# Resisting burnout with justice-doing

**By Vikki Reynolds**

Vikki Reynolds is a therapeutic supervisor/activist interested in liberating justice, resistance, and solidarity, from the margins of our work into the ethical centre. Vikki's therapeutic experience includes clinical supervision and therapy with refugees and survivors of torture, mental health and substance abuse counsellors, and working alongside transgendered and queer communities. Vikki can be contacted via www.vikkireynolds.ca

In this writing I critique the individualism and neutrality of burnout, and offer an approach for resisting burnout with collective sustainability that is shouldered-up by justice-doing. This requires an understanding of collective ethics, and the spiritual pain that we hold as community workers and therapists when we are forced to work against our ethics. I describe the role of justice-doing and solidarity in relation to our sustainability, and practices which can foster our sustainability collectively, including embracing Earth Democracy, co-creating collective ethics, contesting cynicism, attending to immeasurable outcomes, and giving-it-back practices. I connect staying fully alive in our work with therapeutic and possibly revolutionary love, and reflect on the powerful transformations our work offers us. I address the possibilities of connecting with the social divine and transforming the contexts of social injustice in which clients live and we work.

Keywords: burnout, sustainability, justice-doing, spiritual pain, collective ethics, solidarity

*A compassionate doctor and nurse insist I promise them that I won't take a desperate client home with me. Our client, an unwell older man, is going to be put on the street when the addiction clinic closes. We're already an hour past closing. There is no detox bed that will take him; the ambulance workers assess that he doesn't require emergency services; support workers are unable to assist because there is a warrant for his arrest; the police say they have a warrant for him but will not arrest him at this time; and there are no shelter beds. Armed with a load of clean second-hand clothes, which he doesn't want to put on until he is able to have a shower, I walk alongside his sketchy shuffle up to an emergency shelter where he lines up outside and will wait for a few more hours to possibly get mattress space on the floor. I am going to return to the clinic: I am turning around. I know I will never be able to forget this moment of physically turning my back on him. Nothing in my professional training has prepared me for the waves of shame, betrayal and dishonour that go through me. I put one foot in front of the other and walk away from this suffering elderly man. I return to the companionship of the doctor and nurse as we keep each other from taking this man home. I still look for him.*

## INTRODUCTION

I don't think as therapists and community workers we're burning out. The problem of burnout is not in our heads or in our hearts, but 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. What harms me are the injustices and indignities suffered by clients and my frustrating inability to personally change the unjust structures of society they struggle with and live in (Reynolds, 2009). My ethical positioning for supervision alongside workers resisting burnout attempts to bridge the worlds of activism with therapy and community work, and is informed by a spirit of social justice, practices of solidarity, and an ethic of resistance (Reynolds 2002, 2008, 2010a).

In this writing I will outline an analysis of burnout, and offer an approach for resisting burnout that is shouldered-up by justice-doing. This requires an understanding of collective ethics, and the spiritual pain that we hold when we are forced to work against our ethics. I will describe the role of solidarity and practices which can foster our sustainability collectively. Finally I will connect staying fully alive in our work with revolutionary love, and reflect on the powerful transformations our work offers us and possibilities of connecting with the social divine (Lacey, 2005). This paper contains many ideas and is not intended as a thorough exploration of practice, but an invitation to consider some ways we can borrow from the world and work of activism. Engaging with justice-doing constructs our collective desire as more than resisting the harms that are part of our work. As community workers and therapists we want to be fully alive, open to transformation and of use to people across our lifespan in all of our paid and unpaid work.

When I speak about resisting burnout with justice-doing, I am talking about something different than addressing the 'transmission of traumatic stress' (Hernandez et al, 2007, p. 231), Vicarious Trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990), Secondary Traumatic Stress (Figley, 1998), Burnout (Figley, 1998), Compassion Fatigue (Figley, 2002), or Empathic Stress Disorder (Weingarten, 2004).[1] I believe the problem of burnout is not in the minds of workers, and clients did not put the problem there. Our struggles are rooted in the injustice of society, and so I respond collectively and relationally to our work, shored up with a spirit of solidarity, and connected by an ethic of justice-doing which embraces clients, workers, communities, and societies. I am suggesting the co-creation of something like Earth Democracy (Shiva, 2005), which respects the dignity, interconnectedness and sustainability of life in all of its domains.

Burnout is an idea that is very individually structured, as if there is something about us personally that makes us measure up to this work or not. I think that the prevalence of what is being called burnout says more about our society than it says about individual workers. I do not deny that as therapists and community workers we can be harmed and experience pain in our work, even to the extent of needing to leave the work, or take time

out. What I am contesting is the prescriptive, individualised accusations burnout levies against workers which invisibilise and obscure the contexts of social injustice we work in, and blame clients for the harms we experience (Reynolds, 2008, 2010a).

I believe we have an ethical responsibility to engage with enough self-care to be able to be fully present with clients, keep their suffering at the centre, and bring hope to the work. And yet it can seem self-indulgent to attend to our own sustainability against a backdrop of the lived exploitation and pain of clients.

Burnout sounds like we're toys with disposable batteries that are used up. As if we're not doing enough yoga or drinking enough water and these are important things, I do yoga and I drink water but self-care is not enough to offset the issues of poverty, violence, and basic dignity people struggle with. No-one advocating self-care suggests that it will create the necessary practical changes in the daily lived realities of clients. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there are twelve determinants of health, the first of these is income and social status (2006). Yoga does not create more units of housing or make welfare rates livable. Focusing on the self-care of community workers does nothing to address the social determinants of health with which clients struggle.

The costs of our unjust societies fall on people who are impoverished and marginalised, and whose human rights are ignored and abused, and counsellors who work alongside them bear witness to this suffering that other counsellors have the privilege of choosing not to see (Reynolds, 2008). When self-care is prescribed as the antidote for burnout, it puts the burden of working in unjust contexts onto the backs of us as individual workers. Working alongside people with more money, resources and status is less likely to result in what gets called burnout and can make those workers look more professional. I don't want to engage with a false hierarchy of pain, as all people's suffering is real, but acknowledge important differences in privilege. We don't want to be pitted against each other as workers. The problem of staying alive in the work gets constructed as a very individual project. Yet the issues are social and require political willingness, massive resources, direct action, and collective accountability.

