire need to create practices that could be of use to workers. Teachings from activist cultures informed me on this path alongside community workers and clients, and my engagement with these ideas proved 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".[2] The absurdities faced by workers and clients within contexts of poverty and dislocation are often reminiscent of Beckett's 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.

My desire to be of use required immediate responses. I could not wait for better training, the arrival of the right teacher, or finding the right book. I took what I have learned from activist cultures, from progressive therapeutics trainings, and from my family and culture, and responded to need with action. I held close a teaching from Noam Chomsky. "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."[3]

Counsellors, shelter workers, and other community workers who experienced the Solidarity Group (and other practices informed by the Guiding Intentions) let me know that they found these practices useful

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[1] hooks wrote: "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), pp. 59.

[2] This quote is from a novel, *The Unnamable*, (1958, pp. 178) though it is often referenced to the play *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett has influenced my engagement with the tension of both the absurd, and the presence of hope. Beckett was an assistant to James Joyce, a member of the French Resistance, and a Nobel laureate. He is considered one of the first postmodernists. I am accompanied by Beckett as his work has a "focus on poverty, failure, exile and loss – as he put it, on man as a 'non-knower' " (Knowlson, 1997p. 352).

[3] Chomsky (2005), pp. 116.

and in line with sustainability. As an activist, I am always looking to promote ideas and practices that are of use in *doing justice*. I felt compelled and in some small and humble way collectively accountable to bring this work to a wider audience.

I am skeptical about writing anything informed by activism because of strong histories of appropriation. 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 publishing is not a neutral activity. Writings on therapeutic work with survivors of torture are studied at places such of the School of the Americas, where torturers are trained.[4] I have been careful in selecting what will be revealed and what might be risky in all of my writing, trainings and teachings. However, the risks are not taken by me, but by the next generation of victims of political terror.

I recognized and was attuned to these risks. At the same time , I was encouraged from many practitioner and trainer colleagues to make public the ethical positioning I had relied on as I developed some of the useful practices described here. Allan Wade's encouraging voice got my attention when he spoke to the very concerns that threaten to silence me. He suggested that making my ideas public would invite a richer critique and invite an accountability, which I would not be open to if I remain silent about my work.[5] Of course this work is inherently collaborative, and so on some level it is not my work to hide. 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.

An Expansive Inquiry

I was not going to exploit clients or workers by writing exotic tales of torture and dramatic pain. Alongside other academic/activists I believe that "Social researchers should always be the most vulnerable – not those being studied of 'left' behind once the research is complete."[6] Writing myself into the work, and examining my own theory and practice invited enough-accountability for me to engage in line with this ethic.[7] I put the development of my own practice, specifically the Solidarity Group, forward as the subject of my inquiry. I invited some practitioners who participated in the Solidarity Group to offer reflections of their experience from within the practice.[8] This was not a formal research project, which allowed me to continually redirect my inquiry based on what participants found interesting and what they were paying attention to in the Solidarity Group practice. These generative responses informed me in

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[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] Wade (personal communication, 2005)

[6] Fine (2006), p. 88.

[7] Janet Newbury was of great assistance in these reflections. She interviewed me about this inquiry process, and our generative co-consultation allowed for the emergent articulation of new understandings.

[8] A list of some versions of inquiry questions I offered to some practitioners is found in the appendix.

both the doing of the group, and in my attempts to describe it. I offer this description of the Solidarity Group, and the Guiding Intentions that uphold it, backed up by a menagerie of voices.

