Work in Progress

Building Connection Through Diversity

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   Work in Progress is a publication series based on the work of the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College, and it includes papers presented in the Center's Colloquium Series. *Work in Progress* reflects the Center's commitment to sharing information with others who are interested in fostering psychological well-being, preventing emotional problems, and providing appropriate services to persons who suffer from psychological distress. The publication also reflects the Center's belief that it is important to exchange ideas while they are being developed. Many of the papers, therefore, are intended to stimulate discussion and dialogue, while others represent finished research reports.

   For those papers which were part of the Colloquium Series, each document includes the substantive material presented by the lecturer, information about the speaker, and, where appropriate, a summary of the subsequent discussion session.

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Abstract

Each presenter offers a personal statement outlining her own particular cultural, ethnic, and racial background and social location. We then explore how these identifications impact our participation in making and maintaining connections across our differences.

Three questions will be addressed:
1. What interferes with the development of cross-cultural connections?
2. What is needed for the establishment of such connections?
3. What is our vision of the future in regard to diversity and multiculturalism?

The Stone Center relational model of connections and disconnections is used as a theoretical framework for this discussion.

Cynthia Garcia Coll

During the last six months, Robin Cook-Nobles, Jan Surrey, and I have addressed, in a very personal way, the issues that arise from trying to build connections through diversity. Starting with the microcosm of the evolving relationships among us, we took it upon ourselves to further explore how we could establish a deeper understanding of the ways in which our diverse backgrounds have shaped our world-views, our attitudes toward ourselves and others, our needs, and our ways of connecting. We have done this as women coming from three very different backgrounds, myself from a colonial, culturally and racially mixed Caribbean island society (Puerto Rico), Robin from the racially segregated South just before the civil rights movement, and Jan from a White, Jewish, middle-class community.

The process has allowed us to acknowledge our similarities as much as our differences, and it has resulted in a deeper connection among the three. Throughout our regular meetings, we have experienced miscommunications and passionate arguments; we have also experienced sadness and exhaustion from sharing very personal, painful experiences. We have become aware of our own misconceptions and prejudices about each other's experiences and have found some commonalities in areas that were quite unexpected. It has been hard work. Going from the personal to the political, the process has also evidenced very clearly to me that the notion that when women acknowledge their differences, the solidarity among them will be lost is a misconception. Actually, I am more convinced now that this process is necessary if a true new world order is to be established and feminism is to become the voice for many voices that feel excluded. If I can speak for the three of us, which I hesitantly do, I

would say that the process has not only enhanced our mutual respect and admiration for each other, but also has made us recognize the value and uniqueness of our connection in spite of having some very fundamental differences among us. So . . . what are the challenges? Why is it so hard sometimes to establish connections with persons from different cultures, races, socioeconomic classes, sexual orientations, and ethnicities than our own?

Several Stone Center working papers have addressed these issues. Cannon and Heyward (1992) described the ongoing effort to build a friendship, the struggle of creating and sustaining a mutually empowering relationship between a white and a black woman in spite of society's prevalent racism and other structures of oppression. To quote them: "Can we be different but not alienated? . . . the answer lies in the quality of our relation and whether real dialogue . . . is possible and desired between us and around us, among our sisters, black and white. The problem with white liberalism is that liberal white men and women do not advocate real relation, not mutual relation, but rather a patronizing relation" (p. 4).

In my working paper on cultural diversity last year, I raised some similar questions. To quote:

> . . . if we recognize that these groups experience different cultural values, as well as different access to economic and social resources, and that they are subjected to prejudice, racism, classism, sexism, and segregation, we would expect that their world-views, psychic structures, and developmental outcomes would be profoundly impacted.
>
> Where does this reality leave us? How can we collectively (and I would now add individually) recognize how profound these differences are in spite of some basic similarities? (p. 5).