**1. Justice-doing**

Activism has taught me to structure social justice work into my life. Neither a hobby nor an obsession, it is a commitment to a way of being across my lifespan in all of my paid and unpaid work. There are teachings in every thread of the rich fabric of the helping professions which advocate for workers to take overt stances for justice-doing: to challenge the status quo and to address the political issues of our times (James, 1995). Martiniquean psychiatrist, Franz Fanon, unmasked the myth of neutrality in psychiatry in his earliest writings about the French government's widespread use of torture in the Algerian War of Independence, and was part of a tradition of anti-colonial theorists who always addressed the power of the helping professions (1963, 1967). 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. 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 (Furlong, 2008; Furlong & Lipp, 1995). When we enact justice-doing in our work, we are not in new territory, but are weaving ourselves into these rich and diverse histories; although these histories are not always told, taught, or honoured.

If we embrace our work as justice-doing we will use our power as community workers and therapists 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 problematise and critique the constructs of neutrality, objectivism, and disengaged professionalism. Deconstructing power and reading power relations (Foucault, 1972, 1980; Derrida, 1978) are brilliant contributions to just practice, but we also hope to create something new and liberatory in our societies (Cushman, 1995, 2006). For me, this entails participating in direct action activism when that is a good tactic for change. As German philosopher Karl Marx said, the point is not just to interpret the world, but to change it (1994, p. 118).

Addressing private pain/public issues comes from various activist traditions. When I speak of the

individualisation of injustice and the privatisation of pain (such as the criminalisation of poverty), I am connecting with these rich histories from both activist and practitioner traditions. My first teachings that named the intersection of public issues and private problems came from feminism. 'The Personal is Political' is the title of an article that American radical feminist, Carol Hanisch, wrote in 1970, though she makes no claims to owning the phrase or the idea. Hanisch writes, 'They belittled us to no end for trying to bring our so-called "personal problems" into the political arena'. In community work, Kiwi Tamasese of the Just Therapy team from Aotearoa/New Zealand speaks of 'private issues, public problems' (2001). Imelda McCarthy, from Ireland's Fifth Province team, writes of how 'public problems become private and privatized issues' in therapeutic practice (2001, p. 267). I am accompanied by these practitioners, and we are collectively shouldered-up by a rich history of voices legitimising justice-doing. Like most community workers, I have never been neutral about poverty, sexual abuse, or torture – I'm against them. Being neutral in these contexts can become a political position for the status quo.

**2. Collective ethics**

Collective ethics are those important points of connection that weave us together as therapists and 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 within teams of workers to invite a collective commitment to these ethics and create shared meanings. 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 multiple possibilities that can expand our usefulness.

What is most important is that we enact our ethics. It is in the doing that ethics are revealed. Theory, the ideas that support our work, is revealed through an examination of practice, or what we do (Reynolds, 2010b). 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 abeyance until the practice can be shown to reveal the theory. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation which resists authoritative truths, and engages with multiple meanings from different voices.[2]

A hermeneutics of suspicion invites a hopeful yet sceptical position which requires that we stand in critical distance from the claims to ethics we make, and opens us to the possibility that our practice may reveal something other than our intention. For example, when teams tell me being client-centred is held as a collective ethic, I ask how every action is holding clients at the centre of the work, and what clients would say about this claim. This hopeful scepticism invites us to continually ask these questions about how we are ethically 'walking the talk' as activists say:

- What are the ethics that drew you to do this work? What ways of being in this work do you value, hold close, maybe even sacred? What ethics are required for your work, without which you would be unable to work?
- What is the history of your relationship to these values and ethics? Who taught you this? How have these ethics shown up in your life and work?
- What ethics or values do we hold collectively?
- What ethics are alive in our work when we're doing work that clients experience as most useful?
- How do we do this work in ways that are in accord with our collective ethics?
- How can the holding close of our collective ethics foster our sustainability and transformation across time?

**3. Spiritual pain**

I believe that spiritual pain and isolation are more useful ways to understand the harms helpers suffer in the work than the prescriptive and individual ideas of burnout. When counsellors are able to work in accord with their ethical stance, sustainability becomes possible (Reynolds, 2009). But social structures and limited resources, which force counsellors to work in ways that go against their ethics, result in what I call spiritual pain. This

spiritual pain I'm talking about is the discrepancy between what feels respectful, humane, generative, and contexts which call on us to violate the very beliefs and ethics that brought us to therapy and counselling work.

Many therapists and community workers immediately resonate with this concept of spiritual pain. I believe that spiritual pain is what leads many people to leave our 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 therapists and community workers cannot bear, but the contexts of injustice which don't allow for us to work in alignment with our ethics.

Fostering sustainability in the face of this spiritual pain is difficult when the unjust conditions of people's lives do not improve, and we experience our work as shovelling water. We're working hard, and working harder isn't working. The smell of a particularly individual incompetence begins to creep in. This is the dirty work of isolation (Reynolds, 2009).

We learn our work on the backs of clients. I believe this is a hard and often unspoken truth of our collective work. Our work is not innocent, and as counsellors we do not suffer the largest consequences for our incompetence or lack of experience: clients do. This can be paralysing for counsellors and requires our solidarity and commitment to the work.

Care of the community worker is at the centre 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. In case consultations, counsellors will often speak of times they have transgressed against clients, only to have other workers join in by denigrating the client to make the unethical behaviour of the counsellors appear reasonable. This is not done out of maliciousness. However, in staff-centred teams, the politics of politeness and our own imperatives to make things feel better by prioritising harmonious relations (Allan Wade, personal communication, 2010) over critique that can lead to more just relations, invite us to smooth things over with our fellow workers. This doesn't benefit the worker, who holds spiritual pain that they have transgressed the client's dignity and their own ethics. Smoothing it over also requires pathologising identity attacks (Goffman, 1963) against the client. Instead of smoothing things over, I see this spiritual pain as a potential resource (Bird, 2006) to the community worker, a knowing-in-the-bones, whose immediacy calls out for an ethical investigation. Here are questions that I might engage to investigate this relationship with spiritual pain:

- What ethic or way of being that you respect about your work have you transgressed? Why is this ethic important to you? How did you act to transgress it?
- Why is this spiritual pain present in this moment, in work with this person, and in this context?
- Given you've acted in ways that aren't in line with what you most respect in your work, what would the absence of this spiritual pain mean?
- How will you invite accountability to the client for your actions, and begin to repair the relationship? How can we shoulder you up in this accountability work?
- How can you hold this experience of spiritual pain close and use it in the future to re-member (Myerhoff, 1982; Madigan, 1997) your relationship with the ethics you hold?
- What does it say about your relationship to ethics that you've brought this forward in our team?
- What do you know about our collective ethics that might have made it easier to bring this forward? How can this transgression be useful for all of us collectively?

