

What Shall I Teach My Blond, Blue-Eyed Son? Thoughts on Love, Interbeing, and Accountability

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Let parents, then, bequeath to their children not a heap of riches, but the spirit of reverence. ... The best way of training the young is to train yourself at the same time; not to admonish them, but to be always carrying out your own admonitions in practice.

Plato

Introduction

This past Saturday I was invited to the first of what will now likely be frequent experiences: a child's birthday party here in Mexico City. My 3-month-old son and I were the only non-Mexicans and immediately upon our arrival he was encircled. Without exception, every one of the parents there commented about his beautiful blue eyes. Earlier this year, the author Toni Morrison passed away. I have been listening to people share how her novel *The Bluest Eye* was profoundly influential for them. In the novel, Morrison paints a scene of her character Pecola Breedlove, and writes, "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed" (p. 46). Morrison's novel gave voice to many people who have experienced marginalization linked to the ubiquitous racism in our societies, both subtle and overt, which also includes the privileging of

certain racial characteristics over others. I want nothing more than for my son to feel loved, but at the party my stomach also sank a little as I looked around the room and observed the adorable darker-eyed children listening. Were these children unconsciously absorbing a destructive and soul-crushing message similar to the one experienced by Morrison's character Pecola? My thoughts then returned to an ongoing theme of privilege in my own life and how I was now seeing that re-created with my son. What are the implications for those on the receiving end of repeated incidences of society privileging them? I believe it has the possibility of creating a different kind of wound to one's humanity and that it can result in a separateness from so many others on the planet.

I am listening to the sound of my son breathing. He lies asleep in his crib next to me while I revisit the ideas I wrote for this chapter in 2014. That seems a lifetime ago. As a first-time father at 50, I must confess that all my thoughts are currently dominated by this new responsibility. I cannot seem to help myself from filtering everything through this new lens of fatherhood. Though fatherhood is new for me, babies have been a theme in my life for a long time. In the first addition of the book, my chapter was entitled "Stepping Over a Baby's Head: Thoughts on Privilege, Humanity, and Liberation." I wrote about noticing that each time I climbed the stairs to the metro in Mexico City, I was literally stepping over a baby's head. The child's mother was an indigenous woman selling candy and cigarettes, tucking her sleeping child behind her as she worked. In that version of this chapter, I discussed the implications of the differences in my life and that baby in terms of where we were born, our cultures, economics, class, skin tone, access to resources, educational opportunities, nutrition, nationality, and so forth. Although I was talking about a literal baby, reviewers for this updated book were concerned that the title of my chapter might trigger people because of the problematic history of infantilizing indigenous peoples. Honestly, my first reaction was to roll my eyes and dismiss the feedback as being typical of academics from the United States. I have grown a bit weary of the game of one-upmanship and virtue signaling that often replaces actual dialogue. I decided to check my dismissiveness and try educating myself more about the ways that the infantilization of indigenous people has caused harm throughout history. I found many profound examples. This is the process I hope to teach my son. When confronted with a view that causes you to feel reactive, maybe just sit with it for a while and try to learn why another person sees and experiences things differently.

When I first drafted this chapter, the intention was to explore the factors that have influenced my views as a white male educator. While that remains the focus, I am experiencing an extra air of gravitas in my role as an educator as I realize I will be the primary teacher of my blonde and blue-eyed son. As I look to the future, the ugliness in the world feels even more flagrant after 5 years. In the United States, nationalism, racism, sexism, and toxic tribalism seem constantly sanctioned and

normalized, and are often even touted as perverse shadow forms of patriotism or religious morality. And, as throughout much of the planet's history, the ever-increasing divide is linked to race, gender, social class, nationality, sexual orientation, and other contextual factors. There are also so many examples of people confusing domineering and dehumanizing behaviors as somehow representing strength. I have many days where I struggle to have faith that things will get better.

When I switch from Fox News to CNN and see the increasing extremism, I become more convinced that the answers for these wounds will not come from the United States. I believe the position of power that the United States has within the global system too often creates arrogance and thus blind spots. I find that these patterns trickle down into almost all aspects of U.S. culture, even within multicultural education. I believe we should be more cautious about exporting U.S. solutions to social problems abroad and be more cautious about assuming we have the answers. For example, drawing on my experience as a therapist, I have not seen the practice of one-upmanship and shaming as being an effective pedagogy or technique for creating meaningful transformation in a person. Perhaps I am wrong about the contribution the United States can make. The Turkish-Persian poet Rumi suggested that "the wound is the place where the light enters you," and maybe the very wounded culture of the United States may surprise me. For now though, I look elsewhere for answers for how to be part of creating a better world and for how to best raise my son.