Instead of researching the work of others and distilling it down to results, I have invited people into my practice. I have used the Solidarity Group practice to illuminate the Guiding Intentions, which aim to promote sustainability through practices of solidarity and *doing justice*. My hope is that practitioners will respond by creating their own practices in line with some of our collective ethics for *doing justice*, expanding possibilities outwards from this experience.[9] In consultation, Ken Gergen described my process as an Expansive Inquiry, and sketched a picture:
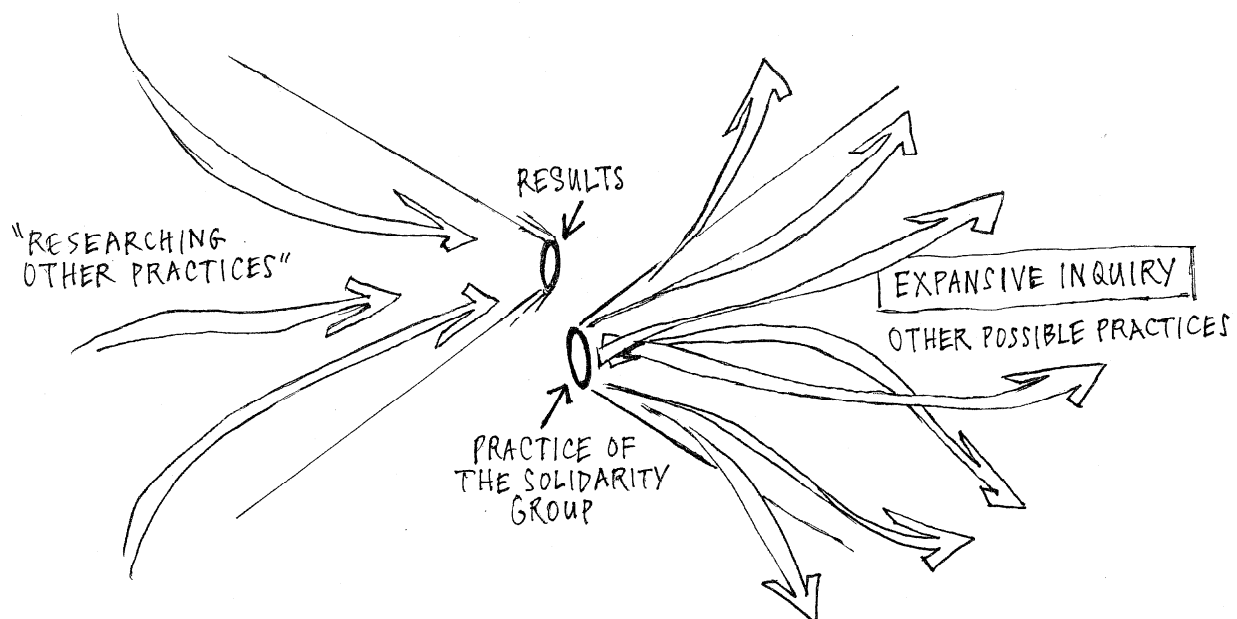
Strategies for Solidarity

I have engaged with many strategies to promote the spirit of solidarity throughout all aspects of this work, including the practice of the Solidarity Group and the process of the writing. I want to welcome all workers, including those unfamiliar with social justice language, into the work. To serve this purpose in this project, a new community worker, Jaime Wittmack, serves as an outside reader and a cultural consultant.[10] Jaime read all of my drafts and offered a critique to encourage clear-enough writing, accessibility, and promote the purpose of the writing, which is to engage and invite, not marginalize. This consultation was generative in multiple ways. For example, Jaime encouraged me to use 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 "less than". Jaime suggested

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[9] American Collaborative Therapist, Bill Madsen, has advocated the importance of adopting a collaborative stance alongside families as opposed to adherence to particular models (2007). His teachings of stance over model have informed me.

[10] Waldegrave & Tamasese (1993)

I introduce the people I am referencing, and identify their profession and culture. This practice allows Jaime to have some context and possible connection to the knowledge in the reference.