These reflexive questions (Tomm, 1987; Madigan, 2011) speak to what Australian narrative therapist Michael White would call the absent but implicit (2000a), and 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 ethical stances. 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.

**4. Solidarity**

Teachings from solidarity inform me that a group is more useful than even powerful individuals: more people, more better. My understandings of solidarity are derived from time honoured activist traditions of envisioning collective ethics, looking for connective practices of resisting oppression (Wade, 1996), and promoting justice-doing. Solidarity speaks to an understanding that just ways of being are interconnected as are our struggles and sites of resistance. We are meant to do this work together. No One Is Illegal, an anti-colonial activist group says, 'Intersecting oppressions. Uniting resistance' (n.d.). I am heartened by their invitation to see all of our actions for justice-doing as loosely joined in a spirit of solidarity. The work of justice-doing is profoundly collaborative and there are many paths: 'We do this work on the shoulders of others and we shoulder others up' (Reynolds, 2010a).

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. Solidarity makes the project of our sustainability less daunting and more possible. Solidarity also allows for imperfect alliances, where we create enough trust with each other for a critique to be spoken, heard and responded to accountably. Solidarity and our imperfect partnerships make it possible for these necessary hard conversations about our work to occur and be experienced as something different than blame and accusation. In these ways, the spirit of solidarity inspires us to better serve clients (Reynolds, 2010b).

For example, 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 is a task for our society, yet it falls on individual workers. Those of us who do not have to make these choices, or use this power, can sit in judgement 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 this difficult choice was the individual worker's in a very personal way (White, 2002). We ignore 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 can transform (Reynolds, 2010c). Brazilian critical educator, Paulo Freire, teaches that solidarity goes beyond naming oppressions and oppressors, and 'implies the transformation of oneself, institutions, and the world' (2001).

Working in contexts that lack social justice can seduce us into thinking we must do everything, and this is where solidarity and collective ethics can be a great resource to us. Sustainability requires that we balance responsibility with power (Reynolds, 2010a). We cannot be responsible for the abundance of need, but only for that work which is within our power to accomplish. A spirit of solidarity invites us to witness and connect with the important work of others, helping us to envision our collective work as both do-able and sustainable.

**5. Fostering collective sustainability**

For me, sustainability describes 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 onto 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 (Reynolds, 2010b). We promote sustainability in relationships with each other, not as a series of isolated, individual projects. I am interested in our collective care, and our collective sustainability, which is reciprocal, communal and inextricably linked with spirited practices of solidarity.

I am inspired by questions not so much of resisting burnout, but of how we can act in solidarity to foster our collective sustainability and keep the spirit of our collective ethics alive in our work and lives:

- How can we be connected with our aliveness?
- How do we hold onto our collective ethics more fully?
- How can we act in solidarity to keep the spirit of justice alive in our collective work and lives?
- How can we change the unjust structures that oppress people?
- What are the boundaries and requirements of justice and just practice in a society which is more just to some than to others?

My understandings of sustainability are inspired by what I learned in communities of environmental activism and linked to what Indian environmental activist and physicist, Vandana Shiva, calls Earth Democracy (2005). Shiva includes sustainability as a principal of an Earth Democracy, which respects the dignity of all life including ecological non-human 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.

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

I am interested in collective sustainability because we are connected in our work alongside people who are marginalised. 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. The greatest resource available to us in the relational work that we are doing is ourselves and each other.

A. **We are irreplaceable**

An organisation 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 organisational 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 immeasurable when relationships with individual workers are torn apart. 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. American family therapist, Lynn Hoffman, describes this rupture in relationship between therapists or community workers and clients as akin to 'severing an artery' (2002, p. 242).

B. **Do-able job descriptions**

I work alongside housing workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which is the poorest neighbourhood in Vancouver and the poorest off-reserve area in Canada. Housing workers are struggling with sustainability which cannot be a surprise, as the United Nations envoy on housing says Vancouver has a world level crisis in housing (Johal, 2007). Since signing the bid for the 2010 Olympics, Vancouver has more than tripled homelessness

(Keller, 2010). When housing workers are able to provide social housing for under-housed and homeless people, the housing agreements can break down because total abstinence is often required for some social housing, and homeless people often struggle with substance abuse and what gets understood as 'mental illness'. 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.

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 the worker is responsible for all of the program's issues 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.

C. **Sustainability as accountability to clients**

In non-profit organisations, directors and supervisors often 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 that prioritise 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'.

D. **Diversity of work**

A diversity of work is another tactic I use to promote the sustainability of workers in the margins. For example, in rape crisis centres, counsellors often can 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. These same workers can also be on call to attend directly to victims of rape in emergencies. Such overtaxing schedules are driven by pressing needs of organisations 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 sustainability tactic and could perhaps be an ethical obligation of organisations. This diversity of work shows up as engagement in group as well as individual work, participating in policy design and implementation, passing our knowledge on to other workers in informal training, community education, direct activism, and creative practices of job/task sharing.

**6. Resisting a sense of specialness**

Our relationships with sustainability are sometimes put at risk by the seduction to see our work as special. I believe we should resist using war metaphors, such as 'in the trenches' to describe our work (Todd & Wade, 1994). 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 suffering 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' (1995, p. 205), where clients

one-up each other to compete over whose pain is more worthy. These clients are responding to entrenched ideas of deserving and undeserving victims. Resisting participation in hierarchies of pain and pissing contests creates space to acknowledge everyone's pain, without invisiblising the fact that the contexts are very different. We resist normalising the contexts that are unacceptable without elevating ourselves as workers. Our work is particular and difficult, but not special.

