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Stepping Over a Baby's Head

Thoughts on Privilege, Humanity, and Liberation

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Commentary: Guillermo Bernal

It seems to me that love is the most important thing in the world. It may be important to great thinkers to examine the world, to explain and despise it. But I think it is only important to love the world, not to despise it, not for us to hate each other, but to be able to regard the world and ourselves and all beings with love, admiration and respect.

Hesse, 1954, p. 119

Introduction

Each day for months I have stepped over a baby's head. On my commute home from work in Mexico City I climb a set of stairs to the metrobus. Glancing down one day, I noticed that a woman selling items from a small table had tucked her baby underneath the stairs. A thought flashed through my mind, "I'm stepping over a baby's head."

As I re-experienced this each day, I kept thinking about the differences between the beginnings of this little baby's life in contrast to my own infancy. The child's mother appeared to be one of the many indigenous women who come from small communities in Mexico to the city looking for a better financial future. I thought about the implications of where we both were born in terms of culture, economics, class, skin tone, access to resources, educational opportunities, nutrition, nationality, and so forth. I wondered about these differences fate had randomly doled out and about the real influence they can have on the paths our lives take.

In stepping over a baby's head, I experienced a déjà vu and recalled many moments in my life: moments in which I recognized that doors had been swung open for me that others must push to get through. I felt a familiar heaviness hanging on my humanity and a lack of clarity

about exactly what I should do about the injustice of it all. This captures a tension that feels destined to be part of my life's work, personally and professionally. From this, several questions emerge: What do I do with my privilege? How do I honor the humanity of others and myself? What needs to occur for us all to be liberated from the structures and stories that stifle human potential and expression?

My Path to This Point

My first memory of life is of a car wreck. My mom and sister had been driving to pick up some last-minute Christmas presents and they were in a car accident. Despite being thrown through the windshield, my sister was relatively uninjured. Unfortunately, my mom was left partially paralyzed, unable to perspire, and with a host of other disabilities. Having been only 3 years old at the time, I have only seen her waterskiing and running along a beach in an old 8-millimeter black-and-white movie. This event was obviously a tragic time in our family's history, yet even though my parents would never wish this type of experience on anyone, I have heard my parents say they would not change the past. Too many of our family's most valued aspects would not exist had this event not occurred. It is easy to trace back how this moment in my family's history is connected to my personal and professional journey.

I was the youngest of four children when the car accident occurred. One of the many outcomes of the accident was that my mom could not have any more biological children. About four years after the car accident, my parents decided to adopt. First they adopted a baby, my sister Maria, from Mexico. Next my parents adopted my brother Jonathan from South Korea. His age was not known, but his dental records suggested he was about seven. Not long after, my mom felt that my sister Maria should have a sibling closer to her age. She found my sister Maura in Colombia and my parents adopted her, along with her two older brothers, Carlos and Edison. My sister Rosi from Brazil and brother Miguel from El Salvador had been adopted previously, but these adoptions had not worked out and so my parents adopted them. Thus, our unusual and complicated six-nation international family system was formed.

That is a short version of a much longer story that included my initial visits to countries outside the United States and my beginning awareness of differences connected to nationality and economic status. People should probably be informed that the play *Annie* has little to do with the reality of adoption, particularly when the adoptions are international. My siblings arrived with varied but traumatic histories; abuse and exploitation; having witnessed and experienced both personal and political violence; sanitary and hunger-related health issues; and so forth. These realities had an influence on my siblings' adjustment to family life in the U.S. and also on my developing views of the world.

The difficulties my siblings experienced in life did not stop once they arrived in the United States. Being among the very few non-white individuals in our community and in their schools, they stood out. I witnessed or they recounted to me the multiple acts of prejudice they faced. Adults shouted at them, even though they were children, and used racist slurs. Teachers found them threatening for doing things they did not take note of when done by white students. They were at times eroticized for being "exotic." They were pulled over by

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police at seemingly higher rates. One time I went grocery shopping with my mom and three of my adopted siblings, and my siblings were walking directly in front of my mom's grocery cart when a store clerk came up and grabbed my brother and told him he knew he was stealing. He had not stolen anything and my mom reacted with shock. The clerk apologized, saying he did not know they were with her. Events like these used to enrage me. Racism was so ugly to me, yet it was not until my doctoral program that I realized the other lessons I was learning in my childhood. I was learning about my place in the existing world and that my skin was celebrated. I expected justice and fairness and to only get in trouble when I did something wrong. I assumed doors would open for me and that they would not be attached to police cars. Feeling that I was passionately against racism, it was a bitter pill to swallow acknowledging my privilege. It was also hard to recognize the role I could play in maintaining oppressive societal structures.

My international family created a somewhat unique microcosm for me as a child. One particularly memorable example was the day some of my siblings began taking anti-parasite medication and large parasites began coming out of their every orifice. It was like a horror film, and I went and sat on the tall green chair in our living room and began hyperventilating. For one sibling, for whom poverty had been the norm, my behavior was hilarious. Using his little finger held to his mouth he imitated a worm and mocked my terror. In some ways, becoming aware of privilege and oppression is not unlike that experience. The jolt of learning that the world may not be as you have constructed it in your mind can be somewhat traumatic.

As an educator, I see versions of this trauma as students are confronted with realities beyond their current worldview. For example, one student shared that she was having nightmares following a Cambodian immersion program in which we visited the killing fields and then worked with a large group of orphaned children who were HIV positive. Seeing teeth and bone still scattered in the dirt and recognizing the legacy of mental health problems from the Pol Pot regime genocide significantly jarred her sense of the world. Sometimes I second-guess myself. Should education jar us? I counter that question with another one. Given that there are numerous Cambodian communities within the United States, would it not be important for a clinician to be aware of such horrific realities? I think therapists do not have the luxury of retaining too much innocence if it leads to a blindness of certain clinical realities. For now, my thoughts are that education of therapists must be a bit trauma inducing and that the difficult recognition of privilege and oppression in the world is central to the job of mental health workers.

Both/And and My Evolving Identity

Yesterday was Thanksgiving and my mom called me a liberal. I had flown to Utah from Mexico City for a few days to be with my family. There were around 40 people at this year's meal, and I found the combination of people typical and yet still mind-boggling. The guest list included conservative Mormons and Catholics, infants and the elderly, Democrats and Republicans, undocumented Mexican and Honduran immigrant families and U.S. citizens, lesbian couples, a Muslim student, people with advanced degrees, people who had not finished high school, and people ranging in socioeconomic status from the working poor to the