Finally, in her colloquium this year, Beverly Daniel Tatum examined why disconnections occur in significant relationships between white male and female friends and black women, starting during the adolescent years. Black women describe many instances of subtle to overt expressions of racism from white male and white female friends as well. Tatum (1993) states, ". . . in the case of racism, our culture almost guarantees empathic failures, experiences of disconnection" (p. 2). Actually, in her framework, these disconnections tend to precipitate movement in

the process of racial identity for the black woman.

In these three Stone Center papers, we all agree that there are some inherent challenges when we attempt to establish connections through cultural diversity. In the present paper we will present, individually, our perspectives on these issues— perspectives that emerge from our personal experiences as well as from our convictions of how connections that recognize, accept, and incorporate diversity can be established and are ultimately necessary in a world which is increasingly interdependent. Each of us will address the following questions:

• What gets in the way of establishing growth-enhancing, mutually empathic relationships across races, classes, cultures, and ethnic groups?

• What works? What can be done to overcome these impasses, these obstacles?

• What is our vision for the future, our ideal of a multicultural, diverse, pluralistic society?

Before I take up these questions, I would like to introduce my personal perspective:

1. My perspective is that of a Puerto Rican, middle-class woman who grew up on the island of Puerto Rico, who was granted U.S. citizenship from birth, and who has experienced Puerto Rico's rapidly evolving colonial relationship with the U.S. which includes tremendous economic, political, cultural, and educational upheavals.

2. My perspective is that of a Puerto Rican woman who migrated to the U.S. at the age of 22 to pursue a graduate education, which, among other things, resulted in a major shift in my experience from being part of the majority to becoming a member of a so-called minority group.

3. My experience in the United States has been mixed.

• I have been granted a lot of privileges as a result of the historical oppression of my own ethnic group, like minority fellowships and special criteria for admission to graduate programs;

• I have experienced, along the way, very subtle to very open forms of prejudice and discrimination;

• I have undergone a process of acculturation that has opened possibilities for economic and social mobility, but that has also created losses, especially the severing of very strong ties to my traditional culture.

4. I am the mother of three tricultural children who are:

• American by birth and exposure to the

dominant culture;

- Jewish by their father's tradition and heritage;
- Hispanic by their mother's culture, extended family, and the deliberate creation of a support system that includes their Hispanic nanny and her numerous relatives and friends.

As it is evident, using myself as an example, each of us has a unique perspective that is the product of complex life experiences, past and current. It is hard for me to imagine, even if I strongly identify myself as a Puerto Rican woman, that my perspective can be taken as prototypical. It is hard to believe that any of us will experience the world in the same way. The richness and complexity of all human beings, the acknowledgment, celebration, and incorporation of diversity, also brings about the identification and celebrations of connections.

So, keeping my own perspective in mind, what gets in the way of establishing mutually empathic, growth-enhancing relationships across classes, races, ethnic groups, religions, and/or cultures?

Collective history

I would like to propose that one of the things that impedes the process is our collective histories; by that, I mean the prior and current history of power differentials and conflicts between the groups that the individuals belong to. In my particular case, Puerto Ricans have experienced five hundred years of colonialism, the last hundred under the rule of the United States. Most colonial relationships reflect not only economic oppression and exploitation but also a systematic imposition of cultural and ideological values and a denigration of the existing culture, language, history, values, artistic expression, physical attributes, ways of communicating, relationships, etc. So even if two individuals are interacting and struggling for mutuality, the prior and current historical relationships between the two groups get in the way. This collective history is real, but in most instances it is more a part of the core experience of the oppressed than the oppressor. Among Puerto Ricans, this internal oppression can be overtly expressed with ambivalence, defiance, resistance, passivity, submission, or a combination of all of these reactions.