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. My mom unfortunately 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 the path both my personal and professional journey has taken.

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 additional 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. My parents adopted my sister Maura in Colombia, along with her two older brothers, Carlos and Edison. Soon after, my parents adopted my sister Rosi from Brazil and lastly my brother Miguel from El Salvador. 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 non-U.S. countries 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, witnessing and experiencing 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 United States 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 often faced. Adults shouting at them, even though they were children, using racist slurs. Teachers finding them threatening for doing things they did not take note of when done by white students. Being eroticized for being "exotic." Being pulled over by police at seemingly higher rates. I remember one time I went grocery shopping with my mom and three of my adopted siblings. 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 make me enraged. 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. I unconsciously learned that my skin is 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, acknowledging my privilege was a bitter pill to swallow. It was also hard to recognize the role I can play in maintaining oppressive societal structures.

My international family created a somewhat unique microcosm for me as a child. One particularly memorable example is the day some of my siblings began taking antiparasite medication and large parasites began coming out of their every orifice. It was like a horror film. 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 world view. 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 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 get to have the luxury of retaining too much innocence if it leads to a blindness of certain clinical realities. So, 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.

Over the past 15 years, the majority of my work has been focused on exposing students in mental health training programs to non-U.S. perspectives of healing and change. A significant aspect of these efforts has been to have them immerse in the realities of other national contexts. I feel less permission to do that lately. Universities in the United States are increasingly primarily simply businesses where students are commodities and customers to be pleased. Predictably, businesses do not want their customers to ever feel uncomfortable. Cold showers and limited Wi-Fi, not to mention dirt floors, political unrest, and visiting places listed on U.S. government travel advisories, are often too uncomfortable. Ogden (2008) describes influence that this consumerism mentality has on students, stating that "not surprisingly, a distinct type of education abroad student appears to be emerging within this dynamic environment. This profile, the colonial student, typifies the U.S. university student who really wants to be abroad and take full advantage of all the benefits studying abroad offers, but is not necessarily open to experiencing the less desirable side of being there" (p. 37). Sadly, if a study-abroad program is linked to a U.S. university, too often it is similar to the stops made by a cruise line. Students can have a safe, fun adventure and feel they have visited another country while remaining unaware of the true realities of the community.

Both/And and My Evolving Identity

At Thanksgiving 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 immigrant families and U.S. citizens, lesbian couples, an Islamic student, people with advanced degrees, people who had not finished high school, and members from socioeconomic statuses ranging 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 then my mom shared 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 responded, and that was when she called me a liberal. And the meaning behind the label was clear; I had crossed a line. I had been arrogant. It was meant to take me down a notch. I defended myself, saying, "But I only said three words!" My brother asked, "But what three words?" At that point I started to consider my part in the interaction. I had said "What? By dying?" At first, I was kind of proud of my verbal zinger. Yet in discussions of important topics where two human hearts and values are involved, is my goal to 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 blocks understanding. The parts of her identity that she might have felt being disrespected—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 that 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 others parts of a person that might exist. Doing so in this instance stopped me from actually understanding anything about her views. As occurs, 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).

I would like to report that my family and I have evolved beyond dichotomizing each other in dehumanizing ways that ignores the both/and nature of each of us. It has only gotten worse in the currently divisive political context. In the recent years, I have come to be seen as a full-fledged, raging liberal while my family has embraced the current views of the conservative party in the United States. We often continue to struggle seeing the complexities in each other's views, and those differences get minimized to being either liberal or conservative. On my side, I need to try and slow the interactions down and remember that every social justice-minded thought that flashes through my head is likely at least partly connected to the modeling of my compassionate family. Whatever box I could place them in, there is so much more to the story. Even though I am conscious of it occurring, I see the same divisions that are happening at the national level being re-created within our family. In general, I think we all need to work on having more complicated stories of one another.