Many community workers who work alongside people who are struggling in the margins of society feel uncomfortable when the exploitation endured by clients is used to esteem us as practitioners, and construct our identities as extraordinary. Being put upon a pedestal is actually a position 'outside of', as if our work is other than normal. It is important to contest being put on a pedestal, as it does several things. Firstly, it exploits and appropriates 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 to change the oppressive contexts of clients' lives.

Leonard Peltier is a leader of the American Indian Movement, and perhaps one of the most well-known political prisoners in the world. (International human rights organisations proclaim Leonard's innocence and call for his release. For more context to his story, see the film Incident at Oglala [Apted & Chobanian, 1992], and the website of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee.) 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. He is adamant that he has done only what his culture has taught him to do in defending his community and his elders:

> *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.* (1999, p. 9)

There are times when working with people who are marginalised can devalue the work of the helper (Suzanne Hinds, personal communication, 2007). Some of my greatest successes in the Downtown Eastside community have been getting people respectful dental care and dentures. This work is sometimes judged as 'not the real work', meaning in my case, not real therapy. Instead, it is seen as support work or community work, which devalues what we have done and the meanings it holds, while at the same time disrespecting these other legitimate forms of relational work.

**7. Contesting cynicism and bringing hope**

Our work can replicate the kinds of dominance we hope to alleviate; accommodating people to lives of poverty, and participating in social control. Workers can respond to this by rolling up their sleeves to transform our work, policy, and organisations, or by throwing up their hands, signing onto cynicism, and abdicating responsibility to create change. Cynicism works like a debilitating social dis-ease. Workers siding with cynicism can attack the slightest efforts of other workers to make change, 'Nothing can change, nothing ever changes here, and nothing you are going to try to do will make a difference. Whatever you're thinking of doing – we already know it, we've already tried it, and it doesn't work'.

Workers caught by cynicism can leave the burden of the work of the organisation with other workers, can act as lone wolves outside of policy, and can and have caused organisations to lose funding, launch expensive defences against investigations, and be closed down. In these instances, fellow workers lose employment and clients suffer the greatest losses.

Changing the structures and policies of our organisations is necessary, useful, but also limited. Responses are required not just from our managers, our organisations, 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 organisations for the contexts of injustice in which our clients live. This is no more just than blaming community workers for the injustices clients suffer.

Sustainability requires that we work in the world we are in, with what is, and not what should be. I'm

not suggesting we accommodate ourselves to oppression, but that we resist speaking of what should be in ways that are not connected to taking often courageous actions to make the needed changes that would allow us to work in alignment with our ethics, and provide effective and compassionate care. Cynicism can be simple. Bringing hope to our work with clients is more complex and more difficult.

It is our obligation as practitioners to bring reasonable hope, a believed-in-hope, or an embodied-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. For refugees and survivors of torture, this can be experiences of therapy that replicate interrogation. Transgender folks have told me of times they had to withstand transphobia and hate from workers they consider gate keepers in order to get access to the services they need.[3] Following these experiences, clients sometimes prudently decide never to engage with us as practitioners again. In these instances practitioners responsible for disrespectful and harmful practice have stolen the possibility and hope of useful work from the client's future.

Justice-doing requires on-going tenacious relationships with hope. Freire defies cynicism and inspires me when he says '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' (1970, pp. 72–73).

It is my ethical obligation as a therapeutic supervisor 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 globalised 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' (Korzybski, 1933, p. 750; Bateson, 1972), 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. 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 staying engaged with a believable hope required that I began to think and act in new ways.

**8. A knowing-in-the-bones that our work matters: 'Immeasurable' outcomes**

Our sustainability is connected to knowing and believing that our work matters. Yet how can our usefulness be measured? The ineffable, intangible and untraceable influences of our collective work cannot be measured. Much of the work we do in the margins goes unmeasured for lack of an instrument of measurement, or because what we do achieve is not prioritised, or recognised as having value. I work to track and 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 (Allan Wade, personal communication, 2008). 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 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?

People are more than the worst thing they have ever done. I learned this in activist work for the abolition of the death penalty, and from invitations to see the humanity of people who were on death row and later executed. (I acknowledge Roger Coleman, who was innocent, and Robert Harris, who was not, for this teaching.) A required competency of our work is to be able to co-create relationships of honour and dignity with 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 respond to us with their 'just anger' (Piercy, 1982, p. 88). 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 stories (Geertz, 1973; White, 2000, 2004) of who they prefer to be, who it is possible for them to be, and to reclaim small and precious pieces of the dignified and honouring ways 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 (Bird, 2000) ways of being. Peak House is a residential program for youth and their families struggling with substance abuse, exploitation and oppression.[4] In our work with young women, much changes in terms of their understandings of what they can do to be safe-r or safe-enough in the world: 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 often gets measured when young women leave this program is their level of use of drugs and alcohol. But there are immeasurable changes promoting safe-r ways of being that go unnoticed in all of our work with clients, including people who identify as men, gender variant, and trans.

Unhappenings are all that we can't measure because it never happens. A young man who is no longer participating in survival sex work because he has six months free of substances; the older client who doesn't need to be hospitalised 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 measurement?

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 centred (Elaine Connolly, personal communication, 2008). 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' (Uzelman, 2005, p. 17), which speak to the ways we make differences in immeasurable ways: stories of our collective sustainability.

**9. 'Giving-it-back' practices**

Borrowing from the Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous traditions in a giving-it-back practice (1998, 2001), 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. Re-connecting with other workers, and catching them up on the differences they have made in the lives of the people we work alongside, is not just a nice thing to do: it is an ethical obligation. I invite teams to overtly engage with giving-it-back as a community-making practice.

I worked with a First Nations young man at Peak House who had been totally failed by the school system, and carried a story of himself as 'stupid'. This wasn't his word, but he thought it fit. He didn't know basic mathematics, like long division, although he was probably sixteen. This young man worked hard to be accountable to his family and community for his disrespectful behaviour, and particular acts of violence. When our work was ending, I asked what had helped him make huge changes in his life and family, and specifically his relationship to alcohol. He said the most important thing was Peak House's alternative educational program, and specifically our teacher, Rick Pelan. This school experience was the first time he'd ever had a relationship of respect with a teacher who believed he was capable.