I have also engaged cultural consultants from anarchist and activist communities, queer and transgendered communities, as well as refugees and survivors of political violence and torture. These cultural consultants have offered critiques of this writing with an aim towards more accountability and not mis-taking or appropriating the ideas. The qualification for these consultants is not their academic certification but rather their life experiences and positionings. Seeking this critique has made room for me to be able to share some of the teachings I have received from these communities in ways that are in accord with a spirit of solidarity. I have also sought the teachings of formal and informal scholars in an attempt to be accountable to the theories and knowings about which I was not erudite. This inspiring and committed collection of folks has served as my Solidarity Team for this inquiry.

I see references as a gift to the reader and, to invite more accountability, I identify my references in terms of their multiple cultural locations.[11] Referencing widely, and attributing cultural knowledges to more than published works, helps 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 footnoting invites more history-making from the communities which have informed my work. Practices of storytelling and in particular co-writing some of these stories have helped bring the ideas from the academic realm into practice. Negotiating permission for this storytelling requires slowing down the process and extensive back-and-forth dialogue. I name groups, organizations and people when they have agreed to that. Other times I have purposefully misconstrued details to invite some anonymity. I have done this when I have been unable to connect with people across time and geography to get their overt consent, or when people have requested that I do so.

I have resisted ideas of total confidentiality in order to fully credit and name people's contributions and not subsume their ideas into my voice. My mixed approach to confidentiality has not been smooth, and I am reluctantly participating in the marginalizing of some communities by perpetrating the use of pseudonyms. My aim in doing this has been 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 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 have been made public by this messy and inconsistent use of pseudonyms and names.[12]

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[11] The gift of extensive referencing was the theme of an interview of myself and Colin Sanders by Allan Wade which occurred as part of a workshop at City University, Vancouver, in 2007.

[12] Canadian social construction informed therapist, Janice DeFehr offers interesting ideas in terms of dialogical methodology and invites a messy and generative process (2007).

Early in this writing process Sallyann Roth critiqued my use of explanation and definition, and suggested that I increase my use of description. This discernment between description and explanation has been liberatory. Wittgenstein writes that, "We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place".[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 about which I am writing and creates a space for the reader's own perspective. 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."[14] Describing the Guiding Intentions and the Solidarity Group practice is a less daunting and more useful task than attempting to define them.

Transformations Already Alive, or Percolating in My Work

The reflexivity of this 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.[15]

Engaging in this process has been generative in terms of the emergent creation of new practices in my work with community workers that are outside the scope of this writing. 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 generative dialogues these consultations fostered, have been expansive and illuminating. They have provided much of what has been pedagogical for me in the process. I experience all of these unexpected developments as surprising and nourishing support for my own sustainability.

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.

2. "Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right"[16]

A. Fears in Relation to the Solidarity Group Practice Itself

I believe that all conversations of a supervisory or training nature are inherently risky. I also believe it is more risky, and especially more risky to clients, if we do not have these conversations. Primarily my fears in relation to the Solidarity Group are of not practicing in accord with the ethical stance described in the Guiding Intentions.

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[13] Wittgenstein in Shotter, 2008, pp. 13.

[14] I got this from Shotter & Katz (1998, pp. 81; Andersen 1991, pp. 158). Their amplification of Andersen's attention to "understanding" was news to me, despite my multiple previous readings of his words.

[15] Tuhiwai Smith (1999)

[16] DiFranco (1993)

There are real limits to the replication of the practice of the Solidarity Group and I have attempted to be clear that I am not necessarily promoting this practice so much as the Guiding Intentions which uphold it. Any model of practice, which does not engage with ethics, has the potential to do harm. The Solidarity Group is not immune to this critique. The Solidarity Group does not necessarily translate "as-is" into different contexts. It requires practitioners to take it as their own and feel entitled to change it so that it can be of use.

