Narrative and Conflict: Explorations of Theory and Practice

Center for Narrative & Conflict Resolution

George Mason University | School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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Welcome to this first edition of Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice!

This is a new project and we appreciate your interest, however you found your way to the journal. We are happy to launch this first edition and look forward to hearing your responses. We also are hungry for contributors who see this journal as an opportunity to circulate their work to a wider audience. So, wherever you live in the world, we wish you a warm welcome.

Purpose of the Journal

The intention of this electronic journal is to foster the application of a narrative perspective to the analysis of conflict in all its forms and to the practice of conflict resolution that is built on the same narrative perspective.

The premise of this perspective is the idea that stories are corporeal and interactive. They are more than reports of what is happening; how they are produced, circulated or circumvented gives shape to what people *do.* In addition, conflict resolution analyses and practices focused on intentionally facilitating shifts in the available narratives have the possibility to shift relationships between people or groups of people.

A narrative perspective in general is, as we understand it, not a neutral one. It is founded on a profound respect for persons and communities and for their right to have a say in the shaping of their own lives. We believe that conflicts are shaped by the complex interplay of powerful narratives, some of which come to dominate a field of experience and restrict the possibilities for the living out of those narratives that are subordinated. We cannot thus understand or intervene in conflict scenarios without taking account of how power works. In particular, we need to understand the effect of the dividing lines that separate people and the contests that take place for the control of meanings. Conflict analysis should address the deconstruction of such power relations and conflict resolution practice needs to work creatively to avoid getting caught by them.

And yet we notice, time and again, that people and communities are determined to hold onto the stories that give them hope and regularly find ingenious ways to breathe life into these narratives. In the interplay of these stories, lives, relationships, organizations, and communities are constructed. In this interplay, there are always counter stories that can form the basis for hope and change. Sometimes they lie in the shadows; sometimes they are muddled and confused; and sometimes they are open for all to see. But narrative conflict analysis and conflict resolution practice seeks to hold to the light these counter stories and to focus the building of just and peaceful futures on the back of the hopes that they represent.

Narrative and conflict emerged out of conversations between its founding editors, Sara Cobb and John Winslade, and grew out of an earlier journal on narrative practice in general, called *Explorations*, which was published by the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Australia under the publishing oversight of Cheryl White. It included a focus on a range of fields of practice, including narrative therapy and narrative conflict resolution. *Narrative and Conflict* owes a debt to Cheryl White and to the Dulwich Centre, as

well as to the legacy of the work done in family therapy and community work by Michael White.

We are launching this journal on the belief that there is a hunger for the articulation of work in this field. And we are looking to our contributors and readers to confirm this belief. While many other journals exist, we do not believe there are any others that have our particular focus on understanding and responding to conflict from an avowedly narrative perspective.

Because we are consciously seeking to grow an emergent field of endeavor, we intend to be friendly to new writers, including student writers, and aim to be helpful to all potential contributors rather than dismissive of anyone's work. We also aim to be friendly to practiced writers who share our concerns so that their work can be made available to a wider audience. We are conscious too that there are parts of the world where access to print journals is more difficult and the idea of an electronic journal might make useful material more easily available to people in such contexts. One reason for doing so is that sometimes places where fresh ideas about conflict resolution and analysis are most needed are the same places where it is more difficult to access the traditional print-based journals. We live in an exciting time in this regard. The development of new electronic publishing formats allows for many new possibilities in the circulation of ideas.

This journal will, however, be academically rigorous. All published material will be subject to peer review.

Narrative and conflict will publish articles on conflict resolution and conflict analysis at local, national and international levels. We invite the submission of articles that focus on the following topics:

- Practices of narrative conflict resolution of all kinds, including, mediation, facilitation, public deliberation, negotiation, problem-solving workshops, conflict coaching, conferencing, etc.
- The narrative analysis of conflict that has the potential to lead to shifts in relations.
- Work based on the narratives within and between kinship networks, groups, organizations, communities, nations, and aimed at conflict or violence prevention, intervention, transformation, peace-building and reconciliation.
- Narrative restorative practices, in youth and adult contexts and in schools, aimed at addressing the harm done by conflict or violence.
- The construction of peace-building narratives within and between communities or nations.
- Fostering or articulating narrative responses to interpersonal, community, organizational, or international conflict.
- Efforts to bring forward generative, resilient and hopeful responses to violence or conflict, drawing on a narrative lens.
- Analysis of the politics of narrative processes in conflicts, including master and counter-narratives.
- Description of narrative interventions or processes that reduce and redress narrative marginalization and destabilize dominant narratives.
- Deconstruction of dominant and powerful narratives or discourses that produce conflict or violence or that restrain peaceful or respectful relations between people.
- Intentional design of narratives of inclusion in contexts where difference threatens to undermine

relations between people.
- Reviews of significant books, films, etc, on themes related to narrative practice in conflict resolution.
- Interviews with significant contributors to the field of narrative conflict resolution.

We welcome submissions in any of these areas as long as they feature a clear narrative perspective.

The editing and publishing team

Publishing is a collective process that always involves many people. This journal is edited by Sara Cobb and John Winslade.

We are grateful too for the contributions that have already been made to this first edition to a number of others.

Mel Kutner has provided valuable editorial assistance and organizational management. She has also handled the layout of the first issue.

Joanna Lee has given technical assistance to the setting up of the journal website.

Maria Domingo has offered careful proofreading of articles.

We are grateful to those who have reviewed articles for this first edition. Many thanks to the following: Alison Castel, John Forester, Lorraine Hedtke, Sarah Rose Jenson, Stine Kaplan Jørgensen, Gerald Monk, Joaquin Gaete Silva, Tom Strong.

We have also sought out a wide range of people who will be on the Editorial Board for *Narrative and Conflict*. They are listed on the website and we will not list them here. We are grateful to all of you for your willingness to have faith in this project and to be generous enough to respond so warmly to our invitation to join this endeavor.

Narrative and Conflict is housed at the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution (CNCR), within the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR), at George Mason University. The Center functions as a research hub to anchor a narrative lens for both conflict analysis and conflict resolution; it also offers workshops and training programs on narrative approaches to conflict and its transformation, as well as academic courses and programs (http://cncr.gmu.edu/). The School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution offers several academic degrees, including a BA, a MS, and a Ph.D., in addition to a set of certificate programs for professionals. S-CAR's support for the CNCR, and for this journal is greatly appreciated.

So we invite you to read the articles in our first edition. They constitute a modest beginning in terms of numbers of articles. We are hopeful that the journal will grow from this beginning. We invite you all to be part of this growth by considering how you might contribute. We will be waiting with anticipation for your contributions.

John Winslade and Sara Cobb

Narrative "Braiding" and the Role of Public Officials in Transforming the Public's Conflicts

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Abstract

Deliberative processes should enable public officials to stay connected to the changing needs and interests of the communities for whom and with whom they work. Theoretically, these practices should enable public officials to help citizens negotiate with each other, and with the government, problem-solving in a way that produces timely solutions to the kinds of wicked problems that are critical to governing in the globalized context where media sensationalizes divisions that create the "Us" as different from "Them." Theoretically, these practices should enable public officials to foster a quality of relationships within a community that supports the community to learn about itself, to become a "reflecting community" (Laws, 2010). However, it is all too often the case that these practices enact the form of engagement only, without significantly altering the nature of relationships or the (his)stories that are the "comet tail" of wicked problems. This paper offers a narrative lens on deliberation, describing a practice called "braiding", which would allow public officials to weave together the storylines and the identities that anchor them, creating the conditions for public deliberation that could actually transform the public's conflicts.

Keywords

narrative, community conflicts, leadership, public officials

Authors' Note

Sara Cobb is the Director of the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

Narrative "Braiding" and the Role of Public Officials in

Transforming the Public's Conflicts

Once elected or appointed, public officials engage each other and their public through cycles of strategic planning, information sharing, inquiry, facilitation, deliberation, mediation, and decision-making. They use these modes of engagement to organize and respond effectively to the emerging issues in the public, often within the "storyline" (Hajer, 1997; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003) or narrative (Roe, 1994, 1989) that is foundational to their political party, and/or to the administrative culture of the organizations where they work (Boje, 2001). But given the nature of the "public" and its issues, these practices may either contribute to the development of community itself such that citizens/residents take ownership of problems, responding to increased inclusivity, and building sustainable solutions, or these practices can exaggerate and deepen the existing fractures within a "community", sharpening identity-based differences, and even radicalizing marginalized groups (Clegg, 1993; Laclau, 2006; Mumby, 1989; Ranciere, 2006a, 2009). From this perspective, much depends on the ways these practices are themselves enacted and how they work.

Theoretically, these practices should enable public officials to stay connected to the changing needs and interests of the communities for whom and with whom they work. Theoretically, these practices should enable public officials to help citizens negotiate with each other, and with the government, problem-solving in a way that produces timely solutions to the kinds of wicked problems that are at the heart of governing in the globalized context, where media sensationalizes divisions that create the "Us" as different from "Them." Theoretically, these practices should enable public officials to foster a quality of relationships within a community that supports the community to learn about itself, to become an "observing community" (Laws, 2010). However, it is all too often the case that these practices enact the *form* of engagement only, without significantly altering the nature of relationships or the (his)stories that are the "comet tail" of

wicked problems; these are problems which are so complex that they are only defined in and through the application of a given solution where there could be multiple solutions (Ritchey, 2011).

Public meetings occur, information is gathered, planning is done, issues are identified and negotiated, or mediated with the trust and the hope that the form itself will generate the quality of engagement which can reduce divisions in the community (Braithwaite & Dryzek, 2000; Button & Mattson, 1999; Cohen, 2005; J. Cohen, 1997; Fleck, 2007; Knight & Johnson, 1994; Laws, 2001; Orlie, 1994; Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, & Rich, 1999; Rosenberg, 2007; Ryfe, 2002; Sanders, 1997). But form of engagement itself may not help communities learn together and generate new ways to know themselves through dis- and/or re-organizing the divisions across the community.

Public officials can convene deliberative processes where stakeholders debate and/or engage in dialogue, while the divisions in a community can remain, or even strengthen, via what (Conklin, 2005) calls "forces of fragmentation." Fragmentation, in the context of problem-solving, refers to the way that problem-definitions are all too often broken down into parts, yet they exist in a system that defies the summation of the parts. Fragmentation also refers to the way that social networks impacted by the problem are also cut off from each other ideologically, (as in the case of the NRA and pro-gun control in the United States), or geographically, as in the case of those who are impacted by rising seas, living in coastal areas and the climate skeptics who live in cities. But fragmentation is also a process akin to structural violence, where marginalization of groups reduces their access to speaking and being heard - they are interpellated (Law, 2000), responding to a "position call" (Klure, 2010) from the state that identifies them as "less than," if not altogether expendable.

Consider, for example, the public deliberations associated with the immigration debate in Prince William County, Virginia, in 2007-2008, when the community was deliberating, via town hall meetings, on the passage of the resolution which suspended the probable cause standard,

enabling police to stop anyone and ask for documentation of citizenship, in a effort to reduce what one side called "illegal immigration". This was clearly a "wicked problem" for the community, but it had many faces. For some, the problem was about day-laborers gathered at the local 7-Eleven. For others, it had to do with significant changes in the ethnic composition of their neighborhoods. For others, it was about the increase in local gangs. Still others were concerned about schools burdened with English as a Second Language classes. For the immigrants themselves, the problems revolved around, for example, racial and ethnic profiling, the threat of deportation and separation from American-born children, low wages, lack of access to services such as healthcare.

The city council worked to bring "the illegal immigration issue" as the problem frame to a public forum for discussion, a problem frame that reflected only one side in a very complex but highly polarized issue. The public forum itself, however, contributed greatly to polarization, as people harnessed existing, often racist, narratives to make their points, while several hundred un-documented immigrants, unable to enter the building and participate in the public deliberation, demonstrated outside.[i] Not only were the voices of immigrants unheard, but the narratives of citizens speaking in favor of The Resolution were so intense and polarizing, if not violent, that they completely drowned out the voices of those citizens who were opposed to The Resolution. The deliberative process itself was deeply problematic in terms of learning, or effective problem-solving, and ironically it was the police chief who brought new, sound, and ethical arguments into the public sphere - he argued in favor of the repeal of The Resolution, and it was ultimately repealed after a set of studies reviewed the economic and social costs of its implementation. In this case, the deliberative process contributed to *strengthening* the fault lines, that is, the divisions that were deployed in the narratives-in-use within the community. Given that collaboration, as well as violence prevention, requires the fault lines to be addressed by the community itself, public forums for deliberation can fail miserably when they cement, rather than evolve, the way the community makes sense of its problems.

Aware that these fault lines are problematic, municipalities often try to mitigate divisions by providing educational and training programs, promoting conflict resolution training and diversity awareness. While these are important and useful tools for residents and citizens (Zartman, 1995), they find it difficult to reach marginalized communities. Additionally, when a wicked problem emerges, it appears within the network of persons attached to that problem and its related issues and these persons may or may not be attracted to educational and skill building programs. In other words, persons impacted by wicked problems are, at times, not willing or interested in participating in conflict resolution or educational programs for civic engagement. Thus, it can be argued that, regardless of the worth of conflict resolution training programs, municipalities need to engage citizens and residents in a manner better suited to reducing the divisions inherent in the community (Conklin, 2006; Rodriguez, 1998; Shirlow & Murtagh, 2004; Smith, 1996). In other words, conflicts provide opportunities for the community to learn about itself in the course of planning and problem-solving (Laws, 2010). But it remains to be seen how the various modes of engagement available to public officials actually contribute (or don't contribute) to a quality of engagement that allows citizens to explore divisions within their communities in a way that develops relationships and leads to what Dewey called "critical intelligence" (Dewey, 1992). This is the kind of intelligence that supports the community to learn, not only about the issues, but also about itself as a constellation of different perspectives.

The presumption of this paper is that conflict itself *reduces* the capacity of the community to do just that. As the conflict escalates, the fractures, materialized and anchored by "attractors" (meaning nodes) in conflict narratives, are cemented (Cobb, 2013). Narratives reflecting and creating those fractures are progressively radicalized, become increasingly simplistic, and "smooth out" details that are contrary to a given storyline. From this perspective, conflict disables a community's capacity to deliberate, to engage in conversations that enable learning, and to support the evolution of the narrative landscape.

Furthermore, forums for public deliberation are often structured in a manner that leads to further radicalization; public officials presume that Robert's Rules of Order and turn-taking will ensure that all voices can be heard. For this reason public forums are "lightly" facilitated and speaking is presumed to be the material evidence that people can participate in the deliberation.

However, we know that speaking is not co-terminous with participation, precisely because the conflict narrative landscape functions so as to favor the initial speaker, as subsequent oppositional speakers must affirm, qualify, or deny the narratives that were advanced by the first speaker (Cobb & Rifkin, 1991). Additionally, it is often the case that more radical groups eschew public forums, setting themselves outside of the solution space (Cohen, 2005). For these reasons, when speaking is equated with participation, there will be some groups of people who stand outside the process and feel, no matter the volume of their voice, they will *not* be heard, and the evidence is that their narratives, the storylines they advance, may not be elaborated, particularly when they are too busy responding to the accusations of the "other side," via denials, justifications, and excuses (Davis, 2005).

As the public conflict hardens in the public space, public officials all too often take sides, as often the conflict is framed in partisan storylines. We saw this clearly in the recent political conflict in the United States which lead to the government shutdown of 2013. The "deliberations" which took place reproduced the deep partisan divisions between Democrats and Republicans, as senators took to the floor and blamed the other side for the failure to reach an agreement which would fund the government. Democrats accused their Republican counterparts of conducting a "jihad" and the Republicans blamed the Democrats for the failure of the negotiations. The American public watched the mudslinging mostly with disdain; and the Congressional leaders, as well as President Obama, captured by their political parties, not only failed to support the learning of Congress, or the general public, but fueled the divisions in Congress and in the country. It is clear, in light of their participation in the conflict, that these leaders believed they had primary

responsibility *to their party* and secondary responsibility to the governance process itself. In other words, they did not see themselves, as leaders, as obliged to care for the nature of the deliberative space itself, rather than just their political agenda. There was no one who positioned themselves as working to foster the quality of conversation that would support collective learning about the issues, neither the President, nor the Speaker of the House. It was not until the United States was on the brink of default that leaders came together to forge an agreement. While there was a sigh of relief across the country, and the world, there was little learning about the complexity of the issues that each party saw as critical to the conflict. Political parties neither elaborated their values or their Others'; there was no construction of the history of the conflict; there was no exploration of the various roles being played, by leaders, by the poor, by the insurance companies, nor was there discussion of the budget in a manner that would clarify exactly why the Republicans hated the Affordable Health Care Act and what they considered appropriate solutions for the 50 million uninsured. This is an excellent example of the failure of leaders to care for, not just the outcome, but for the deliberative processes itself. And of course, the consequences for the American public were drastic - even though the country was able to avoid a default, the public ended up with a dimished understanding of the issues at stake and the relational capital has been the real victim of the political brinkmanship that terminated in a government shutdowon.