In addition, the prior history of each group, independent of the other, can get in the way. By that, I mean that even if historically there have not been power differentials among the groups that the individuals are members of, there are certain internalized assumptions that will be generalized to members of other groups. If you have been colonized/oppressed, you might react to another group as an oppressed individual not expecting mutuality and assuming a power differential between the two, even if there has been no prior power differential with the group that you are interacting with now. It is a perceived power differential, which might be real or not, but is as powerful as if it were real. So, as a Puerto Rican, if I perceive you as an authority figure, I might react to you as if you were one even if you do not so consider or perceive yourself.

Personal history

In addition to the collective history, the individual's personal history can also get in the way. This will include each person's prior experiences with other individuals of the same group, or with other individuals from similar groups. Other aspects of life, such as, specific experiences, socialization processes, attitudes learned in early childhood, and the individual's self-concept, may also be obstructions.

Some individuals may be aware of these sources of influences and be willing to work through them, as did Cannon and Heyward (1992). A lot of the personal work among the three of us has been in gaining awareness of each other by sharing views and perspectives on our personal histories and considering their impact on our evolving connection. In other instances, powerful feelings, generated by the awareness and ownership of the collective and personal history, can interfere with the process. Similarly, strong denial or lack of awareness of either the collective or personal history can also get in the way. As a Puerto Rican woman, I have had to come to terms with my ambivalence about my ethnic identity—the shame and pride of my collective history as well as my personal choices. So, keeping in mind my own perspective, what can be done to surmount these impasses, these sources of possible disconnections and even violations?

Working through the impasses

A first step is that we all have to acknowledge and, more importantly, own our collective histories as well as our personal experiences. Acknowledging the collective and personal history can bring about emotional discomfort: guilt for being part of the oppressor group, anger for having been held

responsible for your group's historical actions, and shame for realizing your own contribution as a member of either the dominant or the oppressed group. Because of this, individuals might choose not to venture outside their own ethnic or racial group, or might deny that either the collective or personal history has any relevance to the ongoing relationship. This denial, however, fails to validate the other person's experience and thus contributes to further disconnections.

A second important consideration is that both persons have to be willing to take risks. Both have to be willing to listen, to learn, and to adapt to each other and to realize that there may be some losses involved. The challenge of establishing mutuality through diversity may be similar to that of any other relationship, but exacerbated in a cross-racial, cross-ethnic, or cross-class interaction. To quote Jordan: "In order to empathize one must have a well-differentiated sense of self in addition to an appreciation of and sensitivity to the differentness as well as the sameness of another person" (Jordan, Surrey, and Kaplan, 1991, p. 29). "Growth occurs because, as I stretch to match or understand your experience, something new is acknowledged or grows in me" (Jordan, 1991, p. 89). However, Beverly Tatum's own experience teaching white students about the psychology of racism suggests the inherent difficulties in establishing cross-ethnic mutual relationships (Tatum, 1993). To quote her: "However, if in stretching to understand a Black woman's experience, a White woman learns something new about herself and doesn't like that new thing (e.g., I have White privilege, or racism has affected me in ways I didn't expect), she is tempted to not understand, to keep out the information" (p. 5). Tatum's experience is that this discomfort usually gets in the way.

An ideal society

So what is my idea of an ideal society? In an ideal society, ethnic, socioeconomic, and racial differences would not be equated with deficits. It is clear that our differences, such as experiences and ways of communication, are going to be influenced by these social variables in some very fundamental ways. However, these differences do not imply deficits. In my ideal society, we would try to create opportunities for establishing connections in diversity as early as possible, so children would learn from early on the pains and gains of building connections through diversity, the necessary work, the necessary growth, the richness, the challenges of these experiences. In my ideal society, there would be structures in place so that working through diversity, both at the personal and collective level, would be part of everyday experiences. In my ideal society, the process that my two friends and colleagues and myself have experienced in the last six months would be more the norm than the exception.