wealthy capitalist class. And one identified liberal. After a day of laughter, food, music, and games we were sitting around reminiscing. The topic shifted to when the family had come to visit me when I was working on my master's degree in Louisiana, and my mom mentioned that she did not know what to think about Louisiana now and that she did not like how they had handled things following hurricane Katrina. I gave a knee-jerk, university-trained response to what I considered a politically incorrect thought and said, "What, by dying?" and that was when she called me a liberal. The meaning behind the label was clear; I had crossed a line and been arrogant. It was meant to take me down a notch, and I defended myself, saying, "But I only said three words!" At that point though, I started to consider my part in the interaction. While at first I was kind of proud of my verbal zinger I began to realize that in discussions of important topics where two human hearts and values are involved, it is a pointless goal to try and zing people. When something touches on core values, caustic remarks might feel good, but they are rarely useful. They shut down dialogue and abbreviate the complexity of a person and their views. My three-word response had reduced my mom and her thoughts into small, overly simplistic and stereotypical categories that blocked understanding. The parts of her identity that she might have felt were being addressed disrespectfully—Mormon, Republican or conservative—were put on the defense. My statement also shut down the liberal, human rights activist, advocate for the poor, and other parts of her identity. There is a catchy arrogance that comes along with higher education which can lead me to forget that there are lots of other paths to knowledge (i.e., being a paralyzed mother of 11 children from multiple nationalities who has been a constant human rights activist throughout her life). Jumping to lump someone into one camp or identity component shuts down the other elements of a person. Doing so in this instance stopped me from actually understanding anything about her views. As occurs in such situations, she returned the favor by putting me into the tight-fitting uncomfortable box that the term "liberal" carries in my family and cultural context. "Polarizations, both mundane and existential, have one compelling quality: they break things down into neat categories and seemingly clear choices. They are also insidiously destructive, creating a wedge between people by making their differences seem vast and insurmountable" (Hardy, 1995, p. 42).

Dichotomizing people dehumanizes them by ignoring the both/and nature of most humans. It cuts out important parts from one's identity. Every social justice-minded thought that flashes through my head is likely connected to the modeling of my compassionate mother. Whatever box I could place her in, there is so much more to the story. The real complexity of both of us (and most people) is that we are both conservative and liberal, spiritual and patriotic, and a mix of multiple other variables. Commonalities also went ignored. We hold a multitude of values and beliefs that are informed by our lived experiences, spiritual experiences, our relationships, our present life situations, as well as many other factors.

Not long ago a similar event happened while I was on a different trip to the States. I stumbled upon a protest with opposing sides facing each other across a street. A woman walked into the road to face a man and yelled, "Stop killing babies!" to which the man responded in kind, screaming, "Go take a bath!" I am sure that members of both groups left that day uninfluenced by the views of the other group and more likely left the event feeling assured of the correctness of their own opinions. I left feeling dumber for having turned that corner. What chasm is ever bridged by that kind of process? Witnessing this exchange captured something for me though. It reinforced how rare it is that people holding opposing or

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differing views ever engage in actual meaningful dialogue. I find a parallel process to this street debate within U.S. academic conversations about diversity. While we may use bigger words, the process is often the same. I recognize there may be a need to revise this thought, but I often find U.S. discussions of diversity boring. They remind me of formulaic movies with stock characters: the privileged person who won't engage if he or she feels any anxiety; the person who quickly shows his or her underbelly to avoid critique; the status quo advocate who reminds everyone of reverse discrimination and argues that we are really all the same; the one who "gets it" and wants to liberate or educate the backwards thinking folks; the one from an oppressed community for whom discussing the elephant in the room is like a first breath of air; and a remaining cast of extras whose voices might thicken the dialogue but who remain silent in the background.

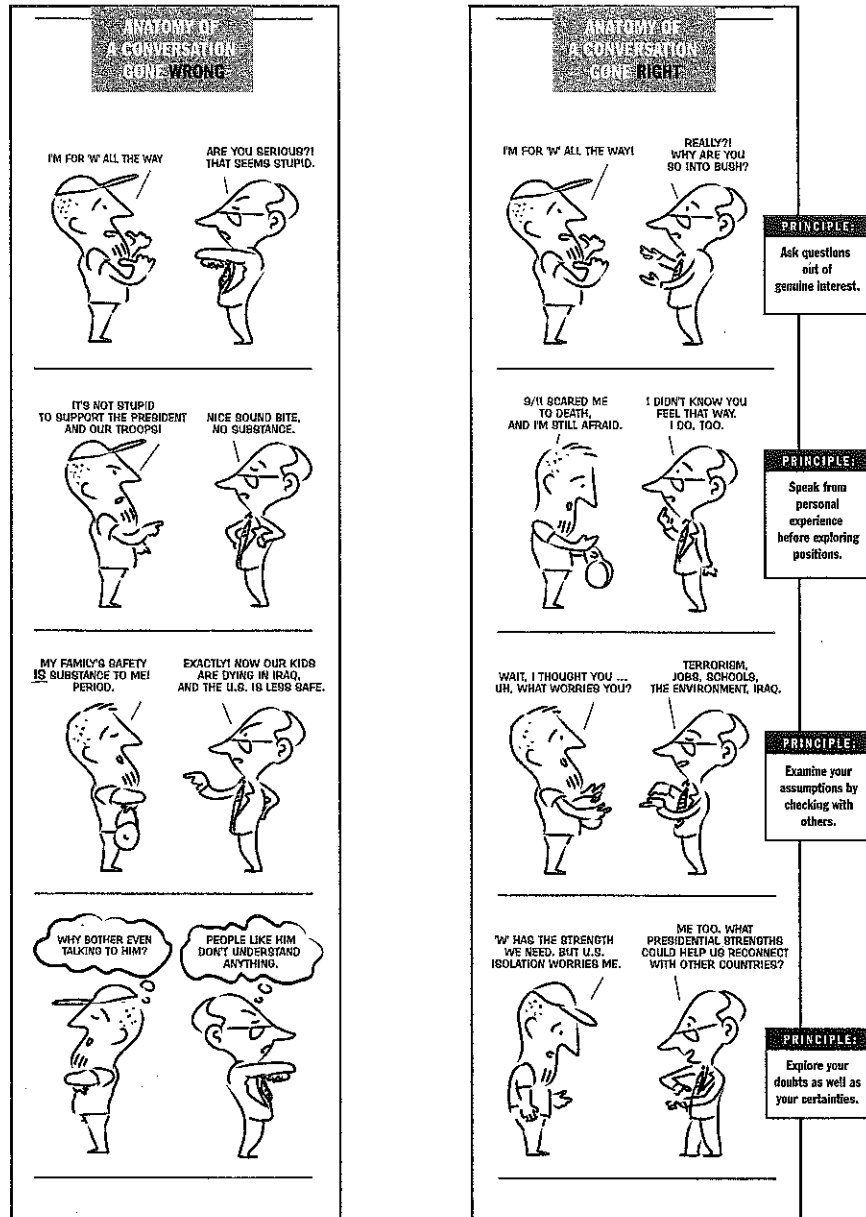
For me, an alternative to the played-out script occurring in U.S. multicultural education can be found in the non-U.S.-originating ideas of Paulo Freire and in the critical pedagogy he championed. Freire (2007) sums up this approach and captures the type of space I hope to create as an educator: "Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (p. 91). A significant part of this is respecting that everyone has something to add in the creation of knowledge and no one person has it all.

Something about the way I see and have experienced diversity taught in the United States seems to be partly to blame for this typecasting. The scenes often include lots of posturing, plenty of condescending anger (demonstrated verbally and silently), and sort of a fevered excitement to catch someone in the wrong. I find fewer examples of love, assuming the best in people, looking for common ground, or anything that leads to deep change. The Public Conversation offers a great example of both approaches.