How could we do this better? How could we engage in public policy debates in a manner that would generate the "critical intelligence" that Dewey imagined? The field of deliberative democracy offers both a theory of public deliberation as a process of "reason-giving" that, when coupled with mutual respect, supports the inclusion of multiple pespectives on public issues (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). However, there is also empirical research that addresses the gap between theory, and practice, highlighting the limits of deliberative process to ensure inclusion (Schouten, Leroy, & Glasbergen, 2012), or the capacity of a given democracy for deliberation (Dryzek, 2009). Moreover, Habermas, along with other theorists (Habermas & Rehg, 2001), has

worked to provide the theoretical foundation for an emancipatory deliberation that enables people to speak, say what they mean, and not destroy relations with others.

> More than any other theorist, Jürgen Habermas is responsible for reviving the idea of deliberation in our time, and giving it a more thoroughly democratic foundation. His deliberative politics is firmly grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty. The fundamental source of legitimacy is the collective judgment of the people. This is to be found not in the expression of an unmediated popular will, but in a disciplined set of practices defined by the deliberative idea. (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, p. 9)

However, while Habermas did indeed address the need to be able to make normative claims about the quality of deliberation, he ended up arguing that people will become emancipated as they are able to participate in the ideal speech situation, but he does not make clear the process for creating the ideal speech situation itself. For speech is not just speaking, it is also being heard (Ranciere, 2004); being heard is, in turn, a function of how we are positioned in discourse (Harre & Slocum, 2003), and whether we are positioned by others as moral agents, or not (Nelson, 2001). Particularly in the context of conflict, idealized speech situations are not available to marginalized speakers. This paper offers a description of a process, *narrative braiding*, that can be used to ensure that the marginalized can in fact speak and be heard in processes of public deliberation, and their identity can be recognized as mattering, that is how they are positioned and how they position themselves. In so doing, I define a new role for public officials as responsible not only for the content of the policies they advance, but for the quality of the deliberative processes in which they are discussed and debated.

Braiding Narrative Strands: Identity Politics in Public Deliberations

Each identity group is constituted through the narratives it tells about self/other, as well as the stories told *about* it by others (du Toit, 2003; Ross, 2001). Each group therefore has a narrative line, a "strand" that anchors their identity, and provides a cognitive and emotional set of guidelines

for action, within group, and between groups. This narrative strand is the foundational narrative that a group tells about itself. It could be an origin myth, or it could function as a narrative that describes the current challenges for "our" group. Within this strand, the group will position itself as positive, and, in the context of a conflict, it will position others as negative. These strands thus contain the core evaluations that enable people to make sense of existing circumstances, evaluating the situation, the others, and self.

Narrative strands are, by definition, not idiosyncratic to an individual - they are held in and by a group. However, the geography of narrative within an identity group is not uniform - every strand will contain substrands; these substrands share a narrative DNA with the main strand and together they comprise the narrative landscape as a system of narratives (Bernardi, 2012). For example, the Palestinian Territory contains one narrative strand that is a story about the Israelis taking their land and subjecting them to occupation. This narrative strand defines the Palestinians. However, within this strand, there are important substrands: the Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, for example, display differences in the way people position self/other. In any case, while there are narrative substrands, they "belong" to a narrative family, to the main strand of a given narrative identity. Within the narrative landscape, the local and particular stories that people tell about themselves not only fit the broader narrative strand, but they also contribute to the overall coherence of the narrative system. Thus when a Palestinian woman tells a story about being afraid for her sixteen-year-old son, living in the West Bank, that story strengthens the main strand of the Palestinian narrative of the occupation.

In a conflict process, the narrative strands are condensed, shortened, and simplified (Nelson, 2001). This occurs because the dynamic of interaction between conflicting groups is a process of mutual delegitimation, which leads to defense (positive positioning for self and counter delegitimation for Other). Thus the interaction cannot lead to the development of critical intelligence or even discussions of interests - parties to a conflict are working on identity issues

(positioning) to establish a context (legitimacy) in which they can reveal and describe their own interests. From this perspective, negotiation processes, which presume parties can trade interests and explore parameters for "mutual gain" are often problematic: either parties reach an agreement (consensus) based on mutual interests, on top of reciprocally delegitimizing narratives or they do not reach agreement, perhaps due to mutual delegitimation.

However, seen from a narrative perspective, it would be imminently possible to use a negotiation process to explore narrative strands, which would be a way to develop a rich account of narrative identity. Benhabib (1996) has argued that conflict provides an opportunity to explore and emerge what she calls the "Concrete Other;" this "Concrete Other" is not just a representation of a given narrative position, s/he is a specific person, textured and nuanced, and is developed as a particularized version of a narrative strand. Negotiation, which emerges the Concrete Other by exploring the texture and complexity of a person's narrative strand, should function to develop legitimate positions (for and with the Other) that would enable them to focus on the issues at hand, and their interests, specifically. As a narrative practice, a quality negotiation would address the issues of legitimacy either ahead of, or in the course of, the discussion of problem specifics. In this way, the development of a narrative strand is crucial to the discussion of interests in the negotiation process, for it establishes the foundation for legitimacy for one party, by/with the Other.

Narrative strands are developed in conversation through interaction. They contain, as do all narratives: a plot sequence of events with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Booker, 2004); an individual protagonist, and/or a collective protagonist who struggles through adversity, with good intention, to surmount difficulties; antagonist(s) who thwart and block the progress of the protagonist or actively seek to harm the protagonist (Greimas & Porter, 1977); and a value system which constitutes the good and the bad (MacIntyre, 1981). Development of the strand involves asking questions, listening, and reflecting with speakers so that new components of the strand appear. Since the narrative strand is the foundation for identity, it will be articulated to any

"position" people take in a negotiation process. From this perspective, the development of the narrative strand opens up new dimensions for the elaboration of identity in a negotiation process.

"Positions" in negotiation (not to be confused with positions in narratives) are the stand that persons take about what they want as an outcome to a negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 1991; Williams, 1992). It is the solution people are seeking. From a narrative perspective, it is a story about what *should* happen. And the "should" is, in turn, woven into a narrative strand about who "we" are and what we need or deserve. The development of the narrative strand is, at some level, the conversation that explores the foundation from which interests arise as well, since interests provide the logic (or not) for a given position. A conversation that explores interests is a conversation about what people need or deserve and why - it is a narrative strand. For a negotiation to be successful, in the long and short run, interests must be developed interactively, not just reported. This is essentially a process of developing the narrative strand.

Strand development is not necessarily an experience that is easy for any identity group, precisely because this process increases the complexity of the narrative the group has about itself. It is what Emerson has called a "provocation" (Emerson, 1903). Given that conflict processes lay down narrative pathways in which both legitimacy (of Self) and delegitimacy (of the Other) provide an action/interaction roadmap, changes in the identity narrative lead to changes in this roadmap and for a time, people may not know where they are, relationally speaking - strand development may create a *liminal* state in which peoples' narratives about self are altered, but as yet, strange and new, or untried. A liminal phase is a "between state" where people are no longer who they were and not yet who they will become (Hoffman, 1998; Cobb, 1994; Van Gennep, 1960). In this between state, a narrative of self is elaborated differently, but it has not had time to be enacted across multiple conversations, or in different spaces. As such, people are unhinged from a prior identity, without the consolidation of the new narrative, which requires "road-testing" across multiple contexts. This liminal phase can be experienced by groups as destabilizing, but it is

tolerated, if not embraced in play, if their legitimacy is elaborated simultaneously. Winslade and Monk (2008) have described the process of narrative development, documenting the set of practices that are associated. This work is essential not only to the broader field of conflict resolution, but also to the practice of narrative strand development, toward changing the narrative landscape.

Either during, or after the process of strand development, narrative braiding is the process in which conversational partners (public officials, mediators, other parties) elaborate the terms of legitimacy, proposed by a given party, *with* all parties. For example, if the Moroccan community in Amsterdam values itself for its commitment to family, as a component of its narrative strand, that positive position in their narrative must be *woven into the problem description* that is under discussion. The terms for the legitimacy of a speaker are most often proposed as a "position call" - an implied request for the elaboration of the positioning of self/other offered in the narrative (Winslade & Monk, 2000). Position calls are particularly central in the context of a conflict as the conflict is a struggle over the legitimacy of positions in discourse, in the narrative. The "braid" comes about when the terms of legitimacy, offered by each party as a "position call" in their narrative strand, is included in the overall generalized description of the problem, where it came from, what the issues are, the nature of the risks and threats, what people did to try and overcome or sidestep it, why it is a problem, and the hopes and aspirations about what could happen should the problem be resolved or addressed appropriately. *The "braid" is the story about the problem, told collectively, that includes the terms of legitimacy offered by each of the parties to the conflict. It is the set of narrative strands that are inflected, or articulated to each other.* As such, it is very different from "consensus", as in sameness of meaning, but precisely reflects the real meaning of "consensus" as making sense together. The braid retains the particularity of the narrative strands, yet they are wrapped around each other at junctures where the legitimacy of one party touches the terms of the Other's legitimacy.

However, braiding is not a conversational process that is typically done by parties in conflict themselves. As noted earlier, conflict typically involves reciprocal delegitimation of Other and legitimization of Self. Because the conflict dynamic does not support braiding, narrative braiding is an intervention, a disruption of the conflict pattern. As such, it would very likely require either a tightly designed process or a mediator/facilitator. It would also require a two-step process where the strands are developed within a group (intra-party work) and then they are woven together, in the context of a facilitated process, or over time, in a set of sequential conversations. Given that mediators and facilitators are not trained to "braid" (even though a close examination of their process may reveal that they are indeed engaged in a practice like braiding), narrative braiding would require the kinds of training that narrative mediators have today.[ii] However, this is not an obstacle to the process, for indeed, public officials should have training needed to support their role as leaders in the transformation of public conflicts.

Public officials, in their role, have the opportunity, if not the responsibility, for narrative braiding; it can be argued that they have responsibility for public discourse, not because they create or control the discourse, but because the quality of the democracy public depends on the quality of deliberation, which, in turn, depends on the way identity groups, narrative strands, interact. Given that conflict processes inevitably shrink the complexity of narrative strands that, in turn, balkanize conflicts, public officials can play an important role in creating the conditions in which narrative strands can be explored and can come into a new relation, an integrated relation, with each other.

The process of strand development can be done by public officials in routine conversations with citizens, relative to their needs and concerns, elaborating with them the terms of their legitimacy. However, given that there are pockets of marginalized communities, within a given district or region, the development of narrative strands may not be part of "routine conversations" as precisely these marginalized groups do not interact with public officials, except so far as they are they object of either "help" or "control/surveillance." So the first level of activity that public

officials may undertake is to seek out the marginalized members of their district or region and engage them in a conversation in which the values *they* offer, which function to establish their own legitimacy, are elaborated and developed in interaction.

Secondly, as problems or conflicts arise in a region, they will inevitably impact multiple identity groups, multiple narrative strands. As problems arise, officials have the opportunity to begin to interact with all parties, even the marginalized groups, in a manner that elaborates the terms of legitimacy they have offered for themselves, *with* other groups.

The Tajessdief Case[iii] provides an excellent exemplar. This case involves the clash between the Moroccan community in Amsterdam and the white Dutch community. In the shadow of the murder of Theo van Gogh on the streets in Amsterdam in 2004, the Dutch government developed policies and programs intended to integrate the Moroccans living in Amsterdam into Dutch society. However, tensions between these communities remained high. In this context, a Moroccan youth stole a woman's purse from her car, and she ran him down with her car, pinning him to a tree and killing him.

The Moroccan community was up in arms, framing this as yet another instance of violence against them, while the white Dutch community argued that this was the sad outcome of yet another example of the criminal behavior of Moroccan youth. As a result of this death, the Moroccan community wanted to protest the death of a Moroccan youth and negotiated with government officials to organize a march. Framed as "protest" narrative, the march would have worked to position the Moroccan youth as a victim, a semiotic marker for the Moroccan community's narrative of its own marginalization and mistreatment by the Dutch society. The Dutch officials would have been positioned as victimizers, for the marchers' narrative would have pointed to exclusion, prejudice, and separation.

As the possibility of this narrative of victimization appeared, the broader Dutch population

was poised to counter this narrative strand with another: this youth was a criminal, *like other Moroccan youth*. In this context, the permit to march was denied - the public officials wanted to avoid a clash between the Dutch and Moroccan communities on the streets, as indeed there was a potential for violence between what Hajer and Versteeg (2005) refer to as "discourse coalitions." The march would have instantiated, or institutionalized the Moroccan narrative, something that the Dutch society would have strongly resisted because it positioned the Moroccan community as delegitimate. Had the protest march taken place, it would have allowed the voices of the marginalized to appear, but it also would have cemented and exacerbated the existing divisions in the context. From this perspective, the complexity of allowing the voices of the marginalized to be heard emerges - this would always accompany a defensive, if not violent response, from the dominant culture.

The Moroccan community then requested a permit to hold a *silent march*, as a vigil of mourning for the youth that was killed. This permit was granted and this is fascinating. Clearly a march of mourning in and of itself would have given the Moroccan community an opportunity to speak, so the difference that made a difference in the decision to grant a permit was not the frame of "mourning" but that it would be *silent*, avoiding any challenge to the Dutch (state) narrative. The march was held, but no Dutch public officials attended. In this way, they enacted their relative disattention to the experiences of the Moroccan community, confirming the Moroccan community narrative. It was not only a missed opportunity, as the officials could have mourned with the Moroccan community, but it contributed to institutionalizing the divisions between the communities, ensuring that the voices of the Moroccan community would not be spoken in a context where they could not have been otherwise ignored.

Alternatively, the Dutch officials could have contributed to the development of the Moroccan narrative strand by elaborating their narrative strand with them. In this process the public officials might have, for example, discovered that the Muslim community had, as core to their

narrative identity strand, the value of "traditional family" (where the father is the patriarch and the

mother is the caretaker, and the rules of the father are to be obeyed); it would have been possible to

begin to define the problem on the basis of those values,[iv] in a hypothetical statement such as:

"This tragedy is clearly the result of the difficulties the Muslim community has, living in the

Netherlands, to create a context where fathers can guide the youth in their development the way

that they, the father, would intend." This statement recognizes the Moroccan community's

aspiration to retain their values is, for them, both a statement of the problem ("we have not been

able, in this environment, to live according to our values") and a statement of the solution ("the

Moroccan community has the values that, were we able to live them, we could raise our children so

they would not steal"). But as legitimacy of the narrative strand needs to be woven into the

collective problem statement, the public officials would have needed to formulate a problem, in

public, *with the public,* toward a narrative that carried the legitimacy of the Moroccan community,

for example, through the following hypothetical statement:

> This is a tragedy in that the death of any young person is a waste, a loss - this
> young man did not live long enough to learn to live in a manner that his family or
> his community would have wished for him. And this relates, in turn, to the
> multiple levels of mourning - for the death of this young man is a marker, a sign of
> the difficulties of families, like his, who have not been able, in the context of the
> Netherlands, to raise their children the way they would prefer, according to their
> own values. We can, in time, learn from families like these and work with them, to
> create the environments in which their children can grow up and become the
> people their parents hope they can become, because like all parents, from
> everywhere, we want children to grow up to contribute to their families and
> communities, a contribution that might benefit all of us.

This narrative would braid into the problem statement the terms of legitimacy offered by this

imaginary Muslim interlocutor, from their narrative strand. Made public by this imaginary official,

perhaps at the opening of the silent march, this strand could then be elaborated in the press and by

other identity groups who could affirm the Moroccan community's intention to raise their children

well, like all parents, everywhere. This is an example of the process of narrative braiding that

would support all the narrative strands to appear and to enter into relation with each other.