The heart of the Solidarity Group is the doing of solidarity and community-making. This relies on some pre-existing understandings and points of unity between participants. If a given Solidarity Group is not in line with the ethical positioning of the Guiding Intentions, it could actually be harmful to go forward with this practice. There might be lasting impacts on the community's ability to engage collectively with the spirit and practices of solidarity. This kind of affront to the solidarity of the community could happen if the participants were actually not witnessed, or if their experiences were disappeared, ignored or marginalized. A sense of solidarity would also be harmed if Reflecting Witnesses responded with judgment or advice giving and this was not responded to by the Interviewer. The role of the Interviewer is key, and all of these risks speak to the necessity of the Interviewer engaging with moral courage to bolster and actively promote Structuring Safety. I am aware that my own ways of being are well suited to this task; others have different ways of being which might work differently, better, or not as well. While I have firmly held convictions, and bring great passion to the work, I hold these qualities with a light touch. I am confident that there are many paths to Structuring Safety. I am also curious about how Interviewers with different ways of being from mine might successfully go about this work.

There is some risk of righteousness being enacted in the Solidarity Group connected to the overt aims to *do justice* and the practice's connections with activist cultures. For example, if the Interviewer engages with righteousness, an anti-oppression lecture could happen on the backs of the participants. Of course this is a risk in all conversations as they exist within relationships of power. I am also aware of the power inherent in my influence as the Interviewer in terms of deciding what is attended to and what is not. Often I am invited inside organizations where I have access to power which is not balanced with responsibility.

As Ani DiFranco says," Any tool is a weapon if you hold it right".[17] I believe that the Solidarity Group can be used in harmful ways if it is picked up in a mechanistic or formulaic way.

B. Fears Related to the Ethical Positioning of the Work

Ethically, my greatest fear in relationship to the Solidarity Group is that the practice might be utilized as a technique in ways that are incommensurate with a spirit of solidarity. Work which is inspired by social justice activists and movements can be distilled into models which are used for creating profit in ways that are entirely against the ethics which inspired them. Thus, while models may serve a purpose, they cannot stand alone, and need to be accompanied by ethics. For example, the Solidarity Group could be engaged to help staff teams socially construct their engagement in exploitative and oppressive projects as more

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[17] DiFranco (1993)

palpable. The pre-existing conditions that promote solidarity and justice doing are necessary if this practice is not to be co-opted.[18]

Scottish anti-psychiatrist R.D. Laing writes about the risk of psychiatric interviews serving as "Degradation Ceremonies", a term he borrowed from the writings of American sociologist Garfinkel.[19] I fear that the Solidarity Group has the potential to serve as a ritual of degradation if the ethical stance which supports it is not put into practice, and a person or persons experience the group as degrading, oppressive, or pathologizing.

I hold close the discomfort that, despite my best intentions, I may replicate oppressive practices in my facilitation of the Solidarity Group. It is possible that I could inadvertently help accommodate workers to systems that keep clients suffering. I share this fear with community workers who fear that they may be accommodating clients to situations of oppression.

There is some risk of activists' work and knowledge being appropriated and subsumed by people working from academic frameworks. bell hooks writes about this concern in relation to early writings from feminist communities. 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 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.[20]

A less egregious fear is that the practices of the Solidarity Group 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.[21] Over time, however, anti-ads became trendy and *Adbusters* finally became an unofficial textbook for advertisers, ultimately becoming a tool of selling.[22] The potential for liberatory tactics to be de-politicized or co-opted 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 people I know have the moral courage to confront me as a practice of solidarity. I don't want my ethical stance for *doing justice* as outlined in this writing and described as the Guiding Intentions, to be read as universal, fixed, or

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[18] Tom Hayden (2008) writes eloquently about the overt and covert co-option of activists and activist knowledges. Hayden, a former California Senator and lifetime activist, was influential in the Students for a Democratic Society movement in the 1960s. He was a primary author of *The Port Huron Statement* of 1962, which served as a manifesto for the Students for a Democratic Society movement, and still serves as a relevant document in social justice movements.

[19] Laing (1967), Garfinkel (1956)

[20] See bell hooks' chapter on Feminist Education for Critical Consciousness in *Feminism Is for Everybody* (2000).