On a trip to the United 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 for me how rare it is that people holding opposing or differing views ever engage in an 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 repent of 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 they feel any anxiety; the person who quickly shows their 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 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 type casting. The scenes often include lots of posturing, plenty of condescending, anger (demonstrated verbally and silently), and a sort of fevered excitement to catch someone in the wrong. I find fewer examples of love, assuming the best in people, and efforts to identify common ground and values.

If the goal is to create transformation in a person and peace between groups, I believe 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 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 and redundant, I do not think the United States offers the best model of diversity dialogues based on love. If I were to predict, I would suspect Latin America might be where such examples are to be found. Humility is not seen as a weakness in Latin America in the same way it is in the United States.

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 shapes my world view. In the shift from student to faculty member, the need for learning continued as I moved into the role of power that position gives me. Similarly, despite the focus on multiculturalism in my education and beginning career, my move from the United States 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 arriving.

My Professional Path

My professional role for 14 years was as a program director of a counseling psychology program based in Mexico City. In addition to my primary job, I also

direct (or co-direct) educational immersion programs in places such as Mexico, 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. It is also a 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 with impoverished and underserved communities. As part of this work, I tend to 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, 2013). 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 socioeconomic status are the two areas I particularly tend to focus on in my work.

Given the nature of my work, there is often an expectation for me to have it all figured out. I have not come close to that yet. As I have been writing this chapter, I have told a few friends that I am writing the chapter 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 real consequences professionally, my own ethics are 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. Work is a Platt family value. 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 have 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, 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 again?”

Despite my critiques, 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. Discouragingly, I see the humanity being sucked out of education as it becomes the sterilized, standardized, and mechanical form that U.S. education promotes (U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, 2007).

A Pointillist Conceptualization of Culture

My emerging view of what culture is could be called a pointillist conceptualization of culture (Platt, 2014). Pointillism is a style of painting developed by artists such as Seurat 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 typically perceives them as a solid form. To me, these dots are similar to stories. This is consistent with the sociological theories of social constructionism that suggest culture is a flexible network of knowledge spheres that include different categories and theories (Chiu et al., 2000; Matsumoto et al., 2008; Platt, 2012). In this sense, culture is when a group of people embraces many shared stories. 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 still 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 an unrelated type of painting style, the work of Diego Rivera, a major player in the Mexican muralism art movement. I was visiting the Palacio Nacional, a historic building that faces the Zocalo in the center of Mexico City. 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 2000 years of Mexico’s history. 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 roles, business practices, humor, and spiritual views are other examples. Based on a pointillist perspective of culture, I don't think it would be possible to memorize every point of information. I do think that the more points of knowledge we can understand, the easier it will be for us to connect with different cultures. The content, though, is less vital than the process one engages in. Therefore, I think multicultural education should spend less time constructing simplistic lists 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 dialogues 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. 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. Multicultural competency is not a destination or something to be checked off.

I do not believe in bulleted lists. Unfortunately for me, the bulleted list is, to a large extent, celebrated and rewarded in U.S. culture and in academia for its attempt to reduce complex information into easily digested and distributable forms. Sometimes I wish I believed in the value of the bulleted list. 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).

Too often the United States' obsession with lists is also reflected in attempts at multicultural education. 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 world view to create required lists to which all must adhere.

Psychology students in the United States are under great pressure to ingest and regurgitate pre-packaged knowledge in order to graduate, pass licensing exams and ultimately be reimbursed. University faculty members are also under pressure to transfer the standard curriculum in increasingly standardized ways. The path to promotions and tenure is paved with detailed rubrics; standardization and the ability to ignore that Bloom's taxonomy might not represent 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 go on to 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 attempt to do both: 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, yet meaningful volunteer work.