Public officials have an opportunity to engage in narrative braiding in multiple settings, informally and formally; braided summaries, such as the one described above, can be done in informational settings, public meetings of all kinds, administrative planning sessions, as well as media campaigns. These braided narratives can also be the foundation for the development of policies that address all manner of issues, including immigration, the environment, security, housing, homelessness, and so on. In all cases, the statement of the problem, which provides the logic for the policy, should include the terms of legitimacy advanced by all the major narrative strands that comprise the community impacted by that policy. In this way, officials contribute not only to the creation of the narrative strand but also to the reduction of marginalization, since the braiding process itself incorporates the voice of those who have struggled to have their legitimacy adopted and elaborated by Others. In turn, this requires the evolution of narrative from those that produce and reflect conflict dynamics (accusation with denial, excuse, and justification, and counteraccusation) to a story structure that creates a new, more collaborative dynamic, a "better-formed" story.

Braiding for "Better-formed Stories": A Politics for Public Officials

Given that the relation between identity groups is quickly, and rather consistently polarized, in the context of conflict and problem-solving, narrative braiding is both a conflict resolution and a conflict prevention process. By reducing marginality and supporting the participation of all identity groups, this practice of narrative braiding ensures that the decisions made, and the policies formulated, will *disrupt* and *destabilize* the broader cultural narratives that anchor and exacerbate the conflicts between identity groups, altering the narrative landscape in the process. Some public officials who rely on these "us" vs. "them" divisions may themselves feel at a loss, for narrative braiding is not a process of advancing a particular ideology, as indeed, it

presumes that in a good deliberative process, people will be able to develop good solutions to problems. However, other officials may find this practice a natural process of caring for, and protecting, the deliberative space where citizens themselves make decisions and exchange ideas.

Ranciere (2006) has argued that the order of things, within which daily life proceeds at administrative and "everyday" levels, contains and reproduces the exclusion of the marginalized and functions in a way that eliminates their voice. However, voice is a precondition of any deliberative process. Speaking and being heard by others, that is, having critically important aspects of one's narrative elaborated by Others, is clearly a precondition for public participation and deliberation. While Habermas (1984) acknowledges that the quality of the communication is critical to emancipation, that is, linking a normative perspective on communication to a political objective - emancipation (Coles, 1992) - he does not offer an account of the conditions required for the development of voice itself. While Ranciere does offer an account of "politics" as the destabilization of the existing sensibility (aesthetic) or way of making sense, he does little to suggest how this destabilization may occur. Narrative braiding addresses the practical limitations of deliberative practice, by building on the legitimacy of all parties; considering that delegitimacy is the foundation for conflict dynamics as well as marginalization and exclusion, legitimizing parties, *on their own terms*, in the course of building an account of the problem, provides a way to build engagement of marginalized groups. The incorporation of the marginalized as legitimate definitely upends the existing relational field, and modifies the existing sensibility within a deliberative practice.

In the course of legitimizing, a process accomplished in and through the development of the narrative strand, a new, better-formed story is created, altering the structure of the conflict narratives, as well as the accompanying process of interaction. This better-formed story has new subject positions in discourse that are legitimizing to all characters in the story, protagonists and antagonists alike; it also contains a new, multimodal moral framework that bypasses the binary

black and white of the more simplistic conflict narrative. Finally, the plot structure contains more episodes (a more developed temporal framework) and also has more subplots, which contextualize and "thicken" the meaning of the actions in the plot line (Cobb, 2013, 2006, 2003; Sluzki, 1992).

All together, the new character roles, moral values, and episodic components constitute a new narrative structure that is better-formed across several dimensions. First, it constitutes new international patterns that are more inclusive (the marginalized finally have a portion of their narrative elaborated). Secondly, these better-formed stories provide a more complex description of the history, which in turn, opens up new ways of describing present problems and future solutions. Thirdly, this narrative creates collaboration, rather than conflict, providing a foundation for improved relationships and the emergence, over time, of critical intelligence. As noted earlier, critical intelligence is a product of a quality of engagement that supports the democratic process. In this way, better-formed stories are foundational to the pragmatics of democracy itself.

Better-formed stories are themselves a product of narrative braiding which includes first the elaboration of the narrative strand, and then its legitimation in a web of stories about a problem. These two steps can be understood as distinct, and in fact may imply the need for two phases of a negotiation or problem-solving process. In the first phase of elaboration of the strand, the interviewer (either a party to the conflict or a third party) asks a set of questions that build on the framework for legitimacy of the speaker while expanding the complexity of the plot (a thicker history of what happened, a more elaborate description of current events), the complexity of the moral framework (from binary to multimodal) and positing a legitimate position for the antagonist(s).[v] This elaboration generates a more complex narrative, or a better-formed story. The second phase is its elaboration by Others - the antagonists in the stories - and perhaps the broader culture. This is accomplished again by conversations in which the Others, those who were initially positioned as antagonists, elaborate the better-formed story. Because these antagonists have a legitimate role in the new story, they are likely to participate, as long as the value system under

development includes their core values as well, and the history detailed in a more complex narrative incorporates both episodes critical to their strand, *and* a logic for those episodes that retains the group's own legitimacy.

Additionally, the elaboration of a narrative strand, by others, can be supported via media campaign, once it is developed by the core protagonists and antagonists; however, it is critical to differentiate "elaboration" from marketing. The former includes parties in the development of the braid, while the latter offers an already formed braid to the set of actors. Winning the hearts and minds of the public, for example in Iraq, through development projects or media campaigns that positively connote the Coalition Forces does little to build the quality of relationship that would lead to collaboration or critical intelligence. But a deliberative process that, for example, leads to the construction of legitimacy for a group of previously marginalized parties, is generative of a new better-formed story, which leads to new interactional patterns and the development of sustainable agreements and policies.

Thinking of the role of public officials from a logistical perspective, it is important to note that both the elaboration of a narrative strand, with parties to a conflict *and* the process of braiding the strands together are conversational processes. Better-formed stories cannot be created through the kind of planning process, which takes the marginalized as an object, nor can better-formed stories be legislated. While it may make more sense to try and differentiate two phases of any planning process, (1) the elaboration of the strands and (2) their braiding, these processes are also very integrated. The elaboration of narrative strands, with parties, provides an opportunity to begin to pick up the criteria for their legitimacy and anchor the new positions (in the discourse) through a process of braiding them into a set of strands, each one constituting the terms of legitimacy for that identity group.

However, it is perhaps more practical, and more effective, to work on the design of

processes that are explicitly in two phases. Creating an initial phase of strand elaboration would function as an invitation to parties to a conflict and also provide a context for conversation where the risks associated with negotiation are reduced. The braiding can also be done over time, in multiple conversations, without a public process with a stated intention to build a collective account of the problem and its context. Braiding could be done across a set of community actors and agencies, as a way of preparing the ground for a collective deliberation in which all parties not only have a voice but also experience themselves as having a voice in relation to others.

Returning to Habermas, the elaboration and the braiding processes, whether distinct or combined, can be understood as providing the pre-conditions (of voice) that are prerequisite to the process of deliberation, negotiation, mediation, or public planning processes. These conflict resolution processes all require persons to be able to participate, and participation is more than just showing up to a meeting and speaking. From a narrative perspective, participation is a process of being storied by others as legitimate. Participation also requires being a "concrete other" for one's Others. And participation requires speaking into a narrative that already authorizes the voice that is spoken. Narrative braiding, and the process of elaboration which is foundation to it, constitutes the conditions for participation in deliberation, as well as democracy itself. From this perspective, the better-formed story itself enacts legitimate positions (in discourse) for all parties, and is thus central to the politics of identity processes, redressing marginalization.

At the policy level, once people are delegitimized, policies created to "help" them defined them as weak, incompetent, or ignorant. These positions are paternalistic and construct the government as caretakers who define the needs of citizens and then design programs to meet those needs. The problem is that the identity of the people is undermined via negative positioning, on the one hand, and by the absence of any process for the reconstruction of identity (deliberation, negotiation) on the other. While citizens/residents may not struggle against the government's positioning of them, as indeed people are often too busy or overwhelmed with life to participate,

they will none-the-less often vote with their feet, resisting their positions in the government narrative by failing to comply with rules, resenting the imposition, or failing to participate in a manner that would increase their own integration.[vi] But the government can also position citizens/residents as dangerous in which case they develop policies (curfews), deploy technologies ("Mosquitoes").[vii] Thus the way the government can *construct* identity can be seen buried in the policies that it creates in which citizens or residents are positioned as less than legitimate.

Tragically, the government often inadvertently positions groups of citizens or residents as delegitimate *in line with* existing narratives in the dominant culture that take for granted that these groups need help or need to be controlled. These are groups, which the broader culture has storied as incompetent or untrustworthy, and of course all too often they are immigrant groups, strange and Other to the dominant culture. Government can and does from this perspective exacerbate existing identity-based divisions among the public and in this way contributes to maintaining and fostering the very exclusion and marginalization that it seeks to redress. These policy narratives thus carry, like DNA, the delegitimized positions of the marginalized and concretize them into new programs and efforts to address or redress their weaknesses or their bad intentions.

Conclusions

Identity, from a narrative perspective, is not a set of static traits or characteristics but a narrative strand that anchors "us" (as *protagonists*) in relation to "them" (*antagonists*). This strand is all too often formed in a conflict dynamic defined by reciprocal delegitimacy. This reciprocity does not however imply symmetry, for the delegitimizing done by groups with formal power and authority is institutionalized both culturally, organizationally, and legislatively. While the marginalized may continue to delegitimate their Others, (dominant identity groups), they can all too often only materialize their narrative through withdrawal and/or violence. In either case, their participation in deliberation and democratic processes is delimited by the position they occupy in

the narrative of their Others. With one or more identity groups marginalized, dominant groups may attempt to engage the marginalized, or they may attempt to promote their integration through legislation and policy. However, these processes only anchor a relation of helping or control on the part of dominant groups toward the marginal.

Public officials can take on the role of enhancing the participation of all citizens through supporting both the elaboration of each group's narrative strand, as well as through braiding these strands together. This process requires that the conditions for legitimacy offered by each party about their own identity group, be included in the formulation of the problem statement. Thus, as problems are identified, they are described in terms that legitimize the stakeholders involved. From this perspective, braiding is a process by which the conditions for participation are created.

This process does not dilute the uniqueness of any identity group, for the grounds they offer for their own legitimacy are retained and elaborated. Rather, this process is one in which the Concrete Other is materialized by each group, for all groups. This is, in effect, a narrative perspective on integration precisely because the process of braiding creates the conditions for the voice of all parties to be materialized and elaborated. For this reason, public officials are uniquely situated to be the braiding agents. First, they have access to different identity communities, either directly, through their own offices or indirectly, through other public agencies and institutions, and this access enables them to engage in the development of narrative strands. Secondly, they have responsibility to foster the participation of the public in public issues, and narrative braiding supports participation. However, this could dramatically change the role of the public official from one of controlling or helping identity groups to one of supporting the emergence of voice through the creation of better-formed stories *with* different groups. In this light, negotiating identity is a critically important role for public officials, one that gives them more than a ring-side seat for the witnessing the emergence of integration but rather defines their role in the negotiation as a process of narrative braiding that is core to deliberative process, if not democracy itself.

Acknowledgements

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i See a video that documents the protest and contestation surrounding the passage of The Resolution in Prince William, VA at http://www.9500liberty.com/.

ii See Forester and Laws (2007) for a set of mediator profiles that displays the complexity of their practice, as per their descriptions of that practice. Their research reveals the gap between what mediators do in practice, and how the field of mediation, more broadly describes practice - the complexity of the actual practice exceeds the descriptions of practice,

iii See Laws & Verloo (2010) for an analysis of this conflict in Amsterdam.

iv This is solely based on conjecture by this author and is intended to be an example only.

v For descriptions of the pragmatics of the emergence of the "better-formed" story see (Sara Cobb, 2006). For descriptions of positive connotation, a type of reframing, see Watzlawick et al. (1967) and Watzlawick et al. (1974). For descriptions of questions that can contribute to the better-formed story formation see White & Epston (1990) and for a description of a process of the narrative evolution in mediation see Winslade & Monk (2008). See Tomm (1985) for an excellent description of "circular questions" which can be used to increase narrative complexity, more generally.

vi It would be most interesting to conduct a narrative analysis of immigrants to the Netherlands to find out how they see themselves positioned by the government and how this sits with them, how they react to it, and how they see the consequences of their being positioned in this way.

[vii] These are mechanical devices that emit a high-pitched noise that is uncomfortable to the human ear, and only perceived by the young. It is deployed in locations in the Netherlands where the government wants to discourage loitering of youth. See

http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,621025,00.html

A Deconstructive Approach to Class Meetings:

Managing Conflict and Building Learning Communities

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Abstract

When the quality of teacher-student and student-student relationships is undermined by conflicts, classrooms can become unwelcoming environments that are not conducive to teaching and learning. Circle conversations are widely utilized in response to such conflicts as well as for academic and community-building purposes. In this article, we introduce a form of circle conversation, which we have termed 'deconstructive class meeting'. We developed this specific meeting format in a New Zealand secondary school drawing on local, indigenous processes of community conversation, discourse theory and narrative therapy. The structure of our meeting is deliberately designed to support the simultaneous achievement of two, seemingly contradictory objectives: conflict resolution and community building. We argue that when teachers and students collaboratively examine the power of ideas or discourses of learning not only alternatives to problematic practices become available, but learning communities and relationships are strengthened also.

A Deconstructive Approach to Class Meetings:

Managing Conflict and Building Learning Communities

The relationship patterns that teachers and students draw on for their interactions with each other not only make a difference for how a classroom operates as a community, but also for whether it is an environment conducive to teaching and learning. In the New Zealand context, the quality of teacher-student relationships has been shown to directly correlate to students' achievement levels, especially for indigenous Māori (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2004) and students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Hill & Hawk, 2005). Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, and Teddy (2007) found that all students' assessment results had significantly improved when teachers made some minor changes to their practices, which included, among other things, showing an interest in and/or trying to better understand their students' perspectives. In contrast, when teachers did not make an effort to engage with their students on a personal level, students demonstrated fewer learning behaviours.

When teachers respond to disruptions, non-compliance and defiance, behaviours that can often be triggered by tensions in the teacher-student relationship, they have a variety of strategies to choose from. Conflict resolution and community building are two possible interventions and both are of particular interest to us. In focusing on community and conflict resolution, we do not completely dismiss behavioural approaches to conflict (see, for example, Rogers, 2002). These approaches are teacher-centred, in the sense that they rely on the external control of student behaviours by the teacher, and they can be useful in situations when there is no time for negotiation and the flow of the lesson has to be maintained. Our preference, however, is for interventions that aim to improve students' self-discipline and relationship competencies and that endorse a *working with* rather than a *doing to* philosophy of addressing conflict. Such interventions also suitably complement schools' projects of inclusion and citizenship education. Increasingly, schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are using various adaptations of restorative practice (RP) processes for preventative purposes and daily relationship

management, in addition to responding to relationship breakdowns. Many teachers draw on the work of prominent restorative practitioners who provide a wide range of examples for such adaptations (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010; Claassen & Claassen, 2008; Hopkins, 2004, 2011; The Restorative Practices Development Team, 2004; Thorsborne & Vinegrad, 2006; Winslade & Williams, 2012). We believe with the above authors that circle conversations offer a framework for collaborative problem-solving between teachers and students. In this current project we were particularly interested to investigate the potential of circle conversations as the basis for daily relationship management. We wanted to explore how they might support the establishment of a positive learning culture in a classroom.

Our particular circle conversation, which the authors of this article termed *deconstructive class meeting*, was developed with teachers at Aotea College, a multicultural secondary school in Wellington, New Zealand. The staff of the school had repeatedly expressed their concerns in staff meetings about the negative impact on the learning culture of minor, but on going, disruptions and conflicts. They were also concerned about what they called 'unjustified meanness' that at times negatively impacted on student-student relationships. The teachers agreed that, in addition to finding effective ways of addressing conflict, there was a need to develop more respectful relationships between students and, in some instances, between teachers and students. Strengthening relationships within classrooms was hypothesised by the majority of teachers to reduce the number of interruptions to teaching and learning. Circle conversations offered a suitable format to achieve the teachers' main objectives of community building and conflict resolution. The first two authors managed to secure funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and under their leadership, the teachers at the school embarked on an innovative three-year project that introduced to volunteering teachers specific ways of speaking, using principles adapted from narrative therapy, and a class meeting process. Over the period of the project, sixty teachers opted to participate in professional learning, which was

delivered through a two-day introductory workshop and regular, three-weekly focus group sessions led by the first two authors.

The meeting process was designed to meet two objectives: the strengthening of the classroom community, and replacing problematic relationship patterns with more respectful alternatives. Every class meeting began with a mixer or relationship-building round, which helped develop new relational dynamics. We were aware that students in secondary schools often became very busy under exam and assessment pressures. During such times, opportunities for connecting with others on a personal level could be diminished. We, therefore, wanted to make the most of the occasions when class meetings were called and space was provided to pay more than just fleeting attention to others.