I invited our teacher into a Witnessing Group with this youth and all the folks from the program (Reynolds, 2002). My intention was to highlight the changes this youth had made and to impart his youth wisdom on making change and getting his life back from alcohol and disrespect to the other youth and all the counsellors. I interviewed this youth in front of the teacher and all the other youth and counsellors. From a listening position alongside the whole group, our teacher witnessed the differences his teaching and ways of being made for this youth. The youth named the difference that made a

difference (Bateson, 1972) as our teacher's slogging patience, ability to meet him where he was at without judgement, see him as intelligent, and not be put off by his responses to past harms at school. The teacher was amazed, and had no idea about the differences he had made.

Although it was not focused on our teacher, this Witnessing Group brought forward our teacher's ethics and compassionate engagement with skills and knowledges, which fostered his sustainability and usefulness. But this part of the conversation also provided the youth with an opportunity to give-it-back and acknowledge the help he had received, and provided witnesses for his own respectful and honourable ways of being. Without a giving-it-back witnessing practice, our teacher's fabulous work and usefulness would be kept secret from him. In fact, as the therapist, I may have silently absorbed the credit for the relational work which belongs to our teacher and this youth held up by the community of Peak House.

I use these questions to invite counsellors and community workers to engage in catching other workers up on the usefulness of their work to promote holding onto a faith that our work matters. 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 stories might be being told about your ways of being, usefulness and work right now?
- What practices of a faith or a believed-in-hope are alive in your work?
- What differences might a faith or believed-in-hope in the usefulness of your work make 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 as a giving-it-back practice?

**10. Revolutionary love**

My work is informed by teachings from my father, Bill Reynolds, who taught our extended family a kind of love that holds people together. Bill has an amazing capacity for loving that collects and holds in loyalty and belonging, great numbers of would-be lost souls. My mother, Joan Reynolds, taught us how to hold onto love together, tenaciously, amidst struggles and across time. These loving familial and cultural teachings are woven throughout my paid and unpaid work, and I believe that something we could call therapeutic love, and maybe even a revolutionary love, may be alive in our community and therapeutic work.

Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana's groundbreaking teachings on the biology of love greatly influenced the helping professions in the 1980s (Maturana & Valera, 1994). Maturana believed that love was fundamental to social activity, and that love does not come from being together: love is what brings us together.

The popular education/critical pedagogy movement offers important teachings for community workers and therapists adopting an ethical stance of justice-doing. For them the interconnectedness of love and community work has never been in question. Freire 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 love: It cannot co-exist with abuses of power' (1970, p. 71). Freire sees the goal of what he calls dialogue as no less than the liberatory transformation of the world! He sees dialogue as 'an act of creation' (1970, p. 70). 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.* (1978, pp. 70–71)

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 views the world as being in a constant state of transformation, and thinking that is always connected to action. In the context of work alongside marginalised and exploited people, many community workers find an affinity with Freire's lifework. This connection may be more influenced by practice than theory, as, in my experience, Freire's contributions are under referenced. (See: Paulo Freire: A critical encounter [McLaren & Leonard, 1993] for a thorough and critical overview of Freire's work.)

My understandings of resistance inform me that it is possible that love is happening all of the time, and that, in a small departure from Freire, oppression does not necessarily make love impossible. It is possible that people who are oppressed are also doing loving throughout those experiences. I know this because survivors of torture and political violence have taught me this. The kind of revolutionary love I'm talking about works as acts of resistance, and cannot wait for conditions of peace and security, but finds community and solidarity, and inspires dignity and resistance in all its overt and covert forms, even in the most desperate conditions.

I am inspired and heartened by Canadian psychiatrist Karl Tomm's invitation to acknowledge the possibility of therapeutic loving as an ethical stance (1990), and conversely the possibility of therapeutic violence, acknowledging the power of our positions and the possibilities of our relationships. I hold my stance for therapeutic loving loosely, and with a caution not to burden my clients or the workers I supervise with needing to respond in kind. This is not easily done and requires excellent therapeutic supervision and accountable reflexive questioning. In a co-supervisory conversation with my colleague, Canadian response-based therapist, Allan Wade, he brought forward these important tensions that I hold close,

> *I feel/have some kind of reservation about the notions of 'love' and 'revolutionary love', maybe because this seems to set the bar rather high, and too easily ties in with the idea of specialness on the part of the therapist. I'm also not sure the notion of revolutionary love doesn't call for something comparable in magnitude from the other, something rather more or different than they would want to, or feel able to, give. I think ordinary and civil, decent and friendly, routine and expectable, committed and free, is a linguistic frame in which to locate the kind of ethics you are laying out, and maybe this is what you mean by the concept*. (personal communication, 2011)

Our collective sustainability can be fostered by giving ourselves room to experience and practice our work on the basis of revolutionary love without requiring this of ourselves or anyone else, and without setting this up as the ultimate or more advanced expression of human relations. Revolutionary love orients us to the possibility of a profound and just connection that I want to foster and respect, but hold lightly.

**11. 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 and as persons. More than being sustained, we are often transformed in beautiful and at times sacred ways by our work with clients.

Liberation psychologist, Ignatio Martín-Baró, was a Jesuit priest and liberation theologian who believed in the possibility of psychologists taking active positions of justice-doing. Martín-Baró said 'to achieve the psychology of liberation demands first that psychology be liberated'(1994, p. 25). He was the first psychologist to impress upon me the possibility of psychology resisting abuses of power and the replication of acts of oppression. 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. Following his murder, Martín-Baró's writings were posthumously collected under the

title: Writings for a Liberatory Psychology (1994). Martín-Baró speaks eloquently of the possibility of relational transformation in our work 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.* (1994, p. 183)

Being open to transformation as workers does not mean that 'we're dealing with our stuff' or 'doing our personal work on the backs of clients'. Professional discourse, what Foucault calls regulative discourses, frameworks of intelligibility, and disciplinary regimes (1977), 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.

American collaborative therapist, Harlene Anderson, writes about her understandings of dialogue as mutually transforming for both the practitioner, and the client, who she refers to as the dialogue partner. Anderson says that in dialogue, 'each party, including the practitioner, is as much at-risk for change as any other' (2008, p. 19).

Michael White was the first therapist who invited me to find ways to acknowledge clients for their contributions to my transformations. He 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' (1995, p. 57). 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, appal, inspire, move and transform me (Reynolds, 2010d).

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 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 therapists and 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 acknowledgement 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 centred, 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 onto 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!