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 et al., 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 & Burszstajn, 2010; Cosgrove et al., 2009). Given that curriculums are driven by financial concerns, it financially makes sense that these focus on the majority. Logically therefore, 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, and Gonzalez (2008) argue that "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, 2000). To be really prepared to serve all populations, multicultural educators and clinicians might do well to remember the counsel of Aristotle (995) who observed that “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” (cited by Barnes, 1984, p. 1572). 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. A major 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. My first language was English and now a significant part of my life involves speaking Spanish. 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. 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 words *bourgeoisie* or the *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 *bourgeoisie*. 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—or in other words, my experience of myself is impacted by who I am with and in what context. For example, being from the United States 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 United States and lead 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 still 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 with the complexity in others. Given this view, 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. I believe it is valuable to see how I benefit from the way society is currently constructed. I am motivated to identify the ways I am privileged because I think it is tied to my own humanity and relationships. For me, oppression is about the diminishing of one's humanity. I am also no angel and there are surely times that I have more directly harmed others. I hope to be a good person though, and I want opportunities to heal the wounds that affect my humanity. 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 is the willingness to critique the status quo and the importance of people reconnecting with their humanity. In terms of multicultural education, both of these facets seem vital for an educator to understand. Shockingly, 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 but also a sense of inclusion. For example, her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* challenged me to see connections between 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 being a real 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. Stumbling into the role of an educator, her writing gave me permission to confess that I had not risen above humanity just because some letters were now placed behind my name. Moreover, she suggested that retaining my 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 the Paulo Freire have been a main source of destroying 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, 2007, 1998; Gadotti, 1994; McLaren, 2000; Platt, & Natrajan-Tyagi, 2014). He proposed critical pedagogy as an alternative to traditional education. The cornerstone of this approach is the posing of problems and engaging in dialogues. Despite the opportunity to live outside the United States, I was still connected to a U.S. university and bound to many U.S.-influenced bulleted lists. Freire's writing was helpful in making me aware of this fact and gave me permission to explore alternative perspectives. As a critical educator, I now consider official knowledge points to be Freirean prompts around which critical beginning 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. In case you have not been there, I will let you in on a secret: hippies still exist. It was a great place to land as a freshly indoctrinated graduate. 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 and question and create. One might trivialize the hippy generation and movement, but consider the powerful social changes that occurred during this period. The influential psychologist and archetypical hippy 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 60s that were about multicultural issues around gender, race, and culture. My phenotype does not allow me to look like a hippy. Yet as I began my career and saw the limitation of most theories when working with people outside the dominant culture, the hippy idea of questioning reality resonated with me. The Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1967), who was also fascinated with the hippy movement, stated and warned that “creative people who can't help but explore other mental territories are at greater risk, just as someone who climbs a mountain is more at risk than someone who just walks along a village lane” (p. 52). In my experience in academia, a desire to be part of

multicultural education is clearly more mountain than village lane. Still, the times they are a changing.

At this point of my professional development, immersed in books like *On the Road* and *Open Veins of Latin America*, I happened to do 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 the first exposure I had 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 United States, struggled to apply it in his work in war-torn El Salvador. His primary critique was how United States approaches tended to be designed for the wealthy elite and not founded on the aim to serve the poor (Hollander, 1997). He also noted how most U.S. models focused on individual pathology rather than truly 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 and a recognition that truth is co-created, not distributed by those from above, and in which mental health workers align themselves in solidarity with the oppressed and are also transformed and humanized in research and practice (Comas-Díaz et al., 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. He writes, "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. 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 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 like there are thought-police who freak out if we 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 they do), 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 have recognized 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 ways. I came across a quote 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. I recall when an opportunity for a dialogue about the complexities of conceptualizations of diversity arrived 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 emailed 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 pias al gato" (You look for five legs on a cat or you look for what is not there). Of the U.S. representatives on campus, 100% believed the image is racist. It paralleled what happened a few years ago when the Mexican comic book character *Memín Pinguín* was put on a postage stamp and 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 mia," which translates into English 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 different?

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. Astoundingly, there was again a significant divide. One hundred percent of the faculty born in the United States publicly reacted and discussed the nuances of Mexican racism. Privately though, international faculty responded and suggested that the image is not innately racist and might even be considered loving. Here is my quandary. I can see the offensiveness through my

U.S.-formed lenses. Yet I worry about U.S. arrogance, including U.S. centrism found in U.S. multiculturalism.

Versions of this event occur often, and the message is that Mexico is backwards. For example, people from the United States 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 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 really addressed nor did any actual understanding of the other viewpoint occur for either side. Considering my role in it, I realize I still have much to learn. It is good to recognize the divides and differences in perspectives, yet I need to do more than just point them out. I think I am in good company. There is a growing awareness that diversity is going to need to include international perspectives. If I am proactive, my hope would be to be part of creating structures in education that will allow this to happen.