If the goal is to create deep change and peace, the second option is far more effective. I think we need a new script in diversity dialogues where more complexity is permitted. I think it needs to be a love story. I will probably be embarrassed for writing that line, but I honestly do think that no long term or deep change happens when love is absent. If it were included, it would require a fairly radical departure from what I frequently see occurring in U.S. multicultural education. And bordering on being unpatriotic, I do not think the U.S., being humility challenged, is where a loving model of diversity dialogues will be found. Therefore, I have looked toward Latin America for alternatives.

Speaking of humility, I have heard that lessons keep repeating themselves until you learn them. For me that lesson is the need to avoid thinking I have arrived. For example, I felt fairly savvy about cultural issues by the time I began my doctoral program given my family experiences. Fortunately, I found faculty who were not particularly impressed. During those years I felt raw from being challenged to consider how my privilege shaped my worldview. In the shift from student to faculty member, the need for learning continued as I moved into the role of power that position gave me. Similarly, despite the focus on multiculturalism in my education and beginning career, my move from the U.S. to Mexico yet again powerfully showed me I had not arrived. For me, Paulo Freire (1998) captures what I have now come to believe when he states, "Education does not make us educable. It is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable" (p. 111). In terms of multicultural understanding, I believe the path is the destination. The goal is to get on the path, keep heading down it, and at all costs avoid the mistaken belief that you have arrived.

Figure 10.1 Anatomy of Two Conversations



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Illustrated by J. Kehe

My Professional Path

My professional role for nearly a decade has been as a program director of a counseling psychology program based in Mexico City. In addition to my primary job, I also run educational immersion programs throughout the year in Mexico and co-direct immersion programs in

Cambodia, Vietnam, India, and, soon, Cuba. These programs are created with the intention of assisting clinicians in developing increased international clinical competencies as well as learning more about specific cultures. We also hope that these programs will be beneficial for the communities in which the trainings occur. An additional emphasis of my work is developing improved approaches to working with impoverished and underserved communities. As part of this work, I emphasize the need for U.S. trained clinicians to develop critical patriotism and become more aware of how U.S. culture and values are strongly embedded in most mental health approaches (Platt & Laszloffy, 2012). As an educator I seek to address issues of diversity: gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity. Additionally, given that they are often neglected items on lists of components of diversity, nationality and social economic status are the two areas I particularly focus on in my work.

Given the nature of my work, there is often an expectation that I have it all figured out, but I have not come close to that yet. In writing this chapter, I have told a few friends that I am writing something that will get me fired. Either I will reveal too many of my multicultural blind spots or one of my bosses will be offended by my critiques of U.S. education. Still, the potential dialogue this book might create is intriguing. It is also consistent with the ideas of critical pedagogy, an approach to education I embrace. While transparency often does have consequences professionally, my own belief is that revealing your humanity and flaws is the only real path to personal and professional growth.

Lately I have wondered about my professional choices. Am I a productive member of society? This is an ongoing theme in my internal dialogue. A cardinal sin in my family is to be lazy. As I began going to college, my mom carried on a tradition she had learned from her father and checked my hands to see if I had been working. The point was that if I had no calluses, I had no excuse to be tired. Years later, I think my job is still a mystery to my family and that the contributions of academia remain suspect. Perhaps for this reason I too wonder sometimes if universities are the place where the real work that benefits humankind gets done. I worry that it is becoming a place where the privileged are trained to serve the privileged (or in some instances maintain social control over the poor and disenfranchised). Education in the United States is particularly entrenched in pervasive consumerism (Aronowitz, 2000; Ogden, 2008) and many of its practices are based on capitalism rather than concern for what helps the majority of humankind (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2007; Shor, 1986). I have also noted that education is increasingly marketed as a means to rise above the masses and that professionalism has come to be associated with perfect manicures, plush offices, and other forms of materialism. Looking at my hands sometimes I question, "Does training a person to be a professional mean that they never will get their hands dirty or callused?"

Still, I do believe in the potential power of education. For me true education involves humans coming together to create knowledge and change the world for the better. Lately, I see less of this form of education. It is discouraging to see the humanity being sucked out of education in the United States, as it becomes increasingly sterilized, standardized, and mechanical (U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, 2007).

I am not alone in my experience, as non-white and international students have shared how U.S. education sometimes leaves them feeling disconnected from their family, communities, and their unique worldviews. Still, I hold onto the hope that U.S. education can be salvaged or that something new will emerge. There is the possibility of an educational process that contributes to the liberation of people from the harsh realities impacting

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humankind. For now, I retain the hope that working in education could contribute to fewer babies having their heads stepped over.

A Pointillist Conceptualization of Culture

My emerging view of what culture is could be called a pointillist conceptualization of culture (Platt, 2012). Pointillism is a style of painting developed by Seurat and other artists in which small dots (points) are used to form an image. When seen from a distance, these distinct dots are almost imperceptible and our brain perceives them as a solid form. To me, these dots are similar to stories. This is consistent with the sociological theories of social constructionism, suggesting culture is a flexible network of knowledge spheres that include different categories and theories (Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Matsumoto, Anguas-Wong, & Martinez, 2008; Platt, 2010). In this sense, culture is the embrace of many shared stories by a group of people. As Mair (1988) suggests, "There is the pervasive assumption of a real world and a real truth. Yet stories create different worlds, different atmospheres, different angles of human responses, different perspectives, different senses of what is human, different plots and themes" (p. 128). Culture, in my view, is made up of millions of tiny points of socially negotiated and constructed stories. Culture, in my view, is not a single, rigid and unchanging, uniform whole that one can memorize. Perhaps this is why we struggle with culture in U.S. education. Culture conceived this way is too messy and complex to fit well in a standardized U.S. model of education.

The idea of a pointillist conceptualization of culture came to me while looking at the work of Diego Rivera, who was part of the Mexican Muralism Art Movement. I was visiting the Palacio Nacional, a historic building that faces the Zocalo in the center of Mexico City, and housed on the first floor are a number of Diego Rivera's best-known murals. In the largest of these murals, Rivera attempted to capture two thousand years of Mexico's history, and hundreds of the faces of Mexico's most important historical figures are represented. On that first visit, I remember looking up and recognizing very few of them. Unlike most Mexicans, I held no stories about individuals such as Benito Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, or Felipe Carrillo Puerto. As I thought about this, I realized that my attempt to understand the culture (connect the cultural dots) while lacking most of the shared historical stories would likely result in an overly simplified and inaccurate picture of Mexican culture. I've since realized that historical stories are just one of many forms of cultural dots. Language, food, art, architecture, family values, traditions, gender rules, business practices, humor, and spiritual views are other examples. Based on a pointillist perspective of culture, it would be impossible to memorize every point of information, but the more points of knowledge we have, the more fully we will be able to connect with different cultures. The content, though, is less vital than the process in which one engages in, so multicultural educators should spend less energy on developing lists of cultural "truths" and focus more on helping people learn to be comfortable engaging with complexity and difference.

Mental health workers in particular need an increased ability to engage in dialogue and to be comfortable negotiating cultural differences. Clients make decisions about how to go about change based on what makes sense within their cultures (Di Nicola, 1997). The culture of the therapist intersects with the culture of the family, and this recognition is vital in clinical

work. According to Virginia Satir (2000), "The person of the therapist is the center point around which successful therapy revolves" (p. 25). Mental health education should provide students practice and feedback on their ability to engage around differences. Multicultural competency from my vantage point involves an ongoing process of self-reflection and interpersonal negotiation; it is not a destination or something to be checked off.