The class meeting was also seen to provide opportunities to teach directly the key competencies which had been introduced in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). There are five key competencies, namely, participating and contributing, relating to others, thinking, use of language, text and symbols and self-management. Teachers are expected to teach these competencies across all curriculum subjects. Nickolite and Doll (2008) claim that, "strategies that promote highly effective peer interactions can be instrumental in creating a soothing and supportive social environment that makes it possible for students to stay engaged in academic learning" (p. 103). Hopkins (2011) suggests that, "Nobody feels safe if they are surrounded by strangers" (p. 49).

Using short activities that build and strengthen relationships can also increase feelings of trust and safety, which are the necessary prerequisites for addressing conflict. We have found that creating opportunities for participants to connect with and to talk to peers and teachers they would not otherwise engage with on a personal level relaxes the atmosphere. We also believe that starting with connection activities makes the meetings more inviting for our Māori and Pasifika students, whose cultural traditions of meeting protocols include a 'mihimihi', or introduction, at the start. Through

participants sharing something about themselves, an atmosphere of trust is created, which helps everyone ease into the more serious, conflict resolution part of the meeting (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2004).

The narrative framework helps locate problems in the relationship dynamics of the group as opposed to locating them in individuals. Like Winslade and Williams (2012), we centralise and address "the whole nexus of relationships within a classroom" (p. 111), in contrast to focusing on particular relationships or individual students or teachers. We think that when problems are considered to be "a function of the relationships among the whole group" (p. 113), rather than of individuals, more productive and constructive responses to conflict become available. For the teachers at Aotea College, addressing the "whole nexus of relationships" meant that they had to be prepared to give up their familiar ways of addressing conflict, such as dishing out consequences and withdrawing privileges. Like the students, teachers also had to be willing to replace familiar patterns of interaction with ones that repositioned everyone in relation to others.

Deconstruction as a Relationship Strategy of

Addressing the Power of Ideas

Our specific, deconstructive approach to class meetings builds on an earlier project by The Restorative Practices Development Team (2004), who developed conference, class meeting and interview processes that drew on Māori hui (meeting) protocols (Macfarlane, 2004), constructionist theorizing (Burr, 2003) and narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990). Their work has been inspirational for the design of both the community and relationship-building activities and the four rounds that provide the structure of the conflict resolution part of our meeting. We will introduce the four rounds below when we describe the format of the class meeting in more detail. Kecskemeti (2011) identified some discourses of learning and notions of schooling as complicit in producing teacher-student conflict. She also found that, when teachers collectively deconstructed those

discourses, their stress levels reduced and they were able to come up with alternative relationship practices that did not produce conflict. Kecskemeti's findings encouraged us to *listen* not only *to* what students and teachers had to say about their conflicts but also to *listen for* discourses of learning during class meetings.

What distinguishes deconstructive class meetings from other forms of circle is the attention paid to discourses and the frequent, strategic use of deconstructive questioning at various points in the meeting. We have drawn on Foucault's work and his notions of power (Foucault, 1980; Ransom, 1997) to support our argument for giving such a significant role to deconstruction. In addition to oppressive power, which involves the use of hostile forces in order to regulate the conduct of others (Rabinow, 2000), Foucault described another type of power, which he termed productive and constitutive of identities (Davies, 2006; Foucault, 2000a, 2000b). This notion of power is particularly relevant to us.

Unlike oppressive power, which is visible because it is exercised through the use of force or some form of coercion, productive power operates through the use of knowledge or discourse, according to which persons shape their own conduct in order to take up a particular type of identity. While oppressive power might be easy to spot, productive power is harder to notice, as it operates in hidden ways. Consequently, it requires a different intervention from trying to change the visible conduct of persons. What we do instead is to look for and expose the discourses or rationalities, which make a particular practice or behaviour seem reasonable and inevitable (Davies, Edwards, Gannon, & Laws, 2007). We believe that the ideas of schooling that teachers and students might use to take up their identities can at times work to undermine their collaboration, against their best intentions. Therefore, we wanted to develop a form of classroom conversation that consciously set out to, 'identify and name the ideas that shape teacher-student, teacher-parent and other relationships in schools, including the ideas that produce antagonistic and disrespectful relationships' (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010, p.110).

So how can such conceptualization of power be used in a class meeting and how can the power of discourses be deconstructed or unsettled? When we observe teacher-student interactions in a classroom, it is the behaviours of both teachers and students that are obvious. It is more difficult to identify what discourses or knowledges of schooling inform the practices they engage in and shape the meanings they make of their respective roles. We might see a teacher who clearly defines the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and corrects students who cross those boundaries. We might see students who respond to these corrections without resistance and would do what their teacher asks. In this instance both teacher and students may follow the same unwritten rules of interaction, which could be described with a statement such as, "Teachers decide what happens in the classroom and students have to follow their instructions". The teacher-student interaction goes well, because neither of them questions these rules. We could say that both teacher and students take up their identities from the same discourse of schooling and they both accept the structure of rights and responsibilities that this discourse or rationality prescribes for both.

However, when students question and resist the tasks set by their teacher – with back-chatting, calling out or swearing - and they might say things like, "I talk because it is boring", or, "It is your job to teach us", then their behaviours are likely to be informed by ideas of schooling that enable resistance to repetitious practice and disable acceptance of either the teacher's leadership role, or the learner's responsibilities (or both), in the teaching and learning interaction. These behaviours are authorised by different beliefs about schooling, such as, "Learning should be fun", and, "Good teachers make all learning activities entertaining", or, "Learning is the teacher's responsibility". These ideas can also set up a problematic power relationship between teacher and student. If a student enters their interactions with teachers with the expectation that they will be entertained, then it is very likely that they will be disappointed. It is unreasonable to expect that all learning activities can be turned into fun and that learners do not have to do anything in order to learn a new skill. So this idea enables

students to resist hard work, as well as constant negative critique of a teacher if she or he does not provide entertainment.

Such discourses or views of schooling have the power to produce particular student and teacher identities, with their concomitant behaviours, while suppressing others. We use deconstructive questioning to dis-cover and unsettle the *power* of a strongly held but unhelpful idea, through drawing attention to its opposite (Davies, 1996). In the case of "fun", discussions can be invited about the usefulness of work or effort. In the case of the idea that, "learning is the teacher's responsibility", a conversation can be started about the respective roles and responsibilities of both teachers and students. A teacher skilled in this type of deconstructive questioning can ask students to reflect on the usefulness or otherwise of particular ideas of learning as opposed to arguing which idea should be accepted as "the truth." The focus is not on the behaviours of students or teachers but on how specific notions of learning might shape those behaviours.

Questions such as, "How much practice do you think you might need to invest in learning this skill?" or, "Do you think it is possible to learn a new skill or concept with only your teacher demonstrating it but without any input from you?" problematize these commonly held ideas that, we believe, produce conflict between teachers and students. Such questions are not about creating binaries by deciding which notion of schooling or successful learning is better than the other. Rather, deconstructive questions unsettle the dominance of an idea by introducing a plurality of meanings (Davies, 1998). Michael White (1992) used deconstruction in therapy in a similar manner. He suggested that, when discourses or knowledges are not problematized, they can acquire a truth status. The practices that these "truths" promote then become "a taken-for-granted mode of life" that comes to be seen as "the natural order of things" (p. 142).

The deconstructive questions posed in our class meetings invite both students and teachers to evaluate the relational effects of different ideas of learning. They help both students and teachers to

clarify their positions on particular views of schooling and the roles of teacher and student. Such evaluation is necessary for deciding which notions of schooling to accept or to reject. It is only after clarifying their own stance that it becomes easier for teachers and students to negotiate which ideas will produce the kinds of relationship that are productive of respect and conducive to teaching and learning in a particular situation. Deconstruction used in class meetings thus supports a critical examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the various discourses that influence teacher-student interactions in a particular class.

The Format of Class Meetings Used at Aotea College

Pre-meeting Tasks

Organisation. Class meetings are commonly called when a class is struggling with learning and/or teacher-student or student-student relationships and other methods, such as behaviour management, have been ineffective in achieving positive relational outcomes for those concerned. Usually several teachers of the same class, or in some instances a group of students, suggest that a class meeting should be called to discuss the concerns and to find a way forward. In the lead-up to a class meeting, the teachers of a particular class share their concerns and discuss their hopes for a meeting. If students want to call a meeting, they will first talk to their form teacher or dean. (Form teachers and deans are teachers who are designated to provide pastoral care for a whole class or for all students of the same year level respectively.)

When a number of teachers experience difficulties with the same group, or a significant number of students are unhappy with how things are in their class, usually most subject teachers, the form teacher and the dean of that year level will all attend one or more consecutive meetings with the same class. When a series of meetings is deemed necessary, each subject teacher of the class gives up a lesson to ensure that students do not miss more than one lesson in any one subject. Substitute teachers are organized, where possible, but teachers often give up their non-contact time or exchange

relief to support each other. They do this in the belief that the time invested in strengthening a classroom community will be compensated for by the increase of caring attitudes and on task behaviours.

Roles. Participating teachers agree on their various roles in the meeting. There are two major roles, facilitator and reflector, which require fluency in the conversational moves the teachers have learned previously through professional development, which included learning about the notions of discourse and deconstruction. Teachers can choose to be contributors, participants or observers, gradually easing into the facilitator and reflector roles as they practice to become more competent in the use of the conversational moves necessary for those roles. The facilitator and reflector roles are pivotal. The facilitator is responsible for setting behavioural expectations, maintaining the structure and flow of the meeting, and asking appropriate questions throughout. The reflector role requires competence in discursive reflection and deconstruction, in order to identify and to unpack the un/helpful ideas that are affecting relationships in the classroom. Participant teachers are encouraged to ask curious or deconstructive questions as they see appropriate, using externalizing language and avoiding totalizing language throughout the meeting.

Setting up a circle. Before the meeting one of the teachers rearranges the seats in the classroom into a circle format with help from students. Sitting in a circle has both practical and philosophical applications. The circle is an ancient symbol of unity, healing and power (Tew, 1998), which is used by many indigenous cultures. The circle format provides a structure that requires students and teachers to act and think differently from their usual ways of interacting with each other. Practically a circle allows all participants to see and hear each other – therefore, no one can hide. Teachers and influential and vocal students have to become listeners, while quiet students can speak without interruption. Participation is equalized as the contributions of students who might otherwise be silenced are brought forward and the dominance of teachers and/or powerful students is reduced.

Initially, some students and teachers might find this shift difficult and it takes some time before they become comfortable with the process.

The Actual Meeting

Karakia and starter activity. The Aotea College class meeting always begins with a reflection or a *karakia*, which is the Māori term for prayer. However, starting with a karakia is not to be misunderstood as imposing religious practices on students. Rather, the inclusion of this step is seen as showing respect for the meeting protocols of the indigenous people of the country, which are frequently observed during public meetings in New Zealand. This formal opening of the meeting is followed by a starter or mixer activity, discussed previously. The starter activity is designed to get students and teachers speaking to each other and getting to know more about the classroom community. Activities to get students mixing their seating arrangements are used to encourage a supportive environment.

Introducing people and process. The meeting continues with the participating teachers introducing themselves (if unknown to the class) and their roles in the meeting. The facilitator explains (or reviews) the process and the rounds that will be followed. There is an explanation of the relevant key competencies, and examples of what would constitute a display of such competence during the class meeting. For example, explaining the messages consciously and unconsciously sent with the body and the various power relationships that body language can call into being has been a distinguishing feature of the meetings, which provide a good opportunity to help students understand how their body language sends messages of respect (or not), as well as learning to read non-verbal cues (Frey & Davis Doyle, 2001; Marshall, 2001).

Giving the context. The facilitator or one of the teachers provides a rationale for the meeting. In the following, fictitious example of a Year 10 class meeting, Ms Smith, the form teacher, addressed the class using externalizing language and avoided blaming particular students like this:

I have called this meeting for two reasons. First, I want to acknowledge how much better the class has been working since our last meeting a month ago. I and the other teachers have all noticed the help that you give to each other and the longer periods of on-task behaviour. However, during the last week or so I noticed that learning had stopped being a priority and there is a general lack of interest to complete assignments. I have also found out, talking to some students, that several of you are finding the social environment uncomfortable, if not threatening. There seems to be a bit of meanness creeping into relationships. As you can see all your subject teachers and your deans are here to find out what you think might be happening and how we could go back to the calm working atmosphere that we had a week or so ago and to stop things from deteriorating.

The four rounds. The facilitator then leads the discussion structured by four rounds. She or he ensures that each and every student and teacher contributes to each round. With additional clarifying and deconstructive questions (asked by the reflector, the facilitator, participating teachers and sometimes students), there is not always time to complete all four rounds. In those instances remaining rounds will be covered in a subsequent meeting, usually the following day. This is not considered a problem as Māori meeting protocols require participants to devote as much time as it takes to resolving an issue. It is not clock time that dictates what happens but honoring every part of the process and the contributions of the participants. The four rounds are an adaptation and simplification (given the number of participants) of a meeting format suggested by The Restorative Practices Development Team (2004). The rounds also loosely follow the process that is employed in narrative therapy. First the problem's influence is discussed on the class community followed by the group's influence on the problem (Morgan, 2000).

Round one. The issues affecting teaching/ learning in the classroom are named and everyone's views on what might be the problems are listened to. Questions that might be asked include;

"What do <u>you</u> think are the issues / problems that need addressing in this classroom?"

or:

"What issues or problems undermine learning in this classroom?"

Students are encouraged to speak in full sentences and sentence starters are provided when students are new to the process and/or they do not feel comfortable to speak in front of others (I think an issue that needs addressing is…; I think the problem is…).

The students in Ms Smith's Year 10 class responded along the following lines:

"I think there is a general lack of respect in our class for both students and teachers."

"I think there is too much talking and distractions. When the teacher talks, some people talk over her and others lose focus and they start talking, too. We get very little work done."

"There are people who are not interested in learning and they are consistently off-task and defiant."
"They make it difficult for those who want to learn."

"People bring their social dramas into the classroom and they tease and bully others."

Students also commented on teachers' practices.

"I find it difficult to listen when Mr. Green talks too quietly."

"I lose interest when Ms Brown gets impatient and doesn't wait for us to complete the task."

Teachers also share their take on the problem, when it is their turn to speak. When there are several teachers in the meeting, they sit at different points of the circle.

It is during the summarizing of the major themes in the contributions to the first round that deconstructive questions can be posed by the reflector or any of the teachers. The reflector's summary is meant to identify and expose some of those unarticulated but inferred ideas of schooling and/or

relationship conduct that are likely to produce disruptive or unsupportive behaviours. In Ms Smith's class, different understandings of the leadership role of the teacher might be highlighted, along with what it might mean to be considerate towards others. Questions like these might be asked:

"Is it reasonable to expect that you can do whatever you like or talk when you are finished and others are not?"

or:

"How much waiting time would be fair? How would teachers know the difference between someone struggling and wasting time?"

Such questions invite students to reflect on the effects of both student and teacher behaviours on others.

Round two. The effects of the issue(s) are explored, with questions such as:

"What are the effects of the problems discussed on you or on others or on learning?"

Ms Smith's class identified the following effects that the occasional absence of learning behaviours brought about:

"We don't get any work done."

"People who want to learn don't get anywhere."

"It is hard for teachers to teach us and they get angry."

"The social dramas waste a lot of time. I don't want to do any groupwork because I am expected to get involved in the dramas and take sides."

"You get attacked if you don't get involved in the dramas."

Teachers might contribute along the following lines:

"I am really disappointed when I prepare lots of interesting activities but get constantly interrupted when I try to explain them. "

Round three. Exceptions to the problem are sought (the alternative story) using questions like:

"Can you think of a time when these problems do not affect this class or when teaching and learning is going well?"

In this round, useful information can be collected about the strategies and circumstances that are more conducive to teaching and learning. Further ideas can be identified that are worth problematizing and critiquing. This is another phase of the class meeting, in which deconstructive questions can be asked. Ms Smith's students thought that there were fewer disruptions and greater respect between people when:

"There is a seating plan and I do not sit next to my friends."

"We have practical lessons, when there is no theory."

"I like the teacher or I like the subject."

"The teacher makes the learning fun."

We all possibly learn better when we are interested in a subject and/or we like the person who delivers the teaching. However, the idea that, "I will only collaborate with people I like or during subjects I prefer", is problematic for a learning community – for any community for that matter. This idea enables care for self only without supporting a notion of care that considers the interests of others also. Deconstructive questions can invite reflection on such ideas and their implications for the various relationships within a classroom community.