Robin Cook-Nobles

I first want to share a little about who I am. I grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina during the times of segregation, when the public water fountains had signs that read, "Colored," and bathrooms at restaurants and filling stations were open only to whites. I lived in an all-Black neighborhood of hard-working, honest families. We were a nuclear family of father, mother, and four children (I am the youngest). We were homeowners, so I guess we would be considered middle class. Most of the families looked like mine. Some held working-class, semi-skilled jobs, some ran small businesses that served solely the Black community, and some were professional. It did not matter what one did, only that one worked and earned an honest living. That alone was respectable, it was enough.

We walked to school and were taught by all Black teachers, some of whom lived in our neighborhoods. They knew us well, had taught our older brothers and sisters, and had gone to school with our parents. We felt safe and secure and lived rather routine, consistent lives. Our Blackness was a nonissue. Our teachers told us we could be anything we desired, even President of the United States, if we tried hard and got a good education. And we were sheltered enough, and naive enough, to believe them.

In retrospect, I think they were over-building up our self-esteem to help us to cope and survive in a cruel, harsh world. Just like a mother may over-clothe her child on a stormy, wintry day, so they over-protected us, hoping that they had put on enough layers of protection to weather the many storms that lay ahead. And there was no warning as to when such storms would occur.

I will share one such story. We were traveling to Charleston, South Carolina to visit my father's relatives. We were so proud of them because they lived on Cook St., which was a short, dead-end street

that we, as children, believed was named after our family because they had lived on that street for as long as we could remember. I recall riding for miles and miles, in what appeared to be the dead of night.

Then, I had to go to the bathroom. So I told my parents, and they began to look for a filling station with a restroom where they could stop, get gas, and take a restroom break. What followed was very interesting and new for me. My parents began to discuss tactics of gaining access to a restroom. My mom and dad disagreed on the tactics. My mom's strategy was to approach a filling station that appeared "hospitable," to ask whether we could use the bathroom, and if the answer was yes to buy gas. My father had a different strategy. He wanted to go up to any filling station, be pleasant to the owner, buy gas, and then ask whether we could use the restroom. This resulted in an argument. I heard my mother saying, "Roy, why do you choose this filling station with all those crackers hanging around?" I did not know what in the world my mother was talking about. I looked out of the car on the ground and did not see any crackers. Furthermore, I did not see what saltines had to do with anything anyway. What was the problem? Why was my mother making such a big fuss? (The word "cracker" used in this way, is what Blacks in the south call racist white people. As indicated by my unfamiliarity with this word, my parents did not generally call people names or use such words in their ordinary speech.)

Well, since my father was doing the driving, he got to choose the strategy. After getting a full tank of gas, and paying, and being polite, he asked whether his little girl could use the restroom. The owner, who initially seemed nice, turned with a cold, stony face and said, "We don't have restrooms for niggers." My father did not argue (that would have been too dangerous). He just drove away. He did not say a thing, but I felt his hurt, his humiliation, his feeling of powerlessness in being unable to grant his youngest child, his baby girl, the simple request of using the bathroom in a respectful way. My mother was fuming! Not apparently angry at the white man for his racism and lack of humanity, but at my father for not knowing better. For choosing to negotiate man-to-man with a white man.

They stopped on the side of the road, several miles away from the filling station to assure our safety, and suggested that I go to the toilet outside, in the bushes. It was dark. I was scared. I refused. Instead, I chose to wait until I reached my relatives' home, where I could use the bathroom like a human being with respect, and I would not wet my pants in the car either. I now had a mission. I had to save myself, my own dignity. I had to give my father and mother back some of theirs also.

Now that I have shared a very real and personal part of myself with you, I will address the questions at hand. 1. What gets in the way of establishing growth-enhancing, empathic relationships across races, classes, cultures, and ethnic groups? 2. What works? What can be done to overcome these impasses, these obstacles?

In essence, I feel that *racism* and *classism* get in the way. Hidden within racism and classism are more human experiences such as *anger, guilt, politics, inability to manage conflict, a fear of the loss of self*, and *inability to accept difference.* I will elaborate on each of these issues, and will present possible solutions as each issue is discussed.