I do not believe much in the value of bulleted lists, yet it to a large extent, they celebrated and rewarded in U.S. culture and in academia for its attempt to reduce complex information into easily digested and distributable forms. Many professors from the United States receive promotions and acclaim based on their ability to create an intriguing list and by getting others to believe it represents reality. Versions of bulleted lists are the very foundation and increasingly the future of U.S. approaches to education (Freire, 2007).

Teaching critical thinking about diverse perspectives can take a backseat to transferring the knowledge blips experts have decided to include in approved curriculums. "Knowledge is produced in a place far from students, who are asked only to memorize what the teacher says. Consequently, we reduce the act of knowing the existing knowledge into a mere transference of the existing knowledge. And the teacher becomes just the specialist in transferring knowledge" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). Beyond the reality that this type of pre-packaged education is frequently boring and tedious, it also poses a problem for any attempt to construct educational practices relevant for a multicultural world. It is somewhat antithetical to a pluralistic worldview to create required lists to which all must adhere.

U.S. psychology students are under pressure to ingest and regurgitate pre-packaged knowledge in order to graduate, pass licensing exams, and ultimately be reimbursed by insurance companies. University faculty members are also under pressure to transfer the standard curriculum in increasingly standardized ways. The path to faculty receiving promotions and tenure is linked to their willingness to create detailed rubrics, accept established standardized material, and adhere to the belief that Bloom's taxonomy represents the only valid path to knowledge. Shor and Freire (1987) suggest that standardized knowledge is pushed in universities because "it is familiar and already 'worked out,' even if it doesn't 'work' in class" (p. 7). They warn that, "by deviating from the standard syllabus you can get known as a rebel or radical or 'flake,' and be subjected to anything from petty harassment to firing" (p. 7). The most viable option I have found is to ensure that my students know the bulleted items individuals in power require while also creating critical educational opportunities beyond official education. The first is what they pay me to do and what students will need to know in order to make a living. The second is often unrewarded, sometimes punished, work that may not be valued by the larger university system.

It does not take much effort to discover that what drives official knowledge and its accompanying bulleted lists is money. Universities are ultimately businesses that typically bow to what the larger context demands, particularly the financial realities that drive U.S. culture and education. This is particularly relevant for mental health education given that "the economic context promotes changes in mental health care delivery, reimbursement, legislation, and managed care" (Miller, Todahl, & Platt, 2010, p. 61). For example, it was not surprising news to learn that the majority of the panel members responsible for writing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM)* have undisclosed financial links to drug makers (Cosgrove & Bursztajn, 2010; Cosgrove, Bursztajn, Krinsky, Anaya, & Walker, 2009). Given that curriculums are driven by financial concerns, the structures that have developed

tend to serve the white and wealthy more than people of color or the poor. This leads to the challenge that financially influenced standardized care often misses the needs of multicultural communities. What is deemed as effective therapy is often evaluated through means primarily valued by the majority and ignores support from minority perspectives. Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez (2008) argue, "Funding sources, including third-party payers and governmental grant sources support, have empirically tested best counseling and therapy practices. This ensures that counselors will adhere to treatment paradigms that have passed the Western empirical test while disregarding considerations of culturally appropriate interventions . . ." (p. 293). Beyond missing the needs of multicultural communities, standardized education also reproduces and reinforces the economic dominance of one class over another (McLaren, 1999). To be prepared to serve all populations, multicultural educators and clinicians might do well to remember Aristotle, who observed: "Some people do not listen to a speaker unless he speaks mathematically, others unless he gives instances, while others expect him to cite a poet as witness. And some want to have everything done accurately, while others are annoyed by accuracy. Hence one must be already trained to know how to take each sort of argument" (Cuomo, 2001, p. 33). What would that look like if applied to education and therapy? My own opinion is that for now multicultural education will likely only occur in spite of official education.

My Cultural Identity

My cultural identity is not a constant. An important mentor in my life, Dr. Raphael Becvar, when asked, "How are you?" would respond by asking, "With whom and in what context?" I am a white male who was born in the United States and I am of English and Danish descent. I am primarily a speaker of the English language, and I have cultural identity connections with Utah, Virginia, New York, Louisiana, Oregon, and California. I am a culturally influenced, but currently nonpracticing Mormon. I am educated, and I am an expatriate who has lived almost a decade in Mexico City. Karl Marx (1952, 1976) would likely place me in the middle class or between the ruling class and proletariat (working) class. Marx might have also used the terms "bourgeoisie" or "professional class" to describe my current class status. Coming from a working class family, I struggle with whether the term "professional" has to be a synonym for bourgeois. All of these factors and others shape who I am. The meaning of what this small sample of my identity factors means also depends on the cultural locations of others; in other words, my experience of myself is impacted by who I am with and in what context. For example, being from the U.S. has different meanings if I am interacting with the wealthy elite of Mexico versus an impoverished community in Cambodia. These different communities have different histories and current relationships with the U.S., and this leads to differences in the interaction with the U.S. parts of my identity. In my view, it is the intersection of identity factors that is important to understand. Another example is my Spanish-language ability. Flawed as it may be, it changes how my nationality, race, and culture are experienced in Mexico. In contrast, barriers stemming from my inability to speak Khmer, the official language of Cambodia, shapes how I negotiate my U.S. nationality (and other identity factors) in relationships with people from that culture. Recognizing the degree of complexity in my cultural identity helps me be open and compassionate about the complexity in others.

Given this, I believe cultural competency is linked to an ability to stay connected while recognizing and negotiating the intersection of our multiple identities with others.

A theme in the above conceptualization of my cultural identity is privilege. Being white, educated, born in the United States, and so forth opens doors for me. It is important to recognize how I benefit from the way society is currently constructed, and I am motivated to identify the ways I am privileged because it is tied to my own humanity and relationships. For me, oppression is about the diminishing of one's humanity. An idea of the educator Paulo Freire (2007) has particularly impacted my thinking on this subject: "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized" (p. 38). If you consider the last time you harmed a person, my guess is that you felt something in yourself being wounded, too. The term oppressor may feel too heavy for many people, but I feel that having many unearned privileges that others do not enjoy is unfair and therefore oppressive. Privilege and oppressing separates us from others. Privilege, so often reframed as exclusive, distances us from others and creates barriers that harm everyone's humanity. In contrast, seeking to know, acknowledge, and change that which harms others (and therefore ourselves) is an opportunity for healing.

In my academic life, the humanity found in the writings of three teachers has significantly shaped my professional lens and academic life: bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Ignacio Martín-Baró. The common themes found in their writings and life's work are the willingness to critique the status quo and the importance of people reconnecting with their humanity. Interestingly, each of these authors also discusses the role of love in their work. Love is an unprofessional word to many people, but these authors have helped me understand why many of my best educational and clinical moments have occurred when I have loved the people with whom I am working.