Round four. Participants are asked to make a commitment to something that they believe would help address the problem and/or change the learning environment in positive ways. Both students and teachers are invited to give answers to the question:

"What are you personally prepared to do or what do you think you need to commit to in order to improve relationships and/or learning in this classroom?"

Both teachers and students commit to change their practices and these commitments are recorded in writing. Everyone writes down what they are prepared to do differently on a small card or post-it. These commitments are collated on a large sheet of paper, which is usually laminated and displayed in the classroom. Such a public display of personal, signed commitments makes it easier to remind people of their promises if they forget to honor them. The meeting finishes with feedback and participants - teachers and students alike - are invited to acknowledge individuals they thought showed competence in any areas of the key competencies. Ideas for future discussions and tasks for follow up are recorded.

Teacher de-briefing after the meeting. Participating teachers allocate follow-up tasks, agree on the date of the next meeting and they decide what ideas (discourses) warrant further discussion, either with students or with colleagues. Collegial discussions of the various discourses exposed in class meetings often produce possible teacher responses for future conflict situations.

Results of Investigations into These Practices

Research on these practices is ongoing. Two small projects and two masters dissertations have been completed and published. The findings of these studies suggest the following:

1. Teachers reported an improved sense of wellbeing, though this was hard won:

   If you are going to go to a class meeting, especially if it requires you having to give up some of your free time or it requires someone having to relieve [substitute] for you then you need to have thought about those things, why am I there and what am I contributing, what do I hope to get out of it.

They felt that class meetings had made the job of teaching the class easier. They felt more positive about their class, and that the meetings had made them easier to manage.

> You know to me that was one of the most positive things to come out of it, the kids in general were more polite and so I could be more polite. They still had their bad days, because they're teenagers and, you know, we still did have some difficult times but the improvement could be seen.

The teachers reported that students sometimes expressed reluctance:

> Even though, if you mentioned class meetings, they might groan and get all upset that they were having a class meeting, because I think you put them on the spot; I think they would begrudgingly say they have been good for them, too.

However, there was an improved learning environment in their class, which was reflected in an improvement in attitude to learning for some individual students (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). Initial reluctance to participate in circle conversations is also noted by Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2010). They suggest that such reluctance can be explained by feelings of discomfort that students might experience due to their lack of familiarity with the process.

The fact that the professional learning program was voluntary, ran for three years, and involved around twenty teachers each year, with ongoing participation of those from previous years, also suggests that teachers found the program well worth the effort.

2. In the early stages of the project, as the class meeting structure was being developed, meetings were regularly video-recorded. Ethical permission was subsequently sought and granted to study a series of video recordings from one class. This study showed significant shifts in behaviour of the class from the first meeting to the last. In particular, we found that students expressed themselves better, were more considerate of others, and made longer and more appropriate contributions in the last recorded meeting than they had done initially. We believe that these data suggest that students learned to manage themselves, to relate better to others, and to participate in their class community. They also

learned to use language more effectively in situations where interpersonal conflict threatened the functioning of the classroom as a learning environment. In short, we believe that the classroom meetings helped students to learn, and to demonstrate, key competencies (Gray & Drewery, 2011).

Informal feedback from students and teachers, who had become familiar with the class meeting process, surfaced similar themes, including a better understanding of others' points of view and an increased sense of connectedness with others within the same community. Students noted:

> "Though the meeting was difficult and challenging, it was nice to learn about others and to develop empathy and understanding. It brought closeness to the group."

> "The meeting helped us create a sense of community and belonging in the group."

> "It helped me understand others, and highlight what their strengths are."

Teachers also appreciated the changes in relational dynamics.

> "The interactions are better within the class as a whole. Disenfranchised students really do get a voice."
> "All students and staff have their say and we get a chance to understand where students are coming from."

They noticed improvements in skill and confidence levels.

> I am surprised how mature the students can be in a new setting. It is interesting to see how the students have become familiar with the process and how they are becoming more confident to speak when it is their turn, whereas, at the beginning, they were reluctant.

Commentary

A key feature of the Aotea project is the focus on students' learning in classrooms. Deconstructive questions focus on discourses around learning, and in the meetings students are helped individually to develop positive attitudes to learning and success at school. Whilst dysfunctional

relationships, among students or between students and teacher, are the precipitating motives for calling a meeting, we do not set out to address problem behaviors as such. Students' behaviors are addressed in relation to their effects on the learning environment of the classroom. We do, however, expect that the project will help to keep students at school who might otherwise have lost their way. A recent study (Gray, 2012) of students who may have become disengaged with school showed that the positive relationships with their peers and teachers helped them to continue in the schooling system. The climate of care and acceptance cultivated by some teachers and some classrooms allowed for these relationships to flourish over years, allowing these students to feel valued and encouraged. Teacher satisfaction has also been a focus from the outset. And we have heard many of our colleagues say that the approach has shown them how they can relate better with students, which, in turn, affects their teaching every day. A colleague described the shifts in her approach this way:

> "I am a lot more accepting of people, because now I just see them operating through different discourses."

We believe in the power of ideas to change lives, and we think the results so far suggest that it is worth pursuing our examination of the power of the dominating discourses which affect the learning culture of a school. And finally, a word about the cost: the ideas presented here may seem sophisticated, but teachers grasped them readily and took them up enthusiastically, once they understood how easily they could change their ways of speaking, and how effective this was. Though it does take personal commitment to acknowledge the potentially destructive effects of 'power over' relationships by teachers, it does not cost much to speak differently.

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"Leaning In" as Imperfect Allies in Community Work

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Abstract
The work of allies in community work is informed by justice-doing and decolonizing practice. A brief description of being an ally is outlined here, as well as understandings of the importance of the concepts of fluidity and groundless solidarity in ally work. "Leaning in" is described and offered as a way to invite accountability while resisting righteousness. "Leaning in" invites collective accountability, which is a more useful concept than personal responsibility, which sides with individualism and the idea we are only held accountable for our personal actions. Strategies for being an ally are considered, including engaging with a hopeful skepticism while reflexively questioning whether we are "walking the talk." The limitations of allies are discussed, as well as the need to make repair for our failures as allies. Strategies for resisting both unity and division are addressed, as is the possibility of creating cultures of critique that allow for something other than attack and division. Imperfect solidarity based on points of connection is offered as a useful strategy for maintaining good-enough and required alliances across time. Finally, some exercises are offered for readers to engage with: an inquiry into their histories and imperfect practices of being and needing allies, and some invitations to step into domains where they have previously not served as allies.

Keywords
ally, community work, leaning in, power, privilege, fluidity, imperfect solidarity

"Leaning In" as Imperfect Allies in Community Work

The story that follows illuminates an experience of messy and imperfect ally work on the number 20 bus that goes through the Downtown East Side, the poorest part of Vancouver, and the poorest off-reserve part of Canada.

I get on the 20 bus late at night, and like most women, I can tell you exactly how many drunk men are on the bus. But there is one guy that requires all of my attention because he's loud, he's standing up and he's shouting racist things at an elder Chinese woman. I stand still, not moving, looking and listening. I think what am I going to do? The first thing I think about is, I can't take on a great big, drunk man. I've tried this in my life, it hasn't worked for me and I'm scared of great big drunk men. I'm not required as an ally to take on that guy, unless I have the power to do it. I am required to be an ally to this woman.

I look at the Chinese elder woman and I kind of throw my love at her. I want her to know I'm here, I'm with her. I'm going to try to figure out what I'm going to do. She's got her head down, she's got her groceries on her seat next to her and she's tucked in tight. She's not looking at my love that I'm throwing at her. This is a good tactic, but it's not working.

While I'm trying to figure out how the heck I'm going to respond, a young, sweet, lovely person who I could not tell the gender of slips by me, Aikido style, and picks up the groceries, puts them on their lap and sits next to her. What I saw as a full seat, this person saw as a seat without a person in it.

Beautiful! What a beautiful thing! So now, there is a body between this elder Chinese woman and this man who is attacking her with racism. The Chinese woman doesn't thank this person. I can tell this person is looking to say, "Should I put my arm around you? Should I talk to you?"

And the Chinese woman is letting them know she's not engaging with them either.

There's a whole bunch of us on the bus that are thinking, "OK. What's the next thing we should do?"

This guy is still going. Now I'm rooting for this young person, and I'm worried for them. My read is that they are possibly trans, or gender-variant and maybe they are queer[i], so they could be next to be attacked. Why should they be in front of this big angry guy? This is not good.

There's a really large First Nations guy on the bus. I can't tell whether or not he's had a few beers or he's doing performance art because he's by the window, and he slips by the person on the aisle seat, puts his hand on the bar and swings around, you know, takes all the room on the bus.

In my head I'm thinking, "Oh man! Big guy stuff, there's big guy and big guy; this is going to be bad."

But no, I totally misjudged this guy. He's being an accountable man, what he's saying is bring it on, bring it over here.

One of the nasty things the white guy had said to the Chinese woman was, "Get back on the boat. Go back to China."

And the big First Nations guy says to the white guy, with humor, "Hey man, you are the original boat person. Christopher Columbus was your captain. Get back on your own damn boat," and he's laughing as he says this.

Everyone on the bus exhales, because we know we are going to be OK-enough, and then everybody leans in, and the guy looks at me, and though I do seem inept, I am available to be an ally. He looks at me and, with a smile, he asks, "What the hell boat did you come from?"

I timidly say, "Ireland, Newfoundland, a little bit of England."

He says, "You can stay, you know your boats."

He starts holding court, inviting other folks into the fray.

As all this is going down, I notice the elder Chinese woman picks up her groceries and slips out the door at the next stop. I go out with her. The bus goes on. I don't get to see the rest of this lesson in 500 years of resistance to colonization, but I envision it: it makes me happy.

But I'm left on the sidewalk with the Chinese woman, and I'm wondering if she wanted me to accompany her, does she feel safe-enough to go to her home. She puts her head down and she kind of runs, dragging her groceries behind her. She's probably not new to this. She probably has really good reasons to not trust me either. I'm not a perfect ally to her, she doesn't love me, she doesn't thank me: she takes off.

I realize I cannot follow her. A big white person following her would be scary, so I try to let go of what I want to do. I want to be the perfect ally, but she's saying, "No."

This is what no looks like. I work at WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) a rape crisis centre. We work really hard to hear no and listen to no. So I'm thinking, "Vikki, you've got to hear no too."

So I know this is going to be imperfect, she's probably OK-enough, and she's probably lived with this her whole life.

I turn around. There are three other women at the bus stop and we are a real multiplicity of women. And one of them looks at me, looks at everyone else, and says, "This is nobody's stop, is it?"

And we say, "No."

"We're all going to wait for the next bus?"

We all chuckle and respond, "Yeah."

And that was my moment of the social divine (Lacey, 2005), that four different women would get off at the wrong stop to accompany this woman who didn't need us to walk her home, and didn't thank us. And the big First Nations guy and the young, possibly gender-variant person, and all the folks who "leaned in" on the bus are a part of the fabric of the social divine.

These are beautiful moments. When people do the right thing.

And there I was saying, "Oh man. What am I doing alone at night at an unfamiliar bus stop? This isn't the best scene for you, Vik."

But I have these other women in solidarity on this street, and I know there are accountable men and gender-variant folks on that bus. This changes things for me, it matters for me. I hold these moments of

the social divine alongside the terror of the racism this Chinese woman experienced. That's the real story, and that's a heart-breaking story (Reynolds, 2012,).

Introduction

In community work informed by justice-doing, we act in solidarity with shared purposes and shoulder each other up to resist structural violence and abuses of power and work to create a more just society (Reynolds, 2010a). This requires us to act as allies to each other across the differences of privilege and access to power that we hold. Allies belong to groups that have particular privileges, and work alongside people from groups that are subjected to power in relation to that privilege. The role of the ally is to respond to the abuses of power in the immediate situation, and to work for systemic social change (Bishop, 2002). Allies work collectively to contribute to the making of a space in which the person who is subjected to power gets to have their voice heard and listened to. Being heard is not enough — a person's words must matter and not be dismissed. This contributes to the creation of "Spaces of Justice" (Lacey, 2005).

Being an ally is not a badge of honor but a sign of privilege and it is risky to be romantic or sentimental about this. When we experience being the subject of power, abuses of power, oppression, or attacks on our dignity we accept allies because we need them, not because it is safe or because we have reasons for perfect trust. We invite good-enough allies, despite past acts that are not trustworthy as imperfect allies are required when the stakes are high and risk is near. The need for allies speaks to structures of social injustice. Our greater purpose is to deliver a just society, not to show up as allies, because our access to power makes that possible. Ally work requires humility and a resistance to righteousness, alongside the skill and moral courage required to name abuses of power from people within the same groups allies belong to.

Power relations are complex and, in order to resist simplification, I will speak of subjection as well as oppression. Oppression does exist, but it is not the only way in which power is used to subject people. All abuses of power are not oppression. As well, power is not always oppressive, and can be generative. I borrow this teaching from critical Trans theorist/activist Dean Spade (2011):

I use the term "subjection" to talk about the workings of systems of meaning and control such as racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. I use "subjection" because it indicates that power relations impact how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning and control... "oppression" brings to mind the notion that one set of people are dominating another set of people, that one set of people "have power" and another set are denied it...The operations of power are more complicated than that...our strategies need to be careful not to oversimplify how power operates. Thinking about power as top/down, oppressed/oppressor, dominator/dominated

can cause us to miss opportunities for intervention and to pick targets for change that are not the most strategic. The term "subjection" captures how systems of meaning and control that concern us permeate our lives, our ways of knowing about the world, and our ways of imagining transformation.

For example, this racist attack on the Chinese elder on the bus is not the only way all of the folks on the bus are subjected to power. It is not only a case of one individual white man attacking an individual woman with verbal racism. What happens is made possible by the existence of a background discourse that structures what happens on the bus. Racist immigration laws in Canada, which prohibited Chinese immigration, disrupted family unification and refused citizenship, and the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion legislation, which impoverished Chinese families, are particular policies that have fostered this racist attack[ii]. Corporate media coverage of "boat people" as threatening and not worthy of refuge is another part of the operating context.

On the other hand, the elder Chinese woman's multiple acts of resistance are responses to her subjection to power. Looking down, being hunched over, and not engaging anyone, are acts of resistance that make up an intelligent and prudent resistance strategy. She has probably had success staying safe-enough by taking less space. Her acts of resistance are responses to her subjection to power, as there is always resistance to oppression and attacks on people's dignity (Scott, 1985, 1990; Wade, 1996, 1997; Reynolds, 2010b).

Simultaneously, the cultural stories the white guy is immersed in are also part of the context. They continually promote a notion of white men as a vulnerable population at the hands of

multiculturalism and feminism. He is on a bus, and guys should drive cars. He is by no means the perfect oppressor, and is subjected by the lies of the particular culture of masculinity held up by capitalism and patriarchy which demand that men should be in charge (drive) and be rich (own a car). Perhaps he is responding to the ways in which the dominant discourse positions him as a failure. This event is thus more than a singular act of oppression of a Chinese person by a white person. It happens at the point of intersection of "lines of force" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 85) about gender, immigration status, age, class and race, which are all part of the particular context. It is not accidental, for example, that this racist attack is not targeted at a Chinese young man who is in the company of six large friends.

While I find Spade's analysis of power useful, it is problematic that the above passage appears agentless: there are no offenders or agents that write, print, circulate, gossip, lie, belittle, and invent the "systems of meaning and control." But these meaning systems that appear disembodied are linked to systems of oppression, violence, relations of physical and material and social power, and arguably inseparable from them. Agentless constructions, such as "systems of meaning" cannot by themselves do injustice: they must be produced, warranted, justified, replicated, used, sanctioned and so on — by social agents (A. Wade, personal communication, 2012). But neither can individual agents act oppressively without the background systems of meaning (J. Winslade, personal communication, 2012). The main problem with Spade's view of subjection is that it does not begin to explain the actions of the people on the bus, not even the drunk white guy shouting racism.

Fluidity and Groundless Solidarity

Like the folks on the 20 bus, we are never perfect allies, but may become imperfect allies, momentary allies, creating moment-to-moment alliances which are flawed, not necessarily safe, but required and of use. Being an ally is not a static identity that requires perfection and always getting it right. It is a tactic informed by strategies, a performance (Butler, 1990). Ally work is comprised of actions potential allies take together across the differences of privilege that divide them to address abuses of power. Queer theory has brought exciting ideas to ally work (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1997) inviting fluidity, which is movement from the fixed and certain to the confused and unstable (Queen & Schimel, 1997).