My experiences of therapy and community work have transformed me in terms of holding a more enriched and useful critical analysis. The experiences of activism and community work recursively transform and counter-inform each other, as we bring learnings across domains of practice.

Transformation is engendered in relationships of solidarity across difference, in helping relationships with co-workers and clients. These experiences teach us an intersectional analysis, where we attend to different domains of identity as they interconnect within and between our relationships with people with different access to power, privilege and oppression (Grant, 2008; Robinson, 2005; Crenshaw, 1995; Waldegrave & Tamasese, 1993). Relationships across difference are risky, and always more risky to those with less access to power. I

acknowledge that I have benefited from the hard-learned teachings of other people at their cost and my benefit. I have been educated by people from the Global South and people who are racialised and minoritised; by refugees, activists, and survivors of torture and political violence, including Indigenous survivors of 'residential schools'; and by people who are gender outlaws (Bornstein, 1994), and othered by heterosexual normativity.[5] I try to hold myself accountable to these teachings in my activism, and in my therapeutic and community work.

I am informed by radical Black feminist educator, bell hooks, and her long-time friend, white radical critical educator, Ron Scapp, who published a conversation to 'document these border crossings', the transformations that grew from their relationship across sites of privilege and oppression (2003, p. 106). 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 moved – transformed utterly. The end result of this transformation is mutuality, partnership, and community.* (Scapp in hooks, 2003, p. 115)

**12. The social divine**

As an activist I have been enlivened by participating in the spontaneous co-creation of spaces of justice-doing and embodied connections with unknown others who embrace me with spirited solidarity in direct action struggles against oppression. These moments amplify my hope for change on many fronts, and inspire me in my therapeutic work alongside marginalised people. These momentary experiences that feed my spirit and scaffold my believed-in-hope are part of what might make up the social divine:

> *The social divine … of which we speak allows us to recreate the cenacles that keep us warm and provide social spaces in the heart of the cold, inhuman, metropolis … The obvious dehumanization of urban life is giving birth to specific groupings for the exchange of passion and feelings.* (Maffesoli, 1996, pp. 42–42)

Australian activist/scholar, Anita Lacey, says, '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 environments' (2005, p. 404).

Pre-existing solidarity and points of connection that engender the social divine are present in our work alongside people living in the margins of our societies. I work to bring these relationships to the surface and to strengthen and multiply them. I look for what Richard Day, a Canadian anarchist theorist, writes about as 'affinities' (2004, p. 716). Affinities are momentary points of connection, where we meet each other and something occurs that is transformative and in line with our collective ethics for justice-doing.

The social divine speaks to a hoped-for-connection, and a social poetics (Katz & Shotter, 2004) of being held up collectively. In spirited relationships of solidarity, we experience ourselves as alongside others, and having those others connected with us by shared ethical responsibilities. More than a resistance to burnout, momentary experiences of the social divine feed our hungry hopes for just societies and global justice.

## (IN)CONCLUSIONS

In contrast to the prescriptive stories of burnout as the cost of my work, my life has been immeasurably expanded and my hopes amplified in response to my work. As community workers and therapists, 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. Engaging with a spirit of solidarity 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 work as both do-able and sustainable. Earth Democracy informs this work and speaks to the

relationship of the sustainability of the planet and sustainability of therapists and community workers through practices of justice-doing.

What follows is a story that speaks to the heart of my own relationship with collective sustainability and the social divine:

> *It's April 2009. The Olympics, which will cost seven to nine billion dollars, are still a year away and, while homelessness hasn't yet tripled, it will. The March Against Homelessness starts in three different parts of Vancouver. People collect and march towards each other, where we will merge and arrive at a site for a rally. I am marching alongside the people of the Downtown Eastside, walking with some guys who are pushing shopping carts, smoking cigarettes, and drinking from bottles wrapped in paper bags. Three First Nations women safety-pin a piece of cloth to my back that says 'Homes not Games'. We are a spirited and sceptical crew. A homeless man with stringy hair, who is walking beside me, is making up his own responses to chants that have us laughing alongside and enjoying his wit. At the moment we come up the incline of Robson Street we see a crowd of people from the West Side coming towards us. No shopping carts or jerry-rigged wheelchairs there, but lots of all-terrain baby strollers and expensive raingear. It is the convergence of two very different communities. The guy beside me stops walking. I feel palpably connected to him. This relational moment between me and this homeless man, connecting with all of the West Side marchers, is a moment of the social divine. Our differences back-grounded, not invisibilised: Our connections of solidarity fore-grounded. He looks at me and, through a genuinely surprised smile says, 'They're here for us'.*

## DEDICATION

In honour of the life work of Harriet Nahanee, an Indigenous Elder and 'residential school' survivor who died following her incarceration for protesting the ecological destruction of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

For everyone who participated in direct action against the gentrification, poverty, and homelessness caused by the Olympics – even if we are hockey fans. Especially the Anti Poverty Committee (APC) who at serious risks of their own safety succeeded in teaching everyone to connect the Olympics with homelessness, the Olympic Resistance Network (ORN), No One Is Illegal (noii), and communities of resistance from the Downtown Eastside.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great respect and thanks to all the folks I 'super'-vise for our collaborations and their teachings, crises, epiphanies, ethical dilemmas, passionate questioning, and fellowship, most especially the good people at RainCity Housing, WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women), and Peak House. This work is shouldered-up by my elders who taught me that our therapy community didn't just tolerate justice-doing but required it: Ignatio Martín-Baró of El Salvador, Imelda McCarthy & Nollaig Burne of the Irish Team, and Kiwi Tamasese, Charles Waldegrave, Warihi Campbell & Flora Tuhaka, the Just Therapy Folks of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Respect and solidarity to Stephen Madigan, Cheryl White & David Denborough who continually make room for my work, but more so, provide the scaffolding and spaces of justice for ideas and practices from social justice movements to be spoken, respected and required within the narrative community. Many thanks for care-filled and generative readings of this paper by Ali Borden, Christine Dennstedt, Stephen Madigan, & Allan Wade. Finally, my appreciation and respect to the Dulwich Centre Publications reviewers who helped make this a better paper, Gene Combs, David Newman and Angel Yuen.