My desire is that diversity dialogues in the United States increase in their consciousness about how U.S. nationality influences both how and which topics are discussed. Arrogance and one-upmanship are not effective strategies for creating deep change. I find these to be common in U.S. diversity dialogues and I wish I saw more examples in the United States of cultural humility in action. I do not think that humility is what gets rewarded there. I also wish that, even when a particular topic of diversity is valid and valuable, that there could be some effort to think about how concepts might be reflective of the U.S. experience and therefore may be less relevant elsewhere. In rural Peru, I do not think manspreading is a primary concern. In Chad, where chronic food insecurities exist, they are not particularly focused on the psychic pain of fat shaming. In El Salvador and Cambodia, with their significant traumatic histories, they are rarely discussing the need for trigger warnings. Yet, if you attend a U.S. conference or witness a U.S. diversity dialogue, these are common themes. Perhaps these topics are safe spaces for people in the United States while topics like our complicity about the bombs we have dropped on babies this year are ignored. Still, I want to work on changing my tendency to reject any idea I think of as being too United States and I recognize I am wrestling with falling into an either/or mentality.

Concluding Thoughts

In the whirlwind of changes, I am currently experiencing, I know that I am only beginning to formulate my ideas regarding what and how to teach my son. I will likely teach him most of the concepts in vogue in diversity dialogues in the United

States, but I will probably also teach him that the United States does not have the only voice that matters and that there is a multiplicity of valid ways one can think. In regard to topics like privilege and oppression, I probably will draw more on my clinical experience of what helps a person not be oppressive. There are three initial concepts that I have identified: (a) he is worthy of love, (b) the concept of interbeing, and (c) the difference between shame and accountability.

You Are Worthy of Love

Parenting expert Pam Leo (2011) has argued that “you can’t teach children to behave better by making them feel worse” (p. 98). If that is true for children, is it possible that this is also true for adults? During the 25 years I have been providing therapy, a theme I have witnessed among those who perpetrate oppressive acts is that they often carry varying degrees of shame and self-loathing. While I understand the desire to punish or shame people engaging in oppressive acts, I think the unintended consequence is it can contribute to a recursive pattern that maintains the status quo. I suspect it accomplishes what coercion often does—change behavior temporarily with doing little toward creating transformation and an evolution to a higher level of consciousness. In thinking of my son, I believe the primary way I can raise a decent person, who will be good to his fellow humans, is to instill within him the knowledge that he is worthy of love. My theory is that many people engaging in oppressive acts are, at some core level, wounded. The emptiness that results from them not feeling loveable leads them to justify being careless with the humanity of others. Many people also try to distract from their own emptiness through materialism, resulting in an obsession with accumulating things and thus an anxious competitive relationship with others. This can be seen at all levels of society and is clearly evident in political leaders, corporation heads, and sometimes among university administrators who limit their focus to the university’s economic gains over their basic moral duty as humans. I believe feeling unlovable is linked to a range of oppressive behaviors from overtly abusive acts to withholding basic kindness in one’s interactions. Versions of this are found in narcissism, bullying, one-upmanship, and all forms of trying to make others feel small. My job is to help my son avoid these cheap substitutes for genuine self-love.

Interbeing

I appreciate the way that Thích Nhất Hạnh discusses the concept of interbeing, which is the interexistence of all things (1987). It is about being in touch with the realities of the world, including injustices, and the realization that we are all interconnected. If our actions or inactions contribute to the pain of another, we

are also wounded by our acts. If we live in a way that lessens suffering, we are also healed. A less frequently referenced idea of Paulo Freire (2007) is that “as the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized” (p. 38). I hope to teach my son that when we harm nature, animals, and other humans, we are literally doing harm to ourselves.

Engaging in oppressive acts toward other humans is not that different from polluting the world’s water; the result is that we are poisoning ourselves. Given that the flipside of oppression is often tied to privilege, I would also want my son to realize the ways his own humanity is wounded if he acts to maintain structures of social inequality. Have you ever seen a genuinely happy white supremacist or homophobe? I hope to teach him to respect himself more than that and to seek to be in solidarity with those marginalized by society. I want him to realize that he is going to make mistakes in his interactions around race, class, sexual orientation, et cetera. and that he can learn from those experiences and improve. I hope to teach him that this cannot come from a white savior mentality, with acts of false generosity, but rather from the systemic view that our lives are linked. As the indigenous Australian activist Lilla Watson has explained, “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Elliott & Shatarra, 2018, p. 8). This idea fits with Alfred Adler’s concept of social interest, which is that a person’s psychological health is linked to their “feeling of community, an orientation to live cooperatively with others, and a lifestyle that values the common good above one’s own interests and desires” (Guzick et al., 2004; p. 362). I do not actually agree with the dichotomous view part of valuing of other’s lives above one’s own, rather I believe our lives and well-being are integrally linked.