Embracing fluidity in ally work means that being an ally is not a fixed position. Fluidity is useful for ally work because it acknowledges that in particular situations we all need allies, and in different contexts we can all serve as allies (Reynolds, 2010c). For example, the First Nations guy on the bus is called on to act as an ally to the Chinese elder, and to all of the women and gender-variant people on the bus, because of his access to gender privilege. Simultaneously, all of the settler people are required to have his back, as the police might attend and he could easily become the victim of police officers enacting colonization and racism by reading him as the perpetrator of violence and dragging him off of the bus. Fluid ally positioning is responsive to the multiple different domains that construct our identities and the access to power we hold in relation to these domains.

Categories, like domains of identity, are useful at times, but also problematic. American critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw writes about how her identity as a Black woman is constantly subject to erasure (Namaste, 2000) and disappearance by categories (Namaste, 1995). When the category being attended to is race, she is left behind as a Black woman. When the category is gender she is seen as a woman, but being Black is invisibilized. Her work illuminating the intersections of domains of identity has been useful in contributing to a more complex understanding of the intersectionality that comprises identity (Robinson, 2005). Ally positioning must always attend to this fluid intersectionality of sites of access to power, and being the subject of others' power, within the same moments and within the same conversations.

Canadian anarchist/academic Richard Day writes about "groundless solidarity" (2005, p.18), meaning that our activism need not always be tied to one location of power. No location is seen as the organizing principle 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. Sometimes we need to address sexism, sometimes it is more important to attend to racism, and, in another interaction, class privilege requires our attention. Of course, we can and must often attend to more than one domain of power at a time. We do not need to move our attention from one mutually exclusive category to another, but can engage in a dance that simultaneously addresses the complexities that comprise power relations.

In Canada, where I live and work, this intersectional approach always exists on colonized territories. In order to resist replicating colonization, we enact a decolonizing practice, which means acting in ways that simultaneously attend to the abuse of power that is happening, and holding ourselves to account in resisting ongoing colonization (Walia, 2012; Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; Lawrence & Dua, 2005). This might sound like inconsistency, but as anarchists say, "We can walk and chew gum."

In the situation on the 20 bus, we could address men's violence and attend to colonization at the same time. To do so requires that we always situate ourselves on the land in an accountable way and from that stance we respond to abuses of power. For example, the network of activists resisting the poverty, gentrification and homelessness that resulted from the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver began all organizing from the decolonizing position, 'No Olympics on stolen Native land'. From that place, we then addressed the devastating social impact of the Olympics facing most folks, not just Indigenous people. We structure decolonizing practice and accountability into all of our organizing, whatever the specific context of power abuses.

"Leaning in" and Collective Accountability

Individual accountability is a limiting idea that does not require us to be responsible for more than our own actions, but social injustice requires enormous, collaborative, and resourced social responses from all members of society, reflecting our "relational responsibilities" (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Whether we intend to or not, many of us benefit from the oppression of others. We need not feel guilty about this, but we are required to respond to the unearned privileges we hold with accountability. I did not personally take anyone's land as a settler person in Canada, but I certainly benefit from citizenship in the nation state of Canada, which exists on these Indigenous territories. Activism teaches us to analyze structures of power, not just attend to our individual acts. Collective accountability (Reynolds, 2009) requires that we take actions together to change these underlying structures that create the conditions for abuses of power.

For example, as a heterosexual person, I hope to respond to another heterosexual person who is performing homophobia by embracing collective accountability, and acknowledging the relationship that connects them to me through our shared site of privilege. I want to locate myself as collectively responsible for the performance of homophobia, and for the fact that it advantages me. I do not have to perform homophobia or racism or transphobia in order for my status to be elevated on the backs of others. I have to be accountable for more than just my personal actions. The seduction of identifying individually and separating myself off from any participation in collective responsibility at these times can be intense — I want to identify myself as, "not that kind of straight person." As an ally, I identify collectively as a heterosexual person in the presence of homophobia, and act to help my fellow straight person move towards accountability as well. I want to "lean in" with humility and resist being righteous and attacking the dignity of this heterosexual person. I do not think of people as homophobic, but I know we swim in a culture that hates homosexuals and that, if we do not resist homophobia, we will replicate it. I remind myself in "leaning in" that this person did not invent homophobia and it is now my job to help them understand this and resist this, as others taught me. "Leaning in" towards the other allows us to move toward solidarity, and act in ways that make space for that person and for us to be walking alongside each other.

Collective responsibility also contests the limits of human rights talk and legislation as the only measure of justice-doing. Legal protections would probably not allow for the prosecution of the white guy on the bus who was attacking the elder Chinese woman with racism. As one direct action activist told a white supremacist who asserted he was not acting illegally by trying to disrupt an anti-racism march, "There are a lot of things that are not illegal that you ought not to be doing."

Some laws are inherently racist, and the law is part of the mechanism that subjects people, so it is more than the application of law that is the issue (Spade, 2011). Collective accountability speaks to a social justice perspective, which may include legal rights, but is much more expansive. It requires us to show up and take imperfect actions immediately in the face of the white guy's attack, and to try to hold what the Chinese woman needs at the centre. Collective accountability invited all of the actions allies

took on the bus, and more. It suggests that we all work to address racism and men's abuses of power, and to transform contexts that make such attacks possible.

Walking the Talk: Engaging a Hopeful Skepticism

Kvale's hermeneutics of suspicion (Kvale, 1996; White, 1991), invites a healthy and hopeful skepticism toward our own practice as to whether we are enacting our ethics and acting as allies in any moment-to-moment interaction. Holding an anti-oppression decolonizing framework is fabulous, but theorizing is of limited value in itself (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Despite the promises of critical theory we have not delivered a just society. Allies engage with the reflexive question activists ask, "Am I walking the talk?" They also embrace "infinite responsibility" or to always attempt to be "open to another other" (Day, 2005, p. 18.) and to the multiplicity of ways we are not acting as allies, despite our intentions.

Would-be allies can inadvertently replicate power-over, lecture righteously, take center-stage, and make situations worse and possibly violent. Any information a person from an oppressed position gives potential allies in any interaction about our abuses of power or less egregious ally-fails are gifts to us. These teachings benefit allies at the cost of the person needing an ally (Tamasese, 2001). Allies work to accept critique with open hearts, and collectively withstand the spiritual pain we experience when we transgress (Reynolds, 2011). The following example speaks to the generous "leaning in" that I experienced in response to my ally-fail with a dear fellow activist.

As part of a Free Tibet rally I gave a speech critiquing the human rights record of the People's Republic of China. After the rally, my longtime activist ally, Sid Chow Tan, approached me, thanked me for my work and my speech, and then let 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 denigrated every Chinese person, including the Chinese allies who had been present to protest actions of the Chinese government. I felt a wave of shame, as, of course, this had not been my intention. I thanked Sid for this, and let him know that I would be accountable and attend to differentiating the Chinese government from Chinese people in my future activist work. I apologized for the pain I had caused him, and named what I

had enacted as racism. (Racism against Chinese people is something I get caught up in, living where I do in Vancouver, where it passes easily in polite white 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."

This event was over a decade ago, and Sid and I continue to work in a less-than-perfect and mutually respectful spirited solidarity. I hold onto this learning as a gift from my fellow activist who has been racialized and minoritized[iii]. I welcome this enabling shame (Jenkins, 2005; 2006) as it reminds me of my failure as an ally, and my need to stay critical and to make repair when I transgress. The relationship of solidarity Sid and I have in social justice work across decades allowed my transgression to be seen in context, not as the only story of me as an ally. Sid's willingness to "lean in" towards me, to teach me and not to sever relations with me allowed me to exhale, embrace being imperfect, and invited me to responsibility to act more accountably.

Trusting allies is risky, because, as allies, we can always choose to be accountable for our access to power, or not. As allies we can decide to back down, not notice, be silent, minimize, accommodate, or smooth things over. As allies, we need to hold our actions and words accountable to the person who is the subject of another person's power. The ally works to make space and then gets out of the way. For example, a feminist with white skin privilege talking on behalf of women who are racialized risks further marginalizing the women she seeks to be an ally to. The ally may need to make space and not speak, because allies are not qualified to speak. I do not know colonization outside of an academic understanding and teachings from witnessing people's suffering. For example, I did not suffer colonization and have not paid the price of this knowledge and so I am unqualified to speak about it.

An anti-oppression stance requires awareness of our locations in relation to power, and that we act with accountability for that access to power (Razack, 2002). As allies we make our privilege public as an accountability practice. For example, when I work in the impoverished community of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, I find ways to be public[iv] 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 sister-feeling from workers and clients that is neither earned nor real. People may feel more affinity and safety with me than my privileges warrant. Later, they may feel that they have been lied to or that some truth has been withheld from them. When we act as allies and make our privilege public, it can serve as a beginning place for trust to grow.

Limitations of Allies: Embracing Imperfection

Ally work is complicated and messy. As allies we can engage in tactics that are direct actions to resist and respond to abuses of power in the moment. We do not often have the luxury of time to step out, call a meeting and discuss strategies and develop perfect responses, as we need to respond in the moment. That is why it is useful not to hold ourselves to a perfect standard of ally acts, but to reflect after such events to critique our actions, strategize how to take on the broader social issues, and make repair, if that is required. For these reasons it is useful to engage with ally work as an imperfection project.

For example, the gender-variant and possibly queer young person on the bus acted immediately to put their body between the Chinese elder woman and the angry white guy. The First Nations guy invited everyone who was willing to participate to converse with him about their "boats" in an effort to complicate the situation, move attention off of the elder Chinese woman, and create some safety for her, while simultaneously responding to the white guy in a collective way that required that he address another man. The collection of folks on the bus did not need instruction on the purposefulness of the First Nation guy's actions, and possibly some folks did not read the invitation, or chose for their own reasons to pretend nothing was going on, but the folks who "leaned in" responded spontaneously and collectively to structure some safety and invite some accountability.

At times it is more useful to survive events, and help people who are experiencing abuses of power get through them than to publicly challenge hate. Would-be allies often share their shaming silences with me; times they did not step up or speak out. Other times potential allies fail because of ignorance, not reading the situation, fear of being wrong, political correctness, the "politics of politeness",

past harms, self-interest, indifference, being tired, or being busy. While I invite accountability for times we side with neutrality or fear, I distinguish these times from events in which it is not safe-enough to speak out. In risky situations, allies are often compelled to attend to the person who is abusing power, and this centers the perpetrator, as well as further isolating the victim[v]. I invite allies to centre their responses in relation to the victim. What do they need? How will my actions serve the victim? This may require being silent, not making a scene, and accompanying the victim to safer ground. In the absence of the First Nations guy on the bus, I would not have confronted the angry white guy, but would have stuck close to the Chinese elder women and prioritized her safety. In situations where there is the potential for physical violence, allies need to be aware they could easily make situations worse.

Imperfect Solidarity: Resisting Unity and Division

Solidarity is not synonymous with unity. As community workers, we look for common ground on particular issues, rather than a unified position. While holding a common ground on particular issues and declining unity, workers simultaneously decline invitations for division (Bracho, 2000). Such imperfect solidarity requires discernment between division and difference. The point is not to achieve unity by smoothing the edges of all differences, but to find points of connection in relationships that bring forward an "intimacy that does not annihilate difference" (Scapp, R. as cited by hooks, 2003, p. 106).

As community workers, we often experience our work as very individual, which brings with it continual invitations to division. We are separated from each other as workers and organizations competing for scarce resources in the midst of overwhelming need in a political climate of greed and privileged individualism. Invitations to division abound in 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 workers and organizations to blame, but to think of ways to change social contexts. Our greatest resources for doing that are each other. The First Nations guy invited me in as an ally without invisibilizing our important differences; in fact, he used our different locations in relation to colonization

to invite me to perform some accountability to both him and to the elder Chinese woman by acknowledging that my people also came to Canada on boats, that I am a settler. This created a point of connection, but did not require us to be in unity. Imperfect solidarity invites workers to be alongside each other, because we need each other, and because it doesn't serve our communities for us to be divided off (Reynolds, 2010c; 2011).

Creating a Culture of Critique

Being allies and working in solidarity does not mean that we are ever hoping to achieve total agreement in collective community work. Creating a culture of critique in which we can challenge each other and hold our practices and theories up to generative and creative scrutiny in order to serve our families and communities better is a useful practice. Being allies to each other in community work invites us to hold each other to account, but we are not acting as allies when judgment and attack are used to silence other workers and discredit them. Discerning critique from attack is part of our work as allies.

Creating a culture of critique begins with "leaning in" and seeing the collective ethics (Reynolds, 2009) we share as our first point of connection; from there we can disagree and critique theory and practice. There are always some collective ethics we share or we would not be meeting together. These collective ethics are the values at the heart of our work, the points of connection that weave us together as workers. They are the basis for the solidarity that brought us together and can hold us together. Our practices of solidarity are emergent from our collective ethics. When collective ethics are hard to trust, I always remind myself that no one is in this movement by accident, and that no one came to community work to hurt people.

Conclusion

Becoming an ally is not a developmental process toward an achievable state or goal, as we are always "becoming" allies (Bishop, 2002), and continually being awoken to our locations of privilege. I did not know I had gender privilege, because I saw the world in the binary of men and women, and only read myself as a potential and actual victim of men's power. And yet all transgender and gender-variant

people know that in the domain of gender I hold the privilege of being cisgendered, meaning that my biology, my identity and how I am read are all congruent, all read as woman. They know that I am safer going to a public bathroom, that I will not be questioned by other women, or followed in by security guards. This unfolding awareness has invited me to respond with new ways of being an ally and to unveil more of my privilege.

Ally work is not innocent, as we learn it on the backs of others. We work to stay ever mindful that the potential fall-out or backlash for our actions will fall on the people who are the subjects of power, the victims of perpetrators, not on us. This requires us to stay humble, willing to learn and open to critique. Our acts of being allies are not enough, nor are they the end of our responsibility. Acting as allies does not end oppression; it is a small piece of a larger response that is useful, but, on its own, never enough. Allies do not act out of charity for the betterment of "under-privileged" folks, but in order to enact our own ethics and our desires to live in a society free of hate. Our collective goal is not to be good allies, but to co-create a society in which everyone experiences justice.

Despite the absence of any prior relationships, many folks on that 20 bus immediately recognized and acted upon our pre-existing points of unity in imperfect solidarity. We did not discuss our willingness to perform as allies who embodied some collective ethics. In that moment we knew enough about each other to "lean in," respond immediately, and act collectively and imperfectly.

Dedication

For Sid Chow Tan, for his great-hearted solidarity and creative activism, for staying teachable and being of use across a lifespan, for tenacity and moral courage, and for many teachings given with humility, generosity of spirit and revolutionary love.

Appendix

Two Exercises

An Inquiry into Ally Work: Imperfect & Fluid Allies

Ally Work: Experiences of Needing Allies

Find a person you have a safe-enough experience of to engage with in this exercise.

Consider a particular time when you were experiencing an attack on your dignity, or when you were the subject of another person's power. Choose an experience that is particular and that you remember details of, not a general feeling. Choose something that is real, but that you can contain yourself in sharing ― meaning stay present, not necessarily meaning experience without pain.

Thinking back on this experience in the relative safety of this conversation, offer your witness a thumbnail sketch of this event, with your experience of oppression at the centre:

- Did you have any allies in this experience?

- What actions did allies take, individually or collectively, that were supportive?

- What difference did these ally actions make?

- How did you communicate to allies what you needed? Appreciated?

- Was there anything that your ally did that you would have liked your allies not to have done? (replicate power-over, be righteous or shaming, take centre-stage, or take actions that make the situation worse)

- Thinking back on this experience in the relative safety of this conversation, what ally actions would you have appreciated that didn't happen?

- What did allies or would-be allies do or say that invited your trust or got in the way of your trusting? What past experiences promoted or harmed your trust of would-be allies?

- Was there any way you could have welcomed in some/more allies?

- What have these allies taught you about being an ally?

Ally Work: Acting as an Ally

Consider a particular experience when you were an ally to another person who was experiencing or an attack on their dignity or oppression, while you were in a location of power and/or privilege:

- What was required of you in terms of being an ally in this context?

- How did you get your experiences of oppression out of the centre in order to be an ally?

- How did you get your own access to power and/or privilege out of the centre in order to be an ally?

- What actions did you take as an ally?

- What differences might your ally actions make for the people involved? Perpetrator, victim, ally, others present?

- What response did you get from the person you were trying to be an ally to about your actions or intentions? How could you invite responses about if or how you were being an accountable ally in this situation?

- How did you stay open to hearing if you were not acting in line with your ethics and intentions for being an ally?