## NOTES

1. There has been important work in the helping professions that tries to address the harms experienced by practitioners working with clients living in the margins of society. Much of this is written about in the literature in terms of 'mechanization'(Weingarten, 2004) and the 'transmission of traumatic stress' (Hernandez et al, 2007, p. 231). Vicarious Trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990) refers to the therapist experiencing the symptomology of the client's trauma. Secondary Traumatic Stress (Figley, 1998) refers to the impact on the lives of caregivers who care for people who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Compassion Fatigue (Figley, 2002) 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 (Weingarten, 2003) is another term that has also been used to acknowledge the potential harms therapists are vulnerable to.

2. Kvale (1996, p. 203) borrows the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion' from the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1970). 'His hermeneutic is always informed by both a suspicion which makes him wary of any easy assimilation to past meanings and as hope that believes in complete appropriation of meanings while warning 'not here', 'not yet'. Via suspicion and hope, Ricoeur plots a hermeneutic course that avoids both credulity and skepticism.' (White, 1991, p. 312).
3. People who I work alongside who identify as transgender or trans do not identify strictly with the gender they were assigned to at birth, and may transition culturally, socially and/or physically to a gender in which they feel more congruent, which could be something other than male or female (Nataf, 1996; Devon McFarlane, personal communication, 2011). Many people do not identify their gender in any way, and others identify as gender variant, gender non-conforming or gender queer, meaning something different than trans and outside of the normative gender binary (Janelle Kelly, personal communication, 2011). All of these terms are problematic, contested and evolving. I am using these terms for clarity and because groups of folks I work alongside have settled on this imperfect phrasing for now (Reynolds, 2010d).
4. See the Peak House website (http://peakhouse.ca/welcome/Program) and follow up on some of the writings generated from the therapeutic work of Peak House's youth, families and staff team (Sanders, 1997, 2007; Reynolds 2002; Dennstedt & Grieves, 2004).
5. Heteronormativity describes the policing of normal in terms of love, sexuality, familial relations, gender roles and other social relations. The constructs of the 'nuclear family', marriage as only a man/woman relationship, sex as only acceptable between a man and a woman, and narrow and rigid societal norms of how to perform gender (be a man, be a woman, don't be anything trans or gender variant), are all part of heteronormativity (Butler, 1990). Queer and feminist theories find points of connection in resisting heteronormativity (Rich, 1980; Warner, 1991).

## REFERENCES


Alcoholics Anonymous (2001). *The big book* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Alcoholic Anonymous World Services.

Anderson, H. (2008, September). *Collaborative practices in organization, therapy, education and research contexts*. Paper presented at the Social Construction Relational Theory and Transformative Practices Conference, Sarasota, FL.

Apted, M. (Director), & Chobanian, A. (Producer). (1992*). Incident at Oglala* [Motion Picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York, NY: Ballantine.

Bird, J. (2000). *The heart's narrative: Therapy and navigating life's contradictions*. Auckland, New Zealand: Edge Press.

Bird, J. (2006). *Constructing the narrative in supervision*. Auckland, New Zealand: Edge Press.

Bornstein, K. (1994). *Gender outlaw: On men, women and the rest of us.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1995). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of colour. In K. Crenshaw, G. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 357–383). New York, NY: The New Press.

Cushman, P. (1995). *Constructing the self, constructing America: A cultural history of psychotherapy*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Cushman, P. (2006, June). *Where do Psychotherapy Narratives Come From? Avoiding the arrogance of monoculturalism and the dead-end of relativism.* Keynote address at the Therapeutic Conversations 7 Conference, Vancouver, Canada.

Day, R. (2004). From Hegemony to Affinity: The political logic of the newest social movements. *Cultural Studies, 18* (5), pp. 716–748.

Dennstedt, C., & Grieves, L. (2004). Unravelling Substance Misuse Stories: Re-authoring and witnessing practices. In S. Madigan (Ed.), *Therapeutic conversations 5: Therapy from the outside in* (pp. 55–72). Vancouver, BC: Yaletown Family Therapy.

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. London, UK: Routledge.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth.* New York, NY: Grove Weidenfeld Publishers.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Figley, C. (1998). *Burnout in families: The systemic costs of caring*. New York, NY: CRC Press.

Figley, C. (2002). *Treating compassion fatigue* (Ed.). New York, NY: Bruner Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York, NY: Harper Colophon.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Random Press.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy in Process: The letters to Guinea Bissau*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

Freire, P. (2001). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy and civic courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Furlong, M. (2008). The Multiple Relationships between the Discipline of Social Work and the Contribution of Michael White. *Australian Social Work*, *61* (4), pp. 403–420.

Furlong, M., & Lipp, J. (1995). The multiple relationships between neutrality and therapeutic influence. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 16, pp. 201–211.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Grant, K. (2008). Pursuing International Humanitarian Aid Assignments, Response 2. In N. Arthur, & P. Pedersen (Eds.), *Case incidents in counselling for international transitions* (pp. 326–334). Alexandria, VT: American Counselling Association.

Hanisch, C. (1970). The Personal is Political. In S. Firestone, & A. Koedt (Eds.), *Notes from the second year: Women's liberation, major writings of the radical feminists.* New York, NY: Radical Feminism.

Hernandez, P., Gangsei, D., & Engstrom, D. (2007). Vicarious Resilience: A new concept in work with those who survive trauma. *Family Process*, *46* (2), pp. 229–241.

Hoffman, L. (2002). *Family therapy: An intimate history*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.

James, W. (1995). The Moral Equivalent of War. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, I, pp. 17–26.

Johal, A. (2007). UN Observer: 'Massive Crisis' in Vancouver blames 'misguided policy' for homeless wave. The Tyee. Retrieved October 31, 2007 from http://thetyee.ca/Views/2007/10/31/Kothari/.

Katz, A., & Shotter, J. (2004). On the way to 'presence': Methods of a 'social poetics'. In D. Paré, & G. Larner (Eds.), *Collaborative practice in psychology and psychotherapy.* New York, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.

Keller, D. (2010). Poetry, Music and Resistance – anti-olympic tent village occupies VANOC parking lot (February 16, 2010). Retrieved June 7, 2011 from http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/audio/2806

Korzybski, A. (1933). A Non-Aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics. *Science and Sanity*, pp. 747–761.

Kvale, S. (1996). Inter-views: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Lacey, A. (2005). Spaces of justice: The social divine of global anti-capital activists' sites of resistance. *CRSA/RCSA*, *42* (4), p. 407.