Anger

In Cannon and Heyward's (1992) working paper, Katie asks Carter if she can hold her anger. Katie shares that for the last 10 years she has gotten in touch with her anger, as well as the collective anger of all African-American women. Yet Katie goes on to say that being in touch with her anger is not enough. She adds, " . . . where do I go with my anger?," and states, that " . . . over and over again I hear white women talking about their fear of Black women's anger," and that she has, " . . . watched white women go to any length to repress, suppress, depress, oppress all acknowledgment of Black women's anger" (pp. 7-8). So she asks Carter whether she can hold her anger. In essence she is saying, will you be with me in this process? Will you share this experience with me?

This is no easy task. To hold somebody else's anger involves being able to hear and to listen without being defensive. Since a great deal of Black women's anger is directed at white women, both past and present, this can be very hard for white women to do. Also, given the history of slavery and oppression that Black women carry with them every day, including white women's historical role in it, and the current privileges that white women still have as a result of this historical oppression of Black women, holding the anger is no easy task.

In addition, I think that there are different cultural norms regarding the expression of feelings,

particularly anger. To illustrate, take any one of your favorite fairy tales. The white female is typically depicted as passive and submissive, waiting for someone to take care of her or to rescue her. Usually that person is a white male on a white horse. In these tales, there is typically an evil, bad person who gets in the way of the innocent, sweet, white woman being rescued and living happily ever after. That person typically is dark-complected and wears black. She is evil and assertive and powerful; not as powerful as the white male, but she gives him a run for his money. This dark, evil, assertive, powerful person is the stereotypical way that the Black female is portrayed in our culture. She is dangerous and to be feared, especially if she gets angry. She is violent, scary, and can kill you. She is out of control.

Psychologically, these images of the white female being innocent, sweet, virginal, and passive, and the Black female being evil, mean, violent, and scary get incorporated into our unconscious. The expression of anger is one way in which, I think, these images or stereotypes manifest themselves in everyday life. Based on these unconscious stereotypes, African-American women have a lot of permission to be angry and to express that anger, while white upper-class women (remember that Sleeping Beauty was a princess, and Cinderella became a princess) are expected to repress their anger and to be polite and to see the raw expression of anger as rude and scary. Thus, when these two groups come together, conflict is inevitable. For at some point during a mutually empathic relationship, anger will present itself. But as Cannon and Heyward (1992) so eloquently express, if the relationship is to progress and move forward, the anger has to be held.

Guilt

One of the reasons why I think it is so hard for white women to hold Black women's anger, is the guilt which many well-meaning, liberal, feminist white women feel over the oppression of Black women and the privileges they have as a result. According to Peggy McIntosh, whites and males need to own their privileged status. To quote (McIntosh 1988):

> As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had never been taught to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.
>
> I think whites are carefully taught not to

recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege (p. 1).

Miller (1986) addresses the issue of difference and states that in most instances of difference there is also a factor of inequality (permanent and temporary). Permanent inequality is defined as unequal due to characteristics that are ascribed at birth such as race, gender, class, nationality, or religion. I, therefore, wonder how one can be engaged in mutually, empathic, genuine relationships when inequality is inherent in the relationship and that status is considered permanent?

Tatum (1992) points out that, "the introduction of these issues of oppression often generates powerful emotional responses . . . that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair" (pp. 1-2). Nevertheless, as Alice Brown-Collins stated during Tatum's recent colloquium on "Racial Identity Development and Relational Theory: The Case of Black Women in White Communities," white women have to own their own racism if we are to connect across cultures.