[21] Adbusters: Journal of the Mental Environment.

[22] Heath & Potter (2004*)*

stridently correct. I want to continue to foster my strong interest in hearing about useful ethical stances developed by other community workers.

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. I do, however, plan to be accountable for that privilege.

Finally, I have some concerns that this work might be seen as simply derivative of other uses of Reflecting Teams. This interpretation would disappear the activist orientation and the spirit of solidarity that is central to the meaning and usefulness of these dialogues. The structure, while important, provides the scale. The dialogical engagement with this particular ethical stance for *doing justice* provides the jazz.

ENDNOTE

My purpose in this writing is to illuminate my ethical stance for *doing justice* through rich descriptions of the Guiding Intentions which support this stance, and a close encounter with the particular practice of the Solidarity Group.

I work to support community workers who work alongside clients who struggle in the unjust margins of our communities. My response to the question of how we can support community workers to work in ways that are in accord with our collective ethics for social justice has taken the form of the Guiding Intentions which provide the scaffolding for the practice of the Solidarity Group.

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 this pragmatic activist approach to inquiry the value lies in what it can do, not what it can say.[23] My hope is that practitioners will take up this invitation to join in a collaborative inquiry,[24] and contribute multiple and generative responses to the Guiding Intentions and develop new practices. It would be increasingly sustaining for me to hear back from community workers who take up this invitation and further 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."[25]

In bridging activism and community work my hope is that an ethical stance of *doing justice* can make a contribution to our collective sustainability: As with clients, we do not want to be merely survivors of this

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[23] Patti Lather, an American feminist poststructuralist social science researcher, 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).

[24] Gergen describes collaborative inquiry as a process in which the interests of participants inform the direction of the inquiry (2005).

[25] Uzelman (2005), pp. 17.

complex work. Rather, we want to be of use, acting in accord with the ethics we are committed to and fully alive across time.
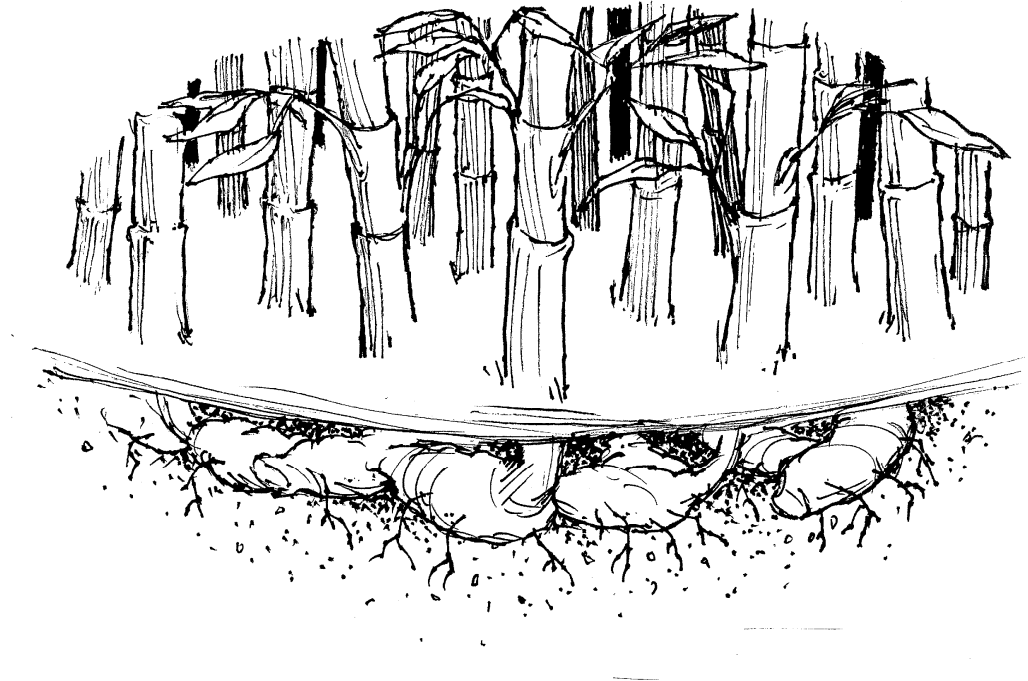
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This writing took place on Indigenous land belonging to Coast Salish, Burrard and Musqueam Nations, and which was never surrendered.