In my first readings of bell hooks, I had the repeated experience of being both challenged to think in new ways and also a sense of inclusion. For example, her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* challenged me to see connections among gender, race, and class, and my privilege in each of these areas, while creating for me, for the first time, the thought that as a male I could also be a feminist. One of the ways she invited me in as a reader was by revealing herself as a person with flaws; she dared share her actual thoughts and occasional missteps. Her writing gave me a bit of access to her as a human and modeled how that can be liberating for others. This seemed to be the opposite of most models regarding what it means to be a professional; in fact, she suggested that retaining one's humanity might actually be valuable. In her book *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), she suggested that faculty often maintain the status quo of oppressive societal structures by remaining hidden in the role of "... all knowing silent interrogators," whereas, "when education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess" (p. 21). As someone in multiple privileged positions, the permission her writings gave me to be flawed, to self-reflect, and to seek to change has been enormously beneficial.

The writings of Paulo Freire have helped destroy my ability to enjoy a good bulleted list. Freire was a Brazilian educator who argued against U.S. education's tendency to focus on transferring knowledge from experts to empty vessels rather than viewing education as people coming together to problem solve and co-create knowledge (Freire, 1998, 2007; Gadotti, 1994; McLaren, 2000; Platt, 2010). He proposed critical pedagogy as an alternative to traditional education; the cornerstone of this approach is the posing of problems and

engaging in dialogue. Despite the opportunity to live outside the U.S., I am still connected to a U.S. university and bound to many U.S.-influenced bulleted lists. Freire's writing has been helpful in making me aware of this fact and encouraged exploration of alternative perspectives. As an educator, I now consider official knowledge points to be Freirean prompts around which dialogues can occur.

Before I can tell you about Ignacio Martín-Baró, I want to place my finding of his writings in context. My official first job was as a professor in Eugene, Oregon, which is a community that is significantly influenced by hippie culture. As a result, in the cultural air of Eugene was the demand that one question reality. For me, this cultural context reminded me of what education should be: a chance to think, question, and create. One might trivialize the hippie generation and movement, but consider the powerful social changes that occurred during this period. The influential psychologist and archetypal hippie Timothy Leary (1993) explained that "*Hippy* is an establishment label for a profound, invisible, underground, evolutionary process. For every visible hippy, barefoot, beflowered, beaded, there are a thousand invisible members of the turned-on underground. Persons whose lives are tuned in to their inner vision, who are dropping out of the TV comedy of American life" (p. 165). Consider the many cultural shifts that occurred in the 1960s that were about multicultural issues, including gender, race, and culture. My phenotype does not allow me to look like a hippie, yet as I began my career and saw the limitation of most theories when working with people outside the dominant culture, the hippie idea of questioning reality resonated with me. This does not always make my career path smooth or the *Man* happy, but still, *the times they are a changin'*.

At this point of my professional development, immersed in books such as *On the Road* and *Open Veins of Latin America*, I did a library search on revolution and psychology. The search brought up liberation psychology, an approach founded by Salvadoran-born Jesuit priest Ignacio Martín-Baró. This was my first exposure to a Latin American originating approach to mental health and I wanted to know more. Martín-Baró, who had earned his psychology degree in the U.S., struggled to apply it in his work in war-torn El Salvador. His primary critique was how U.S. approaches tended to be designed for the wealthy elite and not developed with the aim to serve the poor (Hollander, 1997). He also noted how most U.S. models focused on individual pathology rather than fully considering the impact of a person's context. Liberation psychology is not a single approach to mental health but an umbrella term for numerous models in which there is a focus on addressing the psychological wounding of oppressive societal structures; a recognition that truth is co-created rather than distributed by those from above; and models in which mental health workers align themselves in solidarity with the oppressed and are also transformed and humanized in research and practice (Comas-Díaz, Lykes, & Alacón, 1998; Martín-Baró, 1994; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Liberation psychology has challenged me to consider how most of what I had learned in U.S. universities about mental health is deeply embedded in U.S. culture, including U.S. versions of multiculturalism.

Integration in My Personal and Professional Lives _____

Sometimes I feel knotty. In his book *Knots*, R. D. Laing (1970) wrote a poem that captures my frequent experience in working in higher education: "They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game" (p. 2). No one really likes

you to point out problems and I know it can be overdone, but too often I want to ask why about things: *Why are we spending countless hours discussing this form and other ways to standardize the world? Why does it feel like the university would prefer students to take a standard class rather than engage in service learning? Why would we value more a set of competencies that six people in New Jersey decided on than ones we could come up with ourselves? Why does it feel so revolutionary to question the existing mental health paradigms like the DSM? Why, if APA is going to be part of quality assurance for the world (as an appointed taskforce of APA suggests), would we not allow the same in reverse (i.e., perhaps India having a say on whether what we do qualifies as quality mental health care)?* As I have reflected about my history and family while writing this chapter, I recognize there is some anger in my questions. The pace is slow in changing the way institutions deal with U.S. multiculturalism and international issues. Recently I have decided to try and funnel that energy in less critical and more constructive ways, or as attributed to Sam Rayburn: "A jackass can kick a barn down, but it takes a carpenter to build one." I think I have spent some time critiquing the world and higher education and now I am looking for the next step in the process.

Seeking a Balanced Path

One of the biggest challenges I encounter is when domestic views of diversity conflict with an international perspective. Recently an opportunity for a dialogue about these complexities arose at my university in Mexico in the form of a vending machine. A large image of "Negrito," a caricature of a black boy found on a Mexican pastry, was blazoned across the machine. Shortly after its arrival, one of my U.S. psychology students e-mailed the staff on campus asking that it be removed because it was offensive. The Mexican staff was awestruck at the audacity of a U.S. person making the judgment that there was anything wrong with the image. In a quick survey of those on campus, not a single Mexican viewed this image as offensive. One told me that this was yet another example of the typical U.S. behavior of forcing their views on Mexicans. Another added, "*le buscas cinco patas al gato*" ("You look for five legs on a cat"—that is, you look for what is not there). Of the U.S. representatives on campus, everyone believed the image was racist. It paralleled what happened a few years ago when the Mexican comic book character *Memín Pinguín* was put on a postage stamp, and it came to the attention of people in the United States. Here in Mexico, people sometimes use descriptive words like *gordo* (fat), *chino* (Chinese), or *morena* (dark skin) with great affection. The meaning often depends on the tone of voice. Similarly, the Spanish singer Miguel Bosé has a song entitled "*Morena mía*," which translates as "Dark skin woman of mine," but I've been told more accurately the meaning translates into "my love." How could our two countries view things so very differently?

The vending machine incident stumped me and so I took a picture of the machine and sent it to all of the multicultural experts at the U.S. campuses of my university. Interestingly, there was again a significant divide. One hundred percent of the faculty born in the U.S. publicly reacted and discussed the nuances of Mexican racism. Privately though, international faculty responded and suggested that the image was not inherently racist and might even be considered loving. Here is the quandary: I can see the offense through my U.S.-formed lenses, yet I worry about U.S. arrogance, including U.S.-ethnocentrism found in U.S. multiculturalism.