- Thinking back on this experience from the relative safety and community of this conversation, what different actions might you have taken? (If you had more access to power/less access to power?)

- How can you plan to respond with the discomfort and possible pain that may come from being in an ally position?

- What differences has being an ally made in your life? Community work?

Stepping Up: Reflecting on our Fluid Positions as Imperfect Allies

- What people or communities have I made myself available to as an ally? What multiple ally positions do I hold?

- What qualifies me as an ally? What ways of being and qualities do I hold that are useful to me in being an ally?

- Who am I comfortable/experienced being an ally to?

- What trainings/knowings from my life have taught me how to be an ally in this context?

- What ally positions have I not taken? Why?

- What trainings experiences in my life have made me less capable/able to be an ally in this context?

- What qualities and ways of being about me get in the way of me being an ally?

- What barriers get in the way of me acting as an ally in these other contexts? (for example: ignorance, not reading the situation, fear of being wrong, political correctness, the "politics of politeness", past harms, self-interest, indifference, being tired, being busy…)

- What will it take for me/us/our staff team/this organization to act as an ally in less comfortable/less familiar contexts?

- What would it look like?

The Big Questions (To Hold Reflexively, Not Solve, but Always respond to…)

- How would you describe the anti-oppression stance you hold for your work?

- What understandings of the intersections of your access to power and being subjected to another person's power do you hold?

- How do you/can you center your work in decolonizing practices while holding this anti-oppression stance?

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

ⁱⁱ In 2006 the Canadian Prime Minister apologized for the Chinese Head Tax as part of a spate of 'non-apologies' (Coates & Wade, 2009) to various communities. The Conservative government decided to compensate only surviving Head Tax payers and their spouses. This settlement has only been available to 500 Head Tax families and represents only about one half of one percent of all affected Head Tax families. The Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion laws impoverished families and halted all Chinese immigration from 1923 to 1947. Each Chinese worker was required to pay a fee equivalent to the price of a house. Many families were separated for decades, some never reunited. See the Head Tax Families Society of Canada website for background (http://www.headtaxfamilies.ca/).

ⁱⁱⁱ The terms 'minoritized' and 'racialized' are used for the purpose of naming the power and intention required in the racist and colonial project of re-constructing the majority of the world's people as a collection of minorities (Reynolds, 2012d).

^{iv} American collaborative therapist Harlene Anderson offers the language and practice of 'being public' in response to her useful critique of the term transparency. 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 (2008, p. 18). When we make our work public we invite a richer critique, which invites accountability.

^v The terms 'perpetrator' and 'victim' are used here purposefully to put words to deeds in a particular interaction, as Canadian response-based practitioner Allan Wade would say, and to identify who did what to whom in this event. I am not using perpetrator and victim as identity categories, or to reify any person as a perpetrator or as a victim. Critically engaging with language is required because language can often be used to obscure violence and abuses of power (Coates & Wade, 2007; 2004).

Deconstructing the Policing of the Normal

An Examination of the Work Done by "Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams*"*

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Abstract

Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues have argued for a Foucauldian analysis of bullying relations in schools as an alternative to the common assumption of pathological moral character in the bully. In a Foucauldian analysis, bullying works to maintain discursive categories of normality through marking those who differ as other. Bullying discourages dissensus and polices social norms more than it deviates from them. This paper takes up this analysis and examines the undercover anti-bullying team process for whether it produces greater openness to difference and challenges the discursive logic of bullying.

Keywords

bullying, discourse, Foucault, Rancière, policing social norms, undercover anti-bullying teams, dissensus, difference

Deconstructing the Policing of the Normal

An Examination of the Work Done by "Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams"

Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (Davies, 2011; Bansel, Davies, Laws, & Linnell, 2009; Ellwood & Davies, 2010) have initiated an intriguing re-evaluation of the discursive context through which bullying in schools might be understood. Their argument disrupts the familiar account of bullying that is based on the pathologizing of the person of the bully (and often also of the person of the victim as well). They argue instead for a Foucauldian understanding of bullying as a relational process of power relations in which bullying often involves students imposing behavioral norms on their peers or policing those norms once they are established. This article takes up this Foucauldian reading of bullying in schools and examines the practice of "undercover anti-bullying teams" (M. Williams, 2010; Williams & Winslade, 2007; Winslade & Williams, 2012) in the light of this reading. The question asked is whether this intervention produces the kind of openness to difference that Davies and her colleagues suggest might be an ethical response to school violence.

Conventional discourse about bullying and the most common approaches to addressing bullying are characterized by Davies and her colleagues as founded on a set of assumptions about bullying which focus explanatory attention on the individual as a category of person. The bully is a "pathological individual" or comes from a pathological or dysfunctional family (Davies 2011, p. 278; Bansel, Davies, Laws & Linnell, 2009, p. 62; Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 85). The person who bullies deliberately intends to do harm and lacks the kind of moral conscience that might restrain the violent impulse. This characterization of individual identity is then invoked to explain bad behavior, which "shifts the deviation from normal (what anyone might do) to pathological (what this type of person would do)" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 61).

Michel Foucault (2004) has traced the genealogy of this discourse about the abnormal through nineteenth century psychiatry into current psychological practice. Against the background of Foucault's

genealogy, Davies and her colleagues show that teachers commonly use these categories to distinguish

between behavior that becomes called bullying and other forms of deviant behavior that are more likely to

be read as the result of "a simple misreading of the rules, high spirits, or a momentary slip-up" (Bansel et

al., 2009, p. 62). As Ellwood and Davies (2010) put it, "both bullies and their victims are understood as

deficient in social and personal skills and in need of explicit instruction in the collective ethos of the

school (p. 90).

Bullying as the Policing of a Social Consensus

The collective ethos of the school is likely often to reflect the collective ethos of the social world

around it. The term that Jacques Rancière (2010) uses to refer to this collective ethos is "consensus,"

contrasting it with the democratic openness to "dissensus". A consensus is what is generally assumed

without much attention given to dissenting voices. In Rancière's account, consensus is the condition of

the rule of those who have "entitlement to govern" (p. 31) on the basis of "seniority, birth, wealth, virtue

or knowledge" (p. 32). It is the "power of those with a superior nature, of the strong over the weak" (p.

31). It is the "axiom of domination" (p. 32). Thus consensus, as Ranciere uses it, is roughly equivalent to

what Foucault refers to as a dominating discourse. One definition Rancière (2010) offers of consensus

reads:

> Consensus is a certain regime of the perceptible: the regime in which the parties are presupposed
> as already given, their community established and the count of their speech is identical to their
> linguistic performance. What consensus thus presupposes is the disappearance of any gap
> between a party to a dispute and a part of society.   (p. 102)

Says Rancière (2010), in consensus, there is the agreement that "there is only what there is" (p. 8). In

Foucault's terms, this is the equivalent of a taken-for-granted set of assumptions or norms. There are two

forms of consensus about "what there is" that we might identify in relation to school bullying. One is the

professional consensus on the pathological origins of the behavior of the bully. Bronwyn Davies seeks to

introduce a note of difference to this consensus. The other consensus is about the 'collective ethos', the

social norms, the definition of what will be regarded as the normal identity of students within the school community. This collective ethos may not equate so much with official school policy as with the general set of dominating assumptions about people in the wider social world. Against this consensus stand those students who are different in some way. It is this consensus that those who perpetrate bullying are policing. Bullying, from this perspective is more like enforcing the norm than it is like acting abnormally.

Dissensus, on the other hand, in Rancière's terms, is the condition of democratic politics in which there is a chance for the voices of the "demos" to be heard, that is the voices of those "who do not count" (p. 32), who have no entitlement to govern or are not in the position to govern. Dissensus is thus necessary for the democratic exchange of views. It is the condition of "rupture with the [dominant] logic" (p. 33) of natural command, of "the police" (p. 36), of those who are destined to rule. In this account, the bullying relation is the expression of domination of the weak by the strong which brooks no dissensus, and dissensus would involve the victims of bullying and the bystanders who witness it being invited to have a voice that is listened to. This would amount to the political conflict typical of democracy. For Rancière, "political conflict does not involve an opposition between groups with different interests. It forms an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways" (p. 35).

 An approach to bullying that rests upon the logic of the collective ethos, the determinate rule, the consensus, of those who have the natural right to rule (the "strong" among the student body) will seldom open a space of dissensus in which the voice of victims and bystanders can contest politically their domination and claim a space to be different. It will not undermine the policing function unless the voices of those who do not count can be heard. Ranciere's work thus offers some concepts which potentially sharpen our understanding of the local politics of bullying.

I do not mean to imply that schools are administered in a way that sanctions or encourages bullying. I do mean, however, that the usual responses to bullying are founded on assumptions that leave

the social meaning of difference unchallenged. The result of forms of explanation that emphasize the

pathology of the bully is that, among those who have the professional right to rule (teachers and

administrators and popular leaders among the students), no dissensus is also allowed and the consensus

rules. In this consensus, efforts to combat bullying are often focused on individual moral reform for the

bully (and sometimes also for the victim). The bully is "cast out" or "abjected" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 61;

after Kristeva, 1982; see also Butler, 1999; Søndergaard, 2012) and then required to demonstrate remorse

or perform a show of having a conscience (for example, shedding tears about one's own actions). Indeed,

under the common zero tolerance regime (Skiba et al., 2006), automatic exclusion from the school

community (suspension or expulsion) is routinely applied to bullies. Under restorative practice regimes,

as Bansel et al. (2009) show, bullies are often readmitted to this community once they have shown the

requisite remorse.

The problem with this perspective is that it omits "the relational, situational and cultural

dimensions of bullying" (Davies, 2011, p. 278). The focus on individual pathology ignores both

Ranciere's concern with the politics of consensus and dissensus and also what Foucault (1980) asserted

with regard to the individual.

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple
> and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike … The
> individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power, it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The
> individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that
> effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the
> same time its vehicle.   (p. 98)

If individual, subjective experience is an effect of power, exercised through discourse and taken up by the

person as the performance of agency, then we cannot understand the phenomenon of bullying without

taking account of the discursive world surrounding the individual bully. Through exploring this "line of

fault in the bullying discourse" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 89) Davies and her colleagues arrive at a

fresh account of how the bullying relation might be read.

In this account, the "figure of the bully may be more active in the construction and maintenance of the norms of schooling" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 90) than pathologically amoral. In other words, the function of bullying is the function of police, in Rancière's terms. These norms are actively maintained by students, rather than just imposed by school authorities, and produce the social order of the school community. If this order is aggressively pursued, then it helps those who observe the bullying relation (often called bystanders) to know what they must do to produce themselves as normal and as good students. As Ellwood and Davies suggest, "it is vital to students' survival to know how the social order works" (p. 90).

Bullies are thus recognizable as powerful champions of the consensual "collective ethos" (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 93) of the school or of the society in which the school exists. In other words they champion what Ranciere refers to as consensus. They work to fix the categories of personhood that will be regarded as normal and to police any deviation across the boundaries around these categories. Fixed categories do not allow for mobility in power relations and hence the bullying produces a relation that is described by Foucault as domination.

> When an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political or military [and in this case discursive] means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination. In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained or limited. (Foucault, 1997, p. 283)

Bullying is thus about domination of the general social consensus. For example, a general homophobic consensus might be expressed in the targeting of gay or lesbian students in school for bullying and also in the directing of insults toward any student that refer to his or her identity as gay or lesbian. Even young children can be shown to engage in "category maintenance work" (Ellwood & Davies, p. 90) often involving them in punishing those who disrupt through their difference the established categories of subjectivity in the school. At stake is the production and policing of a "recognizable" identity (Davies, 2011, p. 281), that is, an identity that fits within the unquestioned order

and is not too different to stand out. For this reason, bystanders seldom challenge the bullying and victims are frequently isolated in their suffering, because they stand out as different in some way. According to the logic of the bullying relation, it is the victim who has offended against the consensus or collective ethos of the school community by being different and the bully is acting to police the norms against the threat of difference.

Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2012) has also been concerned about the social aspects of bullying, rather than starting from the assumptions of psychological deficit. She suggests that bullying is about the management of anxiety about "social exclusion" (p. 355) on the basis of the "necessity of belonging" (p. 355). She theorizes from this basis the production of identities in school through processes of despisal and abjection on the one hand and empathy and dignity on the other. I am sympathetic with Søndergaard's argument but, following Davies, seek to tease out why it might be that certain recognizable categories of identity are commonly targeted by the bullying process. In particular, those categories of identity that are associated with the production of abjection in the wider society are also reflected in the targets selected by bullying: that is, those who are different in some way.

Davies (2011) points out that the logic behind the establishment of a "recognizable identity" is founded on a philosophical tradition that goes back to Aristotle's conceptualization of difference as "categorical difference, in which the other is discrete and distinct from the self, with the difference lying in the Other" (p. 282). She contrasts this with Gilles Deleuze's account, which rejects an emphasis on "discrete difference" in favour of "a continuous process of becoming different, of differentiation" (p. 282). An ethos based on Deleuze's conceptualization would recognize difference as continuously evolving and remaining open to what is "not yet known" (p. 282) in other students and to how one might be affected and changed by others; that is, it would remain open to what Ranciere calls dissensus.

Let us now turn to some examples of what Davies and her colleagues are talking about. The example they cite reads as follows.

> There was a session two weeks ago on a Friday where they actually physically I guess you'd call it abused a child, a Sudanese child. [. . .] they thought this Sudanese boy was playing Kiss and Catch with the girls in Year 4 and they didn't like that so one of them went and held his head against the wall and the other child just went and slammed it three times so the child then had a missing tooth and the parents had to be called in and they've never gone physical but, this was their first time. (Primary school teacher). (as cited in Ellwood & Davies, pp. 87-8.)

In this story, the bullying works to construct the Sudanese child as breaking the rules of social order (the consensus) in the sense that he presumes the right to personal connection with white children. The violent response from two girls (who have "never gone physical" before) reminds him that he belongs to a different category of person, a refugee immigrant of a different race. As a result, racial and citizenship categories are enforced and relations of power between races maintained. At first, the girls are convinced of the rightness of their attack and later show remorse for their use of violence but the school's restorative efforts are geared towards the growth of a personal moral conscience and no recognition is expected of the discursive policing implicit in their actions. The categories of personhood on which the acts of domination are based are thus left intact. So is the ruling consensus.

An Alternative Approach

What might constitute an alternative approach? Davies (2011) makes some comments in this direction. She suggests that:

> Teachers could encourage the girls to see the limitations on themselves and others of the normative moral order they are intent on maintaining. They could invite them to question the excessive use of their power that brings harm to others, and that assumes that others should be sacrificed to the absolute moral order to which they are committed. (p. 284)

From this perspective, acts of violence would not just appear as "autonomous acts, free-floating from their histories and contexts that can be accounted for through the character of one faulty individual" (Bansel et al., 2009, p. 66). Instead, they would be understood as relational exchanges based on cultural and discursive knowledges. Perpetrators of bullying would be understood as participating in "lines of

force" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 45; Winslade, 2009, p. 336) and would be encouraged to shift to a

more inclusive "hospitality toward the other" (Derrida, in Borradori, 2003). Ellwood and Davies imagine

programs that might address bullying along different lines.

> School programs currently focusing on the pathologized bully would change to one in which
> schools take up responsibility for developing relational practices that recognize and honor the
> other, with all their differences … Difference would not be seen as an error to be at best tolerated
> and at worst obliterated, but an expansion and extension of each-in-relation-to-the-other. (p. 95)

Such a program would be based on an "ethical relationality", involving reflection on the performance of

relational practices and the persons that students are becoming through those practices. Moreover

openness to the difference of others would be emphasized in such a program. The consensus on which

bullying rests might be made open to political contest, such that the voices of those who do not count

might be heard to challenge the natural determinate rule of the strong. Students who perform acts of

bullying might be posed a question like: "What normative moral discourse were you taking up in this act,

and how might that moral discourse be re-read as oppressive, depriving others of freedom?" (Davies,

2011, p. 284).

Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams

The next task is to outline the "undercover anti-bullying teams" approach to combating bullying

and to ask how it squares with the suggestions Davies and colleagues make for an approach to bullying

that disrupts the discursive regime that their analysis exposes. Undercover anti-bullying teams are formed

by a school counselor in response to an expression of concern from a victim of bullying. After hearing the

story of what has been happening, the counselor inquires into the effects of the bullying and then asks the

victim to nominate a team of six to be invited to change the situation for the victim. Included in the team

of six are two of those who have been doing the bullying and four others who, to the knowledge of the

victim, have not been doing any bullying or been bullied themselves. The victim is not present when the

assembled team is invited to participate in bringing about a change in relationships for the victim.