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[422] From the Poem *To Be Of Use* by Marge Piercy (1982, pp. 106).

APPENDIX I
Expansive Inquiry Questions for Participants of Solidarity Groups

REFLECTING ON THE SOLIDARITY GROUP EXPERIENCE:
QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW PARTNER

Please attend to these questions soon in order to promote an as-close-to-the-experience reflection as possible. I greatly appreciate your participation.

1. Thinking about what you noticed me doing or not doing in our conversation, was there anything you noticed that especially influenced what became possible for you in later parts of the conversation?

2. What did you as the Interview Partner do or not do that influenced what became possible for you in later parts of the conversation? If you see yourself as having acted to influence the development of our conversation, in what ways did you help to ensure that you and I had a useful and interesting initial conversation?

3. What stood out for you in the experience of hearing the Reflecting Witnesses talking to each other?

4. Did the Reflecting Witnesses say or do anything that touched you, interested you, or made some kind of difference to you that you have continued to think about? Or that comes up for you now that you are looking back on the experience?

5. How did your experience of our initial conversations differ or not differ from your experience of listening to the Reflecting Witnesses?

6. Did the Reflecting Witnesses' conversation in any way enrich, expand, limit, or diminish your experience of the initial conversation between you and me? If so, how?

7. Did you see or hear anything, as you think now about what happened then, that you would experience as the doing of solidarity, or community-making? If so briefly say what these were?

8. Did any of the words, or phrases, or ways we talked throughout the conversation, stand out for you? If so, what stood out? What meanings does each of these have for you?

9. Did you experience anything else throughout the conversation that felt like news, or fresh feeling? If you did, what was that news or fresh feeling and what meaning does it hold for you?

10. As you look back now, was there anything that I as the Interviewer might have done differently that you believe could have enhanced the process or made it more effective for you?

11. As you respond to these present questions and articulate your responses to them, do you notice anything else that interests you? If so, please say what that might be.

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REFLECTING ON THE SOLIDARITY GROUP EXPERIENCE: QUESTIONS FOR THE WITNESSES

Please attend to these questions soon in order to promote an as-close-to-the-experience reflection as possible. I greatly appreciate your participation.

1. Thinking about what you noticed me doing in our conversation, was there anything that especially influenced what became possible in later parts of the conversation?

2. What did you notice the Interview Partner do or not do that influenced what became possible in later parts of the conversation? Specifically, in what ways did the Interview Partner help to ensure that we had a useful and interesting initial conversation?

3. When the Interview Partner and I were initially talking to each other, did we say or do anything that touched you, interested you, or made some kind of difference to you that you have continued to think about? Or that comes up for you now that you are looking back on the experience?

4. Did the Reflecting Witnesses' conversation in any way enrich, expand, limit, or diminish your experience of the conversations between me and the Interview Partner? If so, how?

5. What stood out for you in the conversation between me and the Interview Partner, as we reflected on the conversation between the Reflecting Witnesses?

6. How did your experience of listening to these reflections from me and the Interview Partner differ or not differ from your experience of speaking with the other Reflecting Witnesses?

7. Did you see or hear anything, as you think now about what happened then, that you would experience as the doing of solidarity or community-making? If so, briefly say what these were?

8. Did any of the words, or phrases, or ways we talked throughout the conversation, stand out for you? If so, what stood out? What meanings does each of these have for you?