It is midnight and I am in Malinalco, a couple of hours outside of Mexico City. I have brought another group of therapists visiting from the United States to participate in a *temazcal*. The curandero assisting us asked the group to introduce themselves and most responded by telling him which state in the United States they lived in. After the group responded, one of the participants asked where he was from. He responded by saying, “Earth.” That seemed profound to me. While acknowledging and being accountable for the differences in our experiences of privilege and oppression, what if at our cores we viewed ourselves as one? This feels like a very different understanding of reality to me than the more common either/or, us/them, nonsystemic, and nonholistic view that that dominates discourses in our society.

Accountability Versus Shame

It would be an error to talk about how our lives and destinies are linked if that meant we could not also talk about our differences. Those ideas are not opposites. Early

in our conversation that night, the shaman looked directly at me and observed, "Your ancestors came here and took nearly everything and did not even say thank you." So much of the knowledge and dialogue that followed would have been lost if I could not hear and accept that truth. Our histories, individually and those of our ancestors, differ. Those differences have profound meaning and are linked to how different our present experiences can be. Healing for those who benefit from privilege is tied to an ability to see and be accountable about those differences. As I look at my little baby and see his incredible potential, my goal remains to help him reach his full capacities as a human. It will be a failure, though, if I cannot figure out how to support his growth in a way that is not at the cost of the humanity of others.

I started my career studying the topic of clinical competency. Maybe some of those ideas apply here. One of the fundamental ways people develop increasing competency is through receiving and incorporating feedback (Platt, 2003; Miller et al., 2010). Our evolution in almost any area of life is dependent on feedback. The reverse is also true. When we successfully shut down sources of feedback, because of anxiety and defensiveness, we stunt our own growth. Feedback offers us a mirror, revealing both the good and the ugly, and that creates a choice. The decision then becomes whether to improve, evolve, and grow or to try to break the mirror and block feedback. I think this is a phenomenon that happens for many of us in privileged positions when confronted. For example, Freire (2007) observed that "discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed" (p. 31). I believe the difference is related to whether we become stuck in shame versus moving forward toward accountability.

I am mindful that there is sometimes a link between shame and the development of a totalizing, single story about one's identity. Therefore, I do want to be careful about creating any single stories about my son, including about the errors he will make along the way. Less complex labels can have the unintended consequence of trapping people in their current state. There is a line from the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* that says, "If someone's ungrateful and you tell him he's ungrateful, okay, you've called him a name. You haven't solved anything" (Pirsig, 1974 p. 52). You could substitute any term for ungrateful, including the terms we throw around in a frenzy when we miss each other in a dialogue about difference. If we could maybe slow things down and engage in more profound ways, it could be the beginning of a more meaningful and transformative conversation. For my son, I guess I would hope that he would know that we are all unfinished and flawed. When he hears the labels others give him, I hope he will use it as an opportunity for growth and self-reflection.

I would rather my son be in an ever-evolving state of awakening rather than to ever consider himself to be “woke.” I am not 100% sure how to teach that yet, but I suspect it will involve ongoing exposure to different communities, permission to make mistakes, and supporting him in trying to always do better. I do not want him to ever feel shame for how the world will react to him because genetics gave him blonde hair and blue eyes, but I also hope he might be able to nonreactively engage about the social implications of such things. I would want him to be able to distinguish between shame and accountability. Shame, in my view, is a counterfeit version of accountability and serves no one. Accountability results in growth, and though it is often painful, it can also be very empowering. In regard to privilege or oppressive acts, accountability involves recognizing inequalities and making efforts to change the structures that maintain them. I hope to help my son develop a solid-enough sense of self to be able to soothe his own anxiety sufficiently to hear and incorporate feedback.