Versions of this event occur often, and the message is that Mexico is backwards. For example, people from the U.S. may think in terms of race while Mexicans tend to think in terms of class. I find that U.S. folks are often quick to devalue the Mexico perspective and move toward educating them on "how it really is," while missing opportunities for dialogue and new ways to think about difference. In days, the image on the vending machine was plastered over. The machine now stands for me as monument of U.S. multiculturalism in action. There was a strong critique, but the cultural divide was never fully addressed nor did any actual understanding of the other viewpoint occur for either side. It is good to recognize the divides and differences in perspectives, yet I need to do more than just point them out. There is a growing awareness that diversity is going to need to include international perspectives. If I am proactive, my hope would be to help create structures in education that will foster inclusion of international perspectives.

Conclusions

One day the baby under the stairs was gone. I would like this chapter to end with my having done some profound thing—perhaps starting some meaningful dialogue or program that more significantly addresses issues of poverty or began engaging with this child and mother in a way that led to a friendship and altered all of our lives for the better. The fact is that I never actually engaged with the baby or the mother. I talked to several university colleagues about them and I discussed the tension I felt about disparities in a few lectures. As I walk to my ivory tower each day, I step over other babies, pass by beggars, and see innumerable other injustices. There are undoubtedly also many whom I do not see because I allow myself to remain oblivious. While there are things I feel positively about regarding my professional and personal choices, I recognize there is still much more to do. I need to figure out the difference between feeling guilty and taking accountability for privilege. I need to continue examining my motives and rooting out acts of false generosity or those acts that alleviate guilt but do not alter the unjust social order. My hope is that I am on the precipice of something as a professional where I move on from doing so much critiquing into more concrete creating.

Ideas for Students and Faculty

The musician and philosopher Bob Marley (1980) encourages us to "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery," suggesting that "None but ourselves can free our minds" (Track 5). Bias, racism, and other mental pollution are thick in the air, but it does not mean you are a bad person for inhaling. Still, for yourself and for those with whom you will work, you want to try and get it out of your system. Sometimes it is challenging to look at ourselves and to claim the parts that are less than admirable, and sometimes we totalize these parts and think acknowledging a bias means we have no good qualities. That is often what is happening when we find ourselves being defensive. Do not underestimate your ability to shut down feedback verbally or through your silences. Work hard to recognize that the golden path to becoming competent is the ability to find and incorporate feedback. Students have a lot of power to socialize faculty and clients to stop giving them the feedback needed. The lack of feedback creates barriers to developing competencies. Even when experiencing a source of feedback that does not feel accurate, there is knowledge to be found in asking, "How is it

that I could be perceived in that way?" Whether you get on the path (process rather than destination) of multicultural competency is ultimately in your hands.

Recommended Resources

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- Engage in International Language and Cultural Immersion Programs developed specifically for Mental Health, for example, at <http://www.alliant.edu/cspp/programs-degrees/spanish-language-cultural/mexico-immersion-program.php>

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Reflections on Privilege, Humanity, and Liberation _____

Guillermo Bernal

I began reading Platt's chapter on my way to a conference, traveling from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to a meeting in Washington, DC. Getting through security is often difficult but I was confident in my own personal efficiency, speed, and of course privilege as a frequent flyer, but

at the security point there were a group of Puerto Rican travelers just behind me who had unusual looking boxes they were trying to get through the screening machine. I was not paying much attention to them as they were making a commotion with the security personnel. Fortunately, I was just ahead of them and I got through security quickly, but while gathering my belongings and putting on my shoes, I heard some noise and loud voices. As I turned, a guard opened one of the boxes and out flew two chickens, crossing back through the security point. The scene became somewhat chaotic as personnel ran after the chickens right there in the middle of the security station. Anyone who has had the "cultural experience" of trying to catch a chicken knows that it is no easy feat. The situation turned comic. The chickens were eventually caught, but it took the collaboration of fellow travelers and security personnel. I was so stunned by the situation that I missed the opportunity to capture it on video with my phone. I thought to myself, who thinks of transporting chickens through security at an airport? Would this ever happen anywhere else but in Puerto Rico? I didn't want to be bothered as I had a commentary to write and I found a comfortable seat near the gate and awaited the call to board the plane.

After reading a few pages of Platt's chapter, I wondered what it would be like to literally have to step over a baby's head on my way to work each day. I thought, well, there are no babies to step over on my relatively short trip to the university, but there are men and women begging at just about every traffic light. Sometimes I give and sometimes I don't and I am not sure why.

As I raised my gaze, I saw a man who looked to be in his early thirties in a wheelchair, accompanied by a woman about his age. The young man seemed to be in good shape and sported well-developed and strong biceps. As I looked closer, his upper torso was strapped to the wheelchair, and he had no legs below the hips. I imagined that he was a war veteran and I wondered what it would be like to be in his situation. I felt sorrow and compassion for this man's loss of nearly half of his body, and I experienced an uneasy almost guilt-laden sense of appreciation that I was whole and healthy.

I returned to reading the chapter on privilege, a concept that has many dimensions, one of which is the privilege of being an able-bodied person. As I entered the plane, I again saw the young man and his companion seated in the bulkhead area two rows ahead in coach. The trip was to be at least three and a half hours and many thoughts passed through my mind. What if there were turbulence? What if there were an emergency? He was seated close to an exit. How was he going to get to the bathroom, and who was going to help him? About an hour and a half later my question was answered. The young man unstrapped himself from the seat, lifted his torso to the floor, and hand-walked to the bathroom. A little later, he opened the bathroom door, walked again with his hands, lifted himself back onto his seat, and put his seatbelt back on. I was in awe and felt enormous respect for the man, especially as he seemed to do this in such a matter-of-fact way, with such ease and dignity. I was also impressed by the reaction of the passengers seated nearby, who seemed to have seen this amazing feat and treated it as an everyday event.

Platt's chapter is an invitation to reflect on privilege. Both incidents, the passengers traveling with the chickens and the man in the wheelchair, serve as examples of how in our daily lives privilege, class, culture, are ever-present. Why was I so judgmental about people traveling with chickens? Folks travel with dogs and cats, why not chickens? Don't I value diversity? Perhaps I just did not want to be bothered and wanted no obstacles along the way on my

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journey; I tend to place a high value on efficiency, independence, clarity, order, and discipline. The ruckus that ensued at the security gate was not to my liking, and perhaps nationality, class, and cultural issues were surfacing for me. With the young man, initially I felt sorrow and pity, mixed with shame for feeling that way. On the plane, I felt pride for this man, as I certainly could not handle my "full body" the way that he handled his. Building the strength to carry his weight must have taken quite a bit of effort and discipline, and I could almost hear my father's voice telling me that I should always be able to carry my own weight. I found common ground with this man, as there was a shift within me from viewing him as an "object" of curiosity to empathizing with aspects of his subjectivity or humanity. Platt asks the question of honoring humanity, that of others and of oneself. He also asks us to reflect on what needs to happen to rid ourselves of both the form and the contents that limit our human expression. The awareness of my own privilege emerged slowly. Experiences of being marginalized and discriminated against shaped my sense of self and my views on culture and context. The privilege of having grown-up in a loving family and of having obtained an education combined with the exposure to diversity of communities, in part, as a result of the immigration experience, was central and formative.