The team members are not told at first about the identity of the victim, until they have agreed to participate in the team. Instead the story of what has happened is read out in the victim's own words as well as an account of the effects of the bullying. The counselor also assures the team that there is no intention to name the perpetrator of the bullying, nor any plan for anyone to be punished. The team's aim is explained to the team members as just to change the circumstances for the victim and to end the bullying and its effects. To this end, the team is asked to come up with a five-point plan to achieve these goals. They are also asked to keep their work undercover so that it is not too obvious.

Nor is there any requirement for the victim and the bullies to confront each other. The counselor meets with both the team and the victim to check on progress of the team's project every few days but these meetings are separate. However, the victim is put in the position of deciding when the team has done its job and when the team members will be given their promised certificate from the school principal and a canteen voucher.

More details about how this process is implemented can be found elsewhere (M. Williams, 2010; Williams & Winslade, 2007; Winslade & Williams, 2012). Several things are noteworthy, however, about this process. The bully or bullies are placed in a position where they are not named or exposed unless they choose to do so themselves (some do). Neither are they punished. Instead they are given the chance to hear the story of what has taken place and its effects on the victim alongside four others whose responses are often strongly sympathetic with the victim. The logic of the bullying begins implicitly to be called into question at this point. The bullies are also given a chance on the basis of this account to address the situation and help the others on the team change the experience of suffering to which the victim has been exposed. For many bullies this is an awkward commitment to make, given their previous pattern of behavior, and they are sometimes lukewarm in their commitment to it, but often actually do change their behavior to the extent of working with other team members to shift the bullying.

The victim is not required to directly confront the power of the bully but has the power of veto

over the extent of the process. The other team members, however, often actively tackle the bullying and interrupt it or challenge the ethos in which it occurs.

Examining the Data from Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams

Now let us examine some of the examples of bullying stories reported by victims. These examples were recorded by Mike Williams at a high school in New Zealand in the victim's own words as part of the process of implementing thirty-five undercover anti-bullying teams. They are given in response to an inquiry into what has happened and recorded verbatim on a standard form used for the purpose by the school counselor.

Here are examples of the policing of difference with regard to disability. The first speaker has an artificial limb. The second is in a wheelchair.

> In most of my classes I am in, I get hit in the head. On the way to most of my classes, kids kick my leg and mock me a lot, saying things like "legless" and other really mean things. When I am in science, people take my stuff, like my pencil case. Sometimes they open it up and tip all the stuff out on the floor; sometimes they throw it out the window.

> On Wednesday, the girl who was the worst bully and some other girls were mocking me. They were laughing at me and making jokes about me. I would just sit in my wheelchair and do nothing, cause there's nothing I can do. The teachers do nothing. They know but they don't do anything. People say stuff like, "handicapper" and kids kick the wheelchair. They kick the bottom of my shoe because it's big.

Racial difference is another target for the policing of difference. The dominant norm of white superiority is maintained by marking out anyone who is not white as others. The school where the undercover teams were implemented contains a mix of students from many cultural or racial backgrounds, including Pakeha (white), Maori, Polynesian, and Asian (especially Indian and Chinese). Relevant to one of the examples below, there are also a number of students from families who are immigrants from South Africa. Here are some examples of the use of racial difference that can be said to reproduce and enforce the dominant racial norms.

> She mocks me for being white and weak and calls me a midget.

> One girl said, 'Fuck (student's name), fuck your India,' and some other words. I don't know what to say. I say, 'Why are you so mean?' She says, 'Nothing, nothing.

> Everyone started calling me 'snoop-dog' and it was getting annoying ... When it is lunchtime, he calls me names and calls me a 'kaffir.'

Often the discourse that is targeted for the marking of difference (and the policing of departures from the norm) relates to what is constructed as normal with regard to body image. A person who is too fat or too short, for example, can be selected out for bullying. But so can someone who has a distinguishing feature that is a little different in some way. In the third example below, the speaker has bright red hair, which makes her stand out from others.

> I was waiting outside my social studies class and he comes over and tells the girls who were also waiting, 'He's too fat to fit in his car.' All the girls laughed.

> We were going to my next class when this boy started saying I was vertically challenged, I needed anger management, I was a masturbating midget. I sat down and he came and picked up my books and threw them on the ground. Every one laughed when I went to pick them up.

> I am still getting comments about my hair and the way I act around people. People still mock me for speaking loudly and getting angry because of the problem. I take it out on others, which makes them hate me.

It is noticeable in these examples that these victims of bullying are acutely conscious of the role played by bystanders – especially when they implicitly support the policing of the norm in the bullying relation by laughing.

In the early years of high school, students are primed to respond to the onset of puberty and to explore relationships with others of the other or of the same sex. Sensitivities about these developments are common targets for category maintenance work and the policing of difference. Here are some examples.

In science I was sitting with a kid and this girl wanted to be in my group and he let her. Then she started saying that I couldn't get a girlfriend and if I could it must be a rat. Then she said that she was going to get her humungous boyfriend to beat me up and told me to watch my back.

In English, this kid calls me a faggot and accuses me of looking at him. He just keeps on saying the same thing over and over again. All his mates just laugh and support him.

There was this other kid who was calling me a faggot and he pushed me and punched me after I pulled the fingers.

It started last year when I started to hang out with my best friend. We ended up getting mocked because we are always together. Kids said we were gay and that we should get married. It happens about five times every week.

If we think in terms of how bullying functions to police the norm, it makes little difference for homophobic slurs whether the victim is gay or straight or questioning their sexuality in some way. The identities constructed for all who hear the taunts or "joking" support the category of heterosexual normality and assign those who do not fit the position of the other.

In other instances of reported bullying it is not so clear how category maintenance work or policing of norms might be at work but it still cannot be ruled out in an example like this one.

I am doing my work and then one of them tells that people hate me. They always talk about me and what I have done wrong. They think they are the popular people. I hear people saying my name, insulting my last name. They call me volcano and that I am about to explode. Some people take my ruler and pens and throw it on the roof.

As part of the undercover anti-bullying teams process that Mike Williams has developed, victims are also asked to speak to the effects of the bullying on them. Responses are again written down verbatim and read out to the undercover team in their first meeting in order to alert them to what the bullying has been doing. What is noticeable in these accounts is the frequency with which mention is made of feeling isolated, not feeling a sense of belonging, or desiring another school. These kinds of statements are consistent with the maintenance of normal identity categories, which someone marked as different falls outside of. Such is the exclusionary effect of the bullying relation. Here are some examples of what victims describe as the effects on themselves.

I feel like I don't belong in the class.

It makes me feel like I don't belong here and I shouldn't be here.

It makes me feel horrible, because it makes me feel like I don't belong here.

I feel like I'm an alien, nobody wants me around. Don't feel like doing anything with anyone really.

It makes me feel sad and angry and depressed, lonely and confused.

I just feel like crawling into a hole and dying or running away.

Sometimes I want to die.

I just want to run away. I hate this feeling of rejection.

I feel like I can't cope. It makes me want to run away. Sometimes I want to leave and not come back.

I feel scared to come to school and go to my classes or even walk around the school by myself.

It makes me feel very alone. I am scared of her. I'm too scared to say anything.

It makes me feel useless. I feel powerless basically all the time.

They make me feel sad and useless. They make me feel hated. I feel stink. They get me to think that I'm worthless.

It made me feel sore inside like I am being tortured by people, that everyone is making fun of me over something that small.

It makes me think it's true (the teasing). It makes me feel ashamed.

I feel like a crazy person, because I am trying hard not to lash out.

I don't want to come to school.

I want to go to another school.

I don't want to come to class. I haven't been back to art for ages.

It makes me hate school. I used to love school and now, when I wake up, I just want to lie there and not move. I hate it.

Each of these responses is consistent with what might be expected from a relational process of identity production that is focused on category maintenance and the policing of difference. Each reports on the effects of being consigned to the outside or of drawing a conclusion of needing to move to some outside position for protection.

Do the Undercover Teams Contest the Policing of Norms?

Turning to the work done by the undercover anti-bullying teams raises the question of whether this work can be said to actively contest the discourses in which the policing of the norm takes place. The teams undoubtedly work on the bullying relation in an effort to transform it, rather than pathologizing or punishing the bully. This work is done by students themselves and the adults are cast in a decentered supporting role, rather than as central protagonists. It can thus be argued that the work done by the teams is constructed in the age-related cultural world of young people. This is evident in the use of teenage argot and in the straightforward, uncomplicated, openly optimistic ideas the team members come up with to support the victims and challenge the bullying. These ideas are expressed in the five-point plan each team is invited to come up with in response to the question, "If you were going through the same thing, what would make a difference for you?" Examples of ideas from these plans are listed below.

Not bring up the word snoop dog

Put a stop to name-calling

Don't call her names or anything

Say hi to him every day

Talk to her socially

Ask her how she is

Talk to her if she's alone, sad or down

Ask her if she's alright

Listen to her

Have a normal conversation with her

Find out what he likes

Ask her if we see she is upset

Ask him questions

Tell him he's ok

Include him in conversations

If he's sitting alone, go and join him

Hang out with her

Making sure that she is never alone

Sit close to her

Don't leave her to stay alone

Sit next to him in class

Walk with her

Sit next to her in as many classes as possible

Include her more-sport teams/group projects

Ask her in to our group activities

Invite her into our games

Invite him to come over to my house and play PlayStation

Try to comfort her when she's sad

Make her feel comfortable

Give her a hug when she needs it

It is not possible to tell from the record of the data whether the ideas were contributed by the bullies or by the other four students but the first three ideas sound like they came from those who had been doing the bullying. What is noticeable about all these ideas is that the participants conceptualize their role as constructing an experience of inclusion rather than exclusion. There is no evidence of political analysis of the production of difference but there is implicit awareness of victims' need to experience inclusive relationships.

Now let us examine the reports of what happens when these plans are implemented. Once again, Mike Williams has kept careful records, in their own words, of what both victims and team members say has happened. Here is a selection of examples of reports from victims of what happened.

They pulled me away when I was going to get into a fight.

They always stuck up for me when I was getting bullied.

When I was in social studies, (participant X) stood up for me and I didn't really expect it.

They stuck up for me and told other bullies to back off.

They stopped bullying me.

The team was always there and they made sure that the bully stopped. The bully's best mate threatened the bully without realizing it was them which also helped stop.

They helped tell other people to stop mocking me and they invited me to hang out with them.

The way they backed me up when others bullied me and treated me like everyone else and not some disease-ridden thing.

They let me know that they were there for me.

Well they would make me do my work and they wouldn't say stuck-up things behind my back.

I like knowing people have my back.

I liked knowing that I don't have to worry about people calling me names and bullying me and swearing at me.

I liked being involved with the undercover team because they made sure no one got bullied, even others that weren't on the team.

I liked the undercover team, because Mr. Bully was a part of it and they made them realize their mistake and fix it.

These reports from victims are selected from others that generally indicate appreciation of moral and emotional support in a more general way. They are consistent with the following reports from the members of the undercover team.

We helped the person and successfully made them feel safe in the classroom again.

Helping the victim to stick up for herself.

Getting people who are so different or not close friends to work together to help someone.

Helping the person and getting people to stop bullying.

Helping my friend and stopping all the bad things that were happening.

Well it's good talking with people to stop bullying.

The team doing things to stop the issue.

The thing I remember most about being on the team is working together with the other members

and trying to make one individual's confidence grow so that he does not have to come to school knowing that he is going to be treated with disrespect.

Being nice to the person you mocked.

It was good to be a part of something that helped someone out and it was good to see that people had actually changed.

We had to look out for X because she had been bullied by so many children.

I remember that it was hard at the beginning because we had to stop Bully X from being smart to people and therefore people wouldn't be smart to him.

We stopped all the bullying and we had fun doing this.

That we ended the bullying in our class and stopped the dislike.

We all responded when X was being bullied.

I remember stopping the person from being bullied.

I remember sticking up for people.

I remember trying to stop people from bullying others.

Everyone tried their best to stick up for X.

Helping Victim X to fit in by sticking up for her and being really nice to her.

I remember on the second day this group of girls had mocked X and it was fun telling them off and it was cool when the whole team stepped in.

We all stuck up for her when someone was mean to her.

Getting people who are so different or not close friends to work together and help someone.

People were asking why are we sticking up for her.

I remember finding it quite hard at some points to speak up to the person bullying X.

I enjoyed helping to stop the bullying and knowing that I am helping someone.

I liked the fact that I was given the opportunity to help out instead of being stereotyped as the bully.

I liked that we all helped him when he was getting bullied.

What I liked about being involved with the undercover team was I was helping someone else. I

don't like seeing people getting treat unfairly.

I liked sticking up for people who are being bullied.

I thought it was good to know what some of our classmates are going through.

When everyone stopped teasing X, that made me happy.

Getting people that are bullies, not to be.

I liked how I was one of the people to stop bullying.

Making sure it will never happen again.

I liked stopping the mocking and bullying in the class.

I liked how just six people can change how people think about someone.

We helped stopped bullying and it did work.

Me and my friends stopped bullying from going around in the school.

I liked that I had the opportunity to set the example for others.

This is a selection of comments made by participants in an evaluation survey at the end of the team process (J. Williams, 2012). The comments are almost overwhelmingly positive in tone about the process. What is noticeable for the purpose of this paper, however, is the sense conveyed that the undercover teams have been doing more than just offering general support to the victim of the bullying. They have been active in interrupting the interactions that were causing the suffering. They have often challenged acts of bullying and teasing as they happen and caused them to stop. In at least a limited sense, they have created what Rancière might call a context of dissensus.

It might be asked whether the undercover team merely establishes a new consensus and polices the former bullies to the extent that they now are required to bend to a new collective ethos established within the undercover team. I do not think this explanation applies, because six students do not have the power to establish a widely understood social norm, such as racism. Rather the victim and the bystanders are given the chance to raise their voices in a spirit of acceptance of students who are marked as different and to be hospitable toward them. Moreover the bullies are not themselves excluded but are specifically included in a shift of ethos. The team provides a context of acknowledgement for the experience of being made victim that has hitherto remained invisible. It establishes a contestation of the logic of the normal

consensus but should not be confused with giving free rein for a new form of policing against a new target.

The actions undertaken by the undercover teams have actually been identified by victims as making a difference to the effects of the bullying. They no longer feel isolated and excluded. The voices of "those who do not count" have been heard and acted upon. The logic that supported the inclusion of bystanders in the consensus of the bullying relation has been interrupted and a group of potential (if not actual) bystanders has taken a stand against the logic of the bullying relation: that is, against the logic of policing the norm. The bullying relation has been changed in the process and there has been no need to pathologize the moral character of the individual bully. This shift has been achieved through carefully inviting a group of students to work within their age-related cultural world towards a transformative purpose.

What is not clear, however, is whether consciousness of how the discourse of bullying works has been increased. The conventional relational categories have been successfully disrupted, but the shift in thinking remains perhaps implicit. There is not a full invitation to reflect on the concept of difference, or on the oppressive meaning of a process of othering, as Bronwyn Davies envisaged. Perhaps, on the one hand this is not necessary. But perhaps on the other hand, the process might more successfully counter the culture of bullying, rather than just interrupting specific expressions of it, if it were made more explicit. To be clear, if consensus (itself) is a problem that renders bullying more likely, then promoting dissensus might be part of the solution and become an aspect of intervention. But we should not confuse the issue by thinking of consensus and bullying as identical with each other. They are separate concepts that have been argued here to work in relation to each other. Not all expressions of consensus, however, will manifest in bullying. Neither is it yet clear that bullying is only about the policing of norms. It is thus suggested that it may be useful, rather than automatically sufficient, to engage students in the deconstruction of social norms and to create a context of dissensus in which space is created for those who are different to be heard and taken seriously.

To this end, the undercover anti-bullying teams process might profitably be altered slightly to include an opportunity for more conversation about the designation of some persons as "other" on account of perceptions of difference. Participants in the undercover team might profitably be engaged with some questions such as the following:

What is different about X that might have led to him or her becoming the target of bullying?

Do you think it is fair for students to be bullied just because they are different? Why not?

Now that the bullying has stopped, what have you learned about what it is like to be excluded?

What do you now think that bystanders can do to disrupt bullying in future?

Adding questions like these to the process of an undercover anti-bullying team might enhance the extent to which it makes consciousness of the power relations involved in bullying more explicit. Such conversation needs to be located in the language world of the students, rather than laden with theoretical denseness. Potentially, however, challenging more explicitly the discourse of bullying might achieve what Foucault refers to as putting relations of power "back into the hands of those who exercise them" (Foucault, 1989, pp. 143-4).

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