Ideas for Students and Faculty

The philosopher Bob Marley (1980) encourages us to “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery” and suggests that “none but ourselves can free our minds.” Bias and racism and other mental pollution are thick in the air. It does not mean you are a bad person for inhaling. Yet for yourself and for those with whom you will work, you have an ethical duty 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. I think sometimes we totalize these parts and think acknowledging a bias means we have no good qualities. This 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 actually have a lot of power to socialize faculty, clients, and others to not give them the feedback needed. Faculty also can shutdown feedback and have the addition of power to do so. 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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Commentary

Reflections on Privilege, Humanity, and Liberation

Guillermo Bernal, PhD

I began reading Platt's chapter on my way to a conference. I was late on my commentary and I was set on getting this task done. I wanted to turn in the commentary quickly and be done with this, yet another item on my list of writing projects. I was traveling from San Juan, Puerto Rico, for a meeting in Washington, DC. Getting through security is often a hassle, but I was confident in my own personal efficiency, speed, and, of course, privilege as a frequent flyer and I figured I would get past security relatively quickly. But at the security point there was a group of Puerto Rican travelers just behind me that 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 big deal 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 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 30s 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. 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. I experienced an uneasy, almost guilt-laden sense of appreciation that I was whole and healthy. What would my life be like if I were in his shoes? He had no legs, never mind feet on which to wear shoes!

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. My attention was so focused that I nearly missed the priority-boarding announcement. I was able to get in before the hoard of fellow travelers and well before the folks with the chickens-in-boxes. As I entered the plane, I again saw the young man and his companion seated in the bulkhead area just 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 is turbulence? What if there is an emergency? He was seated close to an exit! And then, how was he going to get to the bathroom? Who was going to help him? About an hour and a half later, my question was answered. He unstrapped himself from the seat, lifted his torso to the floor, and simply hand-walked to the bathroom. A little later, he opened the bathroom door, walked again with his hands, lifted himself back onto his chair, and put his seatbelt back on. I was in awe. He seemed to do this in such a matter-of-fact way, with such ease and dignity. I felt pride and respect. 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? Who cares? Folks travel with dogs and cats, why not chickens? Don't I value diversity? Here it was hitting me in the face. Perhaps I just did not want to be bothered and wanted no obstacles along the way on my 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 with part of his body gone, initially I felt sorrow and pity, mixed with shame for feeling that way. On the plane, I just felt pride for this man. 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. There was a shift within me from viewing him as an "object" of curiosity to empathizing with aspects of his subjectivity or humanity to which I could relate. I somehow shifted my perspective. 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 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 (despite the many struggles), coupled with the exposure to diversity of communities, in part, as a result of the immigration experience, was transformative.

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 quote above, Marín-Baró (1998, p. 314) was primarily addressing a Latin American audience. He emphasized how psychology could serve the interests of the majority of the 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 assassination 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 et al., 2009), both of which are very similar to part 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 quote in 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.

My translation of Marín-Baró's (1998) 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 our problems (or issues) of our situations but rather the issues (or problems) that reclaim or choose their own theorizing. 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 the notion 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? Do I want to get into the story of my life journey? 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 United States. For many years I bought 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. In the early 1960s, my family moved to the United States. We lived briefly in Miami, Florida. Next, 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. Later I moved to Amherst, Massachusetts, for my PhD 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 in the Department of Psychology at the University of Puerto Rico. So 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 United States, everything was to change. Upon our arrival in Miami, I was struck by the concept of the large supermarkets. During an outing

to a supermarket, I saw two water fountains. One of them had a label that said "colored." 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 said to me, "No m'ijo [my son], here in the United States, there are water fountains and bathrooms for people of color or Negros 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 numeral seven. Upon entering sixth grade in Miami, the teacher changed my name to William and attempted to get me to pledge allegiance to the U.S. flag. I did not know the words and that was not my flag to honor! Furthermore, I was now supposed to do mathematical division in a different way. But I continued crossing my sevens despite the many 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 there worsened, he joined us. He could not find a job in Miami because of the excess of Cubans, so he accepted relocation to the North with a secure 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. These were rather difficult years, particularly at the beginning. Life was basically survival from day to day. Both my parents were working, as was my older brother, who was 16. My mother, being a very practical woman, assigned household jobs to all of us. 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. So, at about the age of 12 or 13, I started cooking for the family and minding my younger brother and sister (then ages eight and four). We lived in four different places and each one was an improvement over the other. 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. The first student that 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 of kick ass or get your ass kicked! 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 junctures 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. Later, I thought that it was sheer luck. It was probably a combination of both. In many ways, I've been humbled by these experiences that taught me a great deal about my own humanity, my privilege, my sense of self, and the influence of changing contexts.