Paths, Identities, and Culture

Que no sean los conceptos los que convoquen a la realidad, sino la realidad la que busque a los conceptos; que no sean las teorías las que definan los problemas de nuestra situación, sino que sean esos problemas los que reclamen y, por así decirlo, elijan su propia teorización. Se trata, en otras palabras, de cambiar nuestro tradicional idealismo metodológico en un realismo crítico. A los psicólogos latinoamericanos nos hace falta un buen baño de realidad, pero de esa misma realidad que agobia y angustia a las mayorías populares.

Ignacio Martín-Baró

In the passage above, Martín-Baró (1994, p. 314) was primarily addressing a Latin American audience. He emphasized how psychology could serve the interests of the majority of the Latin American population. In a sense, he calls for a reframing of a psychology that emerges from the bottom up and one that is grounded more in a critical realism than a methodological idealism. Since his murder in 1989, multiculturalism has emerged (Pedersen, 1998) and in parallel form methodological approaches such as grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and community-based participatory research (Knight, Roosa, Calderón-Tena, & Gonzales, 2009), both of which are very similar to aspects of what he was advocating.

But, dear reader, stop for a moment. If you don't read Spanish, what is the experience of finding a page with a passage from another language? What is the experience of not finding the translation immediately available? In an English-language-dominant world of science and psychology, there is limited access to the writings of scholars in other languages. Privilege also extends to language, which is often the carrier of culture. My intent here is to bring attention to how privilege operates. Too often we remain unaware of the fact that the majority of the world's populations speak a language different from our own. Multiculturalism must also address the diversity in languages.

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My translation of Martín-Barós (1994) words is: "Let it not be the concepts that convene reality but the reality itself that seeks the concepts; let it not be the theories that define the problems (or issues) of our situations but rather the issues (or problems) that reclaim or choose their own theories. In other words, it is about changing our traditional methodological idealism in favor of a critical realism. We Latin American psychologists need a good reality check, but a check on that same reality that burdens and anguishes the popular majorities."

Platt touches on a number of key issues, namely, identity, culture, multiculturalism, knowledge, oppression, and humanity. These themes are woven throughout his narrative with the purpose of examining the complexity of privilege and oppression. I address them below, primarily from my personal perspective.

Identity. To this day, when someone in a day-to-day encounter asks me where I am from, I hesitate. Do I give the long version or the short version? I am reminded of a verse from José Martí, the poet laureate of Cuba, "Yo vengo de todas partes y hacia todas partes voy"—I come from many places and to many places I go. While I have now a clear sense of my identity, that sense of identity was shaken during my formative years as an adolescent and young adult. I am in fact from many places and identify with various cultures. Below I turn to some aspects of my personal journey.

Personal path. I was born in Cuba and lived there for the first 11 years of my life. I come from a family of privilege; my father had a doctorate in pharmacy and my mother completed her high school education in the U.S. For many years I accepted the idea from my parents that we were middle class, until I actually began to research my family of origin while in graduate school in a family therapy course. My family moved to the U.S. in the early 1960s. We lived briefly in Miami, Florida, and then we moved to Jersey City, New Jersey, where I completed my primary and secondary education. Later, we moved back to Miami, where I completed my bachelor's degree, and then I moved to Amherst, Massachusetts, for my Ph.D and later to Philadelphia for my clinical internship. My first academic position was at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco. From there, I returned to the Caribbean and joined the faculty of the Department of Psychology at the University of Puerto Rico. Indeed, I do come from many places.

In Cuba I attended private schools and lived in a highly protected environment. I had never experienced discrimination, and I was never involved in a fistfight. With the transition to the U.S., everything was to change. Upon our arrival in Miami, I was struck by the large supermarkets, and in an outing to one of these, I saw two water fountains. One of them had a label that said "colored," and I ran to that one, expecting water to shoot out like a rainbow. What a disappointment! It was just regular water. I ran to my Mom to complain that the fountain wasn't working correctly. Then she explained, "No, m'ijo (my son), here in the U.S., there are water fountains and bathrooms for people of color or Negroes and other ones for Whites." Little did I know that despite my light skin, in this new land I was considered a person of color.

My first memory of resisting assimilation was when I refused to not cross the number seven. Upon entering sixth grade in Miami, the teacher changed my name to William and attempted to get me to recite the pledge of allegiance to the U.S. flag. I did not know the words, and that was not my flag to honor! In addition, I was now supposed to do mathematical division in a different way, but I continued crossing my sevens despite the repeated reprimands. Perhaps it was my privilege or stubbornness that prepared me to resist this assimilation.

My English was quite limited, yet somehow I graduated from sixth grade and started junior high. My first or second day there, I got into a fight and was beaten up. I was perplexed because I was just minding my own business, but I was the new kid on the block, and I was from Cuba. Several months later, we moved to Jersey City. My father had initially remained in Cuba, but when the situation worsened, he joined us. He could not find a job in Miami because of the multitude of new Cuban immigrants, so he accepted relocation to the North with a job at a pharmacy. My dad did not speak English well, and he was soon fired. He then got a job as a janitor in a pharmaceutical company.

We lived in Jersey City for seven years—rather difficult years, particularly at the beginning. Life was basically survival from day to day, and both my parents were working, as was my older brother who was 16. My mother, being a practical woman, assigned household jobs to all of us, and there was a clear chain of command. When she was not around, my older brother was in charge and when he was working, I was in charge. At about the age of 12 or 13, I started cooking for the family and minding my younger brother and sister (then ages 8 and 4). We lived in four different places and each one was an improvement over the last. I will never forget the signs in some of the buildings that read, “No dogs or Cubans” and “No dogs or Spicks.” Again, I got into fights at school but by the third time, I had started taking judo lessons. Now, if a student looked at me the wrong way, I used it as an opportunity to practice my judo; I flipped him and beat him up. It was an environment where you either beat up others or got beaten up yourself. Then, I started to hang out with many of the seemingly “antisocial” kids. Sometimes I am not sure how it was that I wound up in academia. Along my journey there were so many times that anything could have happened given the hostile context, the limited resources (social and economic), the closer contact with the more delinquent crowd, and the easy availability of drugs and alcohol. At one time, I thought that it was due to personal and family characteristics, and later, I thought that it was sheer luck. It was probably a combination.

I learned a number of lessons from my experience of migration and the Cuban Revolution, and these experiences had a profound effect on my values, worldview, and identity. On the one hand, there was a clear and tangible loss of privilege, but there are many aspects to privilege that are intangible and probably never lost. Like most kids my age, when the Cuban Revolution triumphed, I was proud of the “rebeldes” (or rebels) and “el movimiento revolucionario” (the revolutionary movement). The government was toppled and a completely new government came into being. My family chose to leave with the mistaken expectation that we would soon return, but the fact that a small group of men and women could change the social and material reality was a very empowering notion. From this upbringing I continue to value organization, collaboration, and social action. Second, despite the fact that I come from a family of privilege, the value of accumulating wealth and possessions has little meaning to me. These resources can come and go at any time as our realities can change in any moment. There is a sense of impermanence, of ever-changing reality that is liberating. Instead, I value the resources of education, knowledge, skills, culture, family, and relationships; these are likely to always exist despite changes in context. Yet even when material privilege is lost, privilege has many intangibles that my mother made a point of teaching me. At one point as a boy in Jersey City riding in a car with the whole family, I said, “So Mom, we are now poor, right?” She turned around and replied with anger in her voice: “No, we may not have any money but we are not poor. Poverty is in the mind!” In her own way, she was trying to tell me that we had culture and values. She was instructing me in no uncertain terms that I had to

stop thinking that way—similar to Bob Marley's notion of freeing oneself from mental slavery (cited in Platt)—and she was also teaching me a bit of arrogance by letting me know that we were above “the poor” (who were now the only friends I had). In other words, we were still bourgeois, we just had no money.