9. Did you experience anything else throughout the conversation that felt like news or fresh feeling? If you did, what was that news, or fresh feeling and what meaning does it hold for you?

10. As you look back now, was there anything that I as the Interviewer might have done differently that you believe could have enhanced the process or made it more effective?

11. As you respond to these present questions and articulate your responses to them, do you notice anything else that interests you? If so, please say what that might be.

Reynolds & Roth, 07

QUESTIONS TO STRUCTURE THE CONVERSATION FOLLOWING THE SOLIDARITY GROUP WITH CONSULTANTS.

Now that we are on the other side of the conversation:

What specific practices did you see that you believe were most meaningful for this Solidarity Group?

Did specific practices or a pattern of practices that you observed seem to be a manifestation of certain principles? If so what are these principles?

Did you see or hear anything, as you think now about what just happened, that you would experience as the doing of solidarity, or community-making?

Did you experience anything throughout the conversation that felt like news, or fresh feeling? If you did, what was that news or fresh feeling and what meaning does it hold for you?

Did you attend to anything that connects with an embodied way of engaging in dialogue?

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APPENDIX II. TRAINING AND SUPERVISION EXERCISES

I. QUESTIONING *NORMAL:* AN INQUIRY INTO GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Connect in groups of three people with whom you have enough safety to engage in a conversation about your own identity and your relationship to your gender and sexuality.

You are welcome to use the questions offered as a guide for your conversation

Gender Identity

When was it decided if you were a man or a woman? Who had the power to decide your gender? Were there stories of your preferred gender told before you were born?

Did you ever transgress the gender you were assigned to? What were the consequences? Who was an ally in these transgressions? Did anyone in your life role model different ways to be a man or woman that were outside the normal performances?

When did you learn that there are more than 2 ways to perform gender? How did you respond to this learning?

What possibilities are open to you if gender is not held to 2 opposed ways of being?

Sexual Orientation

Do you remember teachings about who was an appropriate gender for you to desire?

Where did these messages come from? Who held up these rules? Who transgressed them?

Did you ever question your desire for only the opposite gender? If you did have desire for same gendered or differently gendered people, how did you respond to this? Who was or would have been an ally to you?

 What consequences would you anticipate, or did you experience?

How would, or how is, your life different if you had not been constrained to desire only the opposite gender?

Questioning Normal in relation to our work

Has this conversation invited you to question what is normal? If so, what differences might seeing yourself as other than normal make for your clients? Your self/other people in your life?

How does this conversation invite you to make more room for your clients and fellow workers to be fully present as all of who they are?

Are your reminded of anything that you know about who you prefer to be from this conversation? If so, what difference might that make for clients, co-workers, people in your life?

How might you hold on to these ideas about fluidity and performative identity in your work?

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II.   HONOURING OURSELVES IN COMMUNITY WORK

1. What experiences in your life have prepared you for this Community Work?

2. What qualities and ways of being do you honour in yourself as a qualification for this difficult work?

3. Consider a person you have worked alongside and specifically a time when you were most "of use":

   ➔   If that person was here, what would they say about the qualities and ways of being you enact that support you in being of use to them?

   ➔   Would this be news to you?

   ➔   How might you catch them up on this conversation?

   ➔   What kind of meaning might it hold for them to be a part of sustaining you?

4. What is the history of the qualities that qualify you for this work?

   ➔   Who in your life modeled these qualities and ways of being?

5. Who are your influences, or your mentors?

   ➔   What did they see in you?

   ➔   What would it mean to them to be caught up on how influential they were/are in your life, and in your Community Work?

6. Have you always included these folks, families, cultural knowledges in your picture of what qualifies you for Community Work?

   ➔   What difference does it make to not attribute school/training/supervision with all of your readiness for this work?

7. What meaning does your work hold for you?

   ➔   Your team?

   ➔   Your family?

   ➔   The communities you work alongside?

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