I learned a number of lessons from my experience of migration and the Cuban Revolution. These experiences had a profound effect on my values, world view, and identity. While on the one hand, there was a clear and tangible loss of privilege; on the other, 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 can change social and material reality is 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. So, 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, 2013). But in my case, 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 part, I assimilated to the United States reasonably well. I speak and write English fluently. My skin is light, but early in college I changed my name back to Guillermo, so that is a giveaway. I am male and well educated, and I 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 learned about their stories and lives. I also developed projects with Cuban psychologists in education, training, and research, which 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 and further to the left of the political spectrum. After being promoted to associate professor, I had a premature mid-life crisis. With the promotion, I demonstrated to myself that I could play ball in the major leagues. 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 PhD program in psychology being developed at the University of Puerto Rico, I inquired, applied, and subsequently was offered a tenure-track position. At the time, the move was a way to radically change contexts and explore the possibility of doing psychology within a Caribbean context. Puerto Rico has been my home ever since. I now believe that the move was, in part, an attempt to reverse the assimilated-to-the-U.S. part of me. I am now at a place where I have pretty much come to terms with the three facets of my identity (Cuban, Puerto Rican, and American). Yet, the sense of nationalism is ever present in terms of the music I listen to (mainly Cuban, some Salsa). The language I speak most of the time is now Spanish, although to this day I still prefer to read in English. Yet, when it comes to sports, such as the Olympic games, there are no split loyalties. I always favor the Cuban team. Secondly, I favor the Puerto Rican team, unless they have the misfortune of playing against the Cubans.

Culture and Multiculturalism

My experiences with culture and multiculturalism bring me to a somewhat different view of culture. Platt's framing of culture as "pointillist" is novel. The metaphor is of culture or cultures as dots, points, or even pixels that form a larger image. From a distance, the group of dots take form. Platt's notion is that these dots are like narratives that, taken as a whole, 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 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." 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. In fact, here Platt comes dangerously close to falling into a false dichotomy that he argues against. I believe that both content and process are indeed vital, and I resonate more with the notion of culture as a moving and often messy target.

I certainly agree with Platt's critique of multicultural competency when reduced to items on a list to be checked off. Yet, as with both our own journeys, 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. It is always a process because the content is always changing. Being in search of something presupposes a process, but one that comprises 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: (a) scientific-mindedness, (b) dynamic sizing, and (c) culture-specific elements including knowledge and skills. Note that the first component suggests a hypothesis-testing approach to what is going on with the patient and whether 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. This 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, short cuts are taken; the risk here is offering easy solutions and fast training. As cultural competence and multiculturalism have ascended 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 redouble the efforts to denounce misuse in the implementation of cultural competence and support development of well-informed procedures for its implementation and teaching.

Conclusion

Upon completing Platt's reflection on privilege, humanity, and liberation, I was struck by the courage, honesty, and eloquence of his narrative. I wondered if I could do the same. 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, the likes of 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 a dear uncle of mine. He labeled me a "rabanito" (little radish). This insult threw me for a loop; in the heat of the moment, I didn't get it. He spelled it out for me. 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. I eschewed everything that seemed high middle/upper class or 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 or so, 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 about 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 time and its impact on my family. I was fortunate to inherit the very detailed diary of my maternal great-grandfather, which was like rereading Garcia Marquez's epic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I have been humbled, empowered, and in a sense liberated by the new found 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, follow up on leads, 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 in my search for an understanding of my own sense of privilege, humanity, and liberation.

Recommended Resources

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What should children of privilege be taught?
 2. 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 (e.g., race, gender, nationality, skin tone, class)?
 3. What do you see as the differences between shame and accountability?
 4. How do you think your nationality influences your view of the world and of culture?
 5. When does thinking critically about the topic of nationality cross the line into being unpatriotic?
 6. How might your answers to these questions influence what you do or do not do in your clinical work?
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