My sense of identity has been tied to the notion of belonging. In many respects, I assimilated to the U.S. reasonably well. I speak and write English fluently, but early in college I changed my name back to Guillermo. I am well educated and can fit well in both English- and Spanish-speaking contexts, yet there is a certain uneasiness about fitting in that has remained with me. Perhaps the one place where I almost felt “at home” was San Francisco, California. That may have been because the majority of the population was not from there and no one really belonged anyway. In the late 1970s I traveled to Cuba and reconnected with family that chose to stay. I also developed projects with Cuban psychologists in education, training, and research that meant returning for many other visits. Those trips and reconnections went a long way to strengthen my sense of identity as Cuban.

Over the years I have moved further to the left on the political spectrum. After being promoted to associate professor, I had a mid-life crisis. With the promotion, I demonstrated to myself that I could play ball in the major leagues, but I asked myself, now what do I really want to do and where do I want to do it? When I learned of a new Ph.D. program in Psychology being developed at the University of Puerto Rico, I inquired, applied, and subsequently was offered a position. Puerto Rico has been my home ever since, and I believe that the move was, in part, an attempt to reverse the assimilated-to-the-U.S. part of me. I have mostly come to terms with the three facets of my identity (Cuban, Puerto Rican, and American), and I am comfortable in each but often in different areas. The music I listen to is mainly Cuban and some Salsa. The language I speak most of the time is now Spanish, although I still prefer to read in English. When it comes to the Olympic games, there are no split loyalties: I always favor the Cuban team. After that, I favor the Puerto Rican team, unless they have the misfortune of playing against the Cubans.

Culture and multiculturalism. Platt's framing of culture as “pointillist” is novel, where the individual narratives—which he likens to the pointillist's dots—taken together comprise a meta-narrative or, as he suggests, many shared stories that constitute culture. The strength of this metaphor is that it serves as a reminder that culture is made up of many stories that are fluid and in constant transformation; however, the pointillist view of culture does not ring true to my experience. Platt writes that “content is less vital than process.” But in my view, content and process are both vitally important and they are both in continual movement. There are so many nuances to the language, the customs, the body of information that enter into an encounter such as those I've narrated above that it is difficult in my mind to privilege one over the other.

I certainly agree with Platt's critique of multicultural competency when reduced to items on a list to be checked off, yet it is important to consider the historical and cultural context. For example, the very term “cultural competence” was developed because of the problems with other terms such as “cultural sensitivity” (Bernal & Domenech Rodríguez, 2012) that did not have a skill component. In his now-classic article, Stanley Sue (1998) notes that moving toward the term “cultural competence” helped shift the dialogue from one focused on ethnic and race relations viewed from the ideological prism of assimilation or pluralism. It was difficult to argue against developing “skills” for working with diverse and multicultural communities.

Sue (1998) writes of being "in search of cultural competence." One is always in search of cultural competence, and it is always a process because the content is always changing. Being in search of something presupposes a process, but one that is comprised of both content and skills. Unfortunately, as Platt correctly points out, many have distorted cultural competence and reduced it to a bullet list. In sharp contrast to the bullet list approach, Sue (1998) proposed the following key elements of cultural competence: (1) scientific-mindedness, (2) dynamic sizing, and (3) culture-specific elements including knowledge and skills. Note that the first component suggests a hypothesis-testing approach to what is going on with the client and whether or not culture and language are key elements to consider; here we have a process of hypothesis-testing. The second component, dynamic sizing, entails a process by which the therapist is constantly evaluating when to generalize in a flexible and appropriate way and when not to do so. Again, here we have a process of checking against stereotypes. As Sue writes: "the ability to dynamically size—to appropriately categorize experience—is important" (p. 446). The third component is expertise or skills that are culturally specific. That means knowledge of a cultural content that is constantly changing and skills in working with the culturally and linguistically diverse.

Platt's critique is directed at some of the inadequate implementations of cultural competence. Often in the rush to fulfill a policy requirement of a training program or a continuing education course, shortcuts are taken; the risk here is offering easy solutions and fast training. As cultural competence and multiculturalism have become more important given the increased diversity in the population (Bernal & Domenech Rodríguez, 2012), the implementation of culturally competent standards often falls short. But let us not throw out the baby with the bath water. We may need to re-double the efforts to develop well-informed procedures for the implementation and teaching of cultural competence.

Conclusion. Upon completing Platt's reflection on privilege, humanity, and liberation, I was struck by the courage, honesty, and eloquence of his narrative. I share many of his concerns about U.S. multiculturalism and how it seems to fall short on international issues. For example, the Western-based view of multiculturalism, when focused on U.S. views of race and ethnicity, too often excludes the histories of colonialism, domination, conquest, and class differences. I sometimes wonder whether the importation of U.S.-based multiculturalism by Latin American countries in the guise of "liberation" may serve to instill a new form of domination. We have both been influenced by some of the same writers in the field, including Ignacio Martín-Baró and Paulo Freire. Platt's statement that "dichotomizing people dehumanizes them by ignoring the both/and nature" of our humanity is on target. I recall a heated conversation years ago over Cuban politics with an uncle, who labeled me a "rabanito" (little radish). This insult threw me for a loop, and in the heat of the moment I didn't get it. He was saying that I was red on the outside but white inside. In other words I had pinko-leftist arguments but my core was bourgeois. Clearly my uncle was calling me on my privilege. For a while, I lived an ascetic lifestyle, eschewing everything that seemed bourgeois. At one point, with a little help from my friends, I came to accept different parts of myself, even the facets that I had labeled as bourgeois.

For the past 30 years, I've been involved in a seemingly never-ending project on the history of my family. I've been able to trace my genealogy on both maternal and paternal branches to the late 1700s. I've learned a great deal about our history of love, work, oppression, migrations, and struggles with political movements at different points in history and its impact on my family. I was fortunate to inherit the very detailed diary of my maternal great grandfather, and

I have been humbled, empowered, and in a sense liberated by the newfound understanding of my history. My best advice in understanding multicultural competence is to begin by studying your own history. Examine your contexts, draw your family tree, interview long-lost family members, and figure out what was happening in your country and in the world at the time. This process has been fundamental to an understanding of my own sense of privilege and humanity.

Recommended Resources

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Discussion Questions

1. What would you do if you became aware that you had been given an extra \$5,000 beyond what you had earned in your paycheck? Do you respond similarly if instead of \$5,000 it is a different form of privilege (i.e., race, gender, nationality, skin tone, class, etc.)?
2. What do you see as the differences between guilt and accountability?
3. How do you think your nationality influences your view of the world and of culture? How might your answers influence your clinical work?
4. When does thinking critically about the topic of nationality cross the line into being unpatriotic?
5. How accurate do you think you are at recognizing your economic class and how does your economic class influence your clinical work?



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