McCann, I., & Pearlman, L. (1990). *Psychological trauma and the adult survivor: Theory, therapy and transformations*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

McCarthy, I. (2001). Fifth Province Re-versings: The social construction of women lone Parents' inequality and poverty. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 23, pp. 253–277.

McLaren, P., & Leonard, P. (1993). *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter*. London, UK: Routledge.

Madigan, S. (1997). Re-considering Memory: Remembering lost identities back towards re-membered selves. In D. Nylund, & C. Smith (Eds.), *Narrative therapies with children and adolescents* (pp. 338–355). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Madigan, S. (2011). *Narrative therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Maffesoli, M. (1996). *The time of the tribes: The decline of individualism in mass society* (D. Smith, Trans.). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Martín-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Marx, K. (1994). *Early political writings*. J. O'Malley (Ed.). Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Maturana, H., & Valera, F. (1994). *The tree of knowledge: The biological roots of human understanding*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Myerhoff, B. (1982). Life History Among the Elderly: Performance, visibility, and remembering. In J. Ruby (Ed.), *A crack in the mirror*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Narcotics Anonymous (1988). *Narcotics anonymous basic text* (5th edition). Van Nuys, CA: World Service Office.

Nataf, Z. (1996). *Lesbians talk transgender*. London, UK: Scarlet Press.

No One Is Illegal, Vancouver (n.d.). Retrieved December 30, 2008 from http://noii-van.resist.ca

Peltier, L., Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (n.d.). Retrieved March 21, 2008 from http://www.leonardpeltier.net/

Peltier, L. (1999). *Prison writings: My life is my Sundance*. New York, NY: St. Martins Griffin.

Piercy, M. (1982). *Circles on the water: Selected poems of Marge Piercy*. New York, NY: Knopf.

Public Health Agency of Canada (2006). What Determines Health. Retrieved Sept. 20, 2009 http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php.

Reynolds, V. (2002). Weaving Threads of Belonging: Cultural witnessing groups. *Journal of Child and Youth Care*, *15* (3), pp. 89–105.

Reynolds, V. (2008). An Ethic of Resistance: Frontline worker as activist. *Women Making Waves*, *19* (1), p. 5.

Reynolds, V. (2009). Collective Ethics as a Path to Resisting Burnout. *Insights: The clinical counsellor's magazine & news*, December, pp. 6–7.

Reynolds, V. (2010a). *Doing Justice as a Path to Sustainability in Community Work.* http://www.taosinstitute.net/Websites/taos/Images/PhDProgramsCompletedDissertations/ReynoldsPhDDissertationFeb2210.pdf

Reynolds, V. (2010b). A Supervision of Solidarity. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, *44* (3), pp. 246–257.

Reynolds, V. (2010c) Fluid and Imperfect Ally Positioning: Some gifts of queer theory. *Context*, October, pp. 13–17.

Reynolds, V. (2010 d). Doing Justice: A witnessing stance in therapeutic work alongside survivors of torture and political violence. In J. Raskin, S. Bridges, & R. Neimeyer (Eds.), *Studies in meaning 4: Constuctivist perspectives on theory, practice, and social justice* (pp. 157–184). New York, NY: Pace University Press.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 5, pp. 631–660.

Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and philosophy: An essay on interpretation.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Robinson, T. (2005). *The convergence of race, ethnicity, and gender: Multiple identities in counselling (2nd Ed.).* Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Sanders, C. (1997). Re-Authoring Problem Identities: Small victories with young persons captured by substance misuse. In C. Smith & D. Nylund (Eds.), *Narrative therapies with children and adolescents* (pp. 400–422). New York, NY: Guilford.

Sanders, C. (2007). A poetics of Resistance: Compassionate practice in substance misuse therapy. In C. Brown, & T. Augusta-Scott (Eds.), *Narrative therapy: Making meaning, making lives* (pp. 59–77). London, UK: Sage Publications.

Scapp, R. (2003). In b. hooks, *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Shay, J. (1995). Achilles in Vietnam: Combat trauma and the undoing of character. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Tamasese, K. (2001). Talking about Culture and Gender. In C. White (Ed.), *Working with the stories of women's lives* (pp. 15–22). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Todd, N., & Wade, A. (1994). Domination, Deficiency and Psychotherapy. *Calgary Participator*, Fall, pp. 37–46.

Tomm, K. (1987). Interventive Interviewing: II. Reflexive questioning as a means to enable self healing. *Family Process,* 26, pp. 167–183.

Tomm, K. (1990). Ethical Postures in Family Therapy. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Philadelphia: PA.

Uzelman, S. (2005). Hard at Work in the Bamboo Garden: Media activists and social movements. In A. Langlois, & F. Dubois (Eds.), *Autonomous media: Activating resistance and dissent* (pp. 17–27). Montreal, QB: Cumulus Press.

Wade, A. (1996). Resistance Knowledges: Therapy with aboriginal persons who have experienced violence. In P. H. Stephenson, S. J. Elliott, L. T. Foster, & J. Harris (Eds.), A Persistent Spirit: Towards understanding aboriginal health in British Columbia (pp. 167-206). *Canadian Western Geographical Series*, 31, pp. 167-206.

Waldegrave, C., & Tamasese, K. (1993). Some central ideas in the 'Just Therapy' approach. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy,* 14, pp. 1–8.

Warner, M. (1991). Fear of a Queer Planet. *Societal Text*, 9, pp. 3–17.

Weingarten, K. (2003). *Common shock: Witnessing violence every day*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Weingarten, K. (2004). Witnessing the Effects of Political Violence in Families: Mechanisms of intergenerational transmission and clinical interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 30, pp. 45–60.

White, E. (1991). Between Suspicion and Hope: Paul Ricoeur's vital hermeneutic. *Journal of Literature and Theology,* 5, pp. 311–321.

White, M. (1995). *Re-authoring lives: Interviews and essays*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (2000a). Re-Engaging with History: The absent but implicit. In M. White (Ed.), *Reflections on Narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (2000b). *Reflections on narrative practice: Essays and interviews*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (2002). Addressing Personal Failure. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, pp. 33–76.

White, M. (2004). *Narrative practice and exotic lives*: Resurrecting diversity in everyday life. Adelaide Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.