In the Winter 1992 newsletter of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, Russo, writes,

> I'm a white, middle-class, Catholic-raised woman. This is not only the position I was born into and raised, but the legacy I carry with me into my life and politics. But it is not a static and unchanging identity, rather something to be reckoned with and challenged on a daily basis.
>
> Unlearning and confronting racism in myself and others must be an active process, because my white privilege allows me to ignore or deny it when I choose. Racism permeates all parts of my life. Because of its divisive power, if I do not challenge racism, it determines my chosen friends and networks . . . (p. 1).

I think it is hard for liberal feminists to own their own racism and the role they play in the oppression of women of color. I, therefore, commend Carter Heyward, Peggy McIntosh, and Ann Russo, as well as my colleague, Jan Surrey, for their work and bravery; for this work must be done if we are to accomplish the task at hand.

Politics

All of the above is political, is it not? It's about economics; the haves and the have-nots, the deserving and the undeserving. Miller (1986) uses the terms

dominant and subordinate. She explains, "Once a group is defined as inferior, the superiors tend to label it as defective or substandard in various ways. These labels accrete rapidly. Thus, Blacks are described as less intelligent than whites, women are supposed to be ruled by emotion, and so on" (p. 6). When this book was written, the subordinate was seen as female or Black, and no distinction was made between the different experiences of women. I, therefore, want to emphasize that status and the power are relative. Although white women are subordinate, in most instances, to white men, white women are typically dominant with respect to women of color. Likewise, given my educational background, I have some privileges that other Black women do not have. We are not unidimensional. Issues of race, class, and gender interact, and we must acknowledge these multiple and complex realities of women's lives.

Inability to manage conflict

In addressing these issues, which stir up anger in Black women, and anger, resentment, and guilt feelings in white women, conflict arises. What do we do with this conflict, especially since women are socialized to avoid, ignore, and deny conflict? First, I think the persons involved need to be highly motivated to work through the conflict. Each person has to believe that she will get something personally out of the time, energy, and risk taking that is necessary in order to look at the truth, and own one's own "stuff," in order to work toward resolution. In so doing, one has to tolerate feeling vulnerable.

Jordan (1990) suggests an interpersonal and psychological definition of vulnerability as that experience of self in which we are open to the influence of others, at the same time that we are open to our need for others; what we reveal of ourselves is relatively undistorted by defense. We also need a safe space/place in order to do the work. There needs to be a mechanism in place that gives some structure, and safety to do the work and take the necessary risks.

Fears of the loss of self

Black women fear losing themselves as they assimilate. They fear becoming alienated from their histories, their Blackness, their mothers, fathers, and grandmothers. They wonder whether their view is being diluted, whitewashed, and whether they are being brainwashed. They wonder whether they are selling out. In our history of racial slavery and oppression in this country, the mulatto or light-complected person was allowed to stay in the master's house. I now know that that was because the master felt guilty about his mixed-racial child being a field hand, while his other children lived in luxury and privilege. These slaves eventually became a privileged group, just by the nature of the white blood that ran through their veins and their white-like skin. They became known as "house-niggers," "the creme of the crop," while their mothers (who usually had been raped by the masters), remained field-hands, "field niggers." African-Americans carry this history with them, so, the question of who you are, and whether you remember where you came from, remains a critical one.

This fear of the loss of self is also shared by white women and other women of color who connect across racial-ethnic lines. Just as African-Americans are accused of being an Oreo (black on the outside and white on the inside) if they are perceived as becoming too assimilated, I have heard Asian women say that they have been accused of being a banana, yellow on the outside and white on the inside. Likewise, white persons who take risks to help Blacks are referred to as "nigger lovers." These experiences are real, these fears are real, they get in the way, they hold us back.

Inability to accept difference

Nobody wants to be different. We all want to be like the other because we experience being like the other as being accepted by them. We all want to be valued. Unfortunately, our experience has typically been that different means less than, or not good enough. Being alike has come to mean being normal and different as being abnormal. Our culture tends to polarize and dichotomize; to be seen as different triggers unconscious attitudes and fears that are deeply engrained in our culture and in ourselves.

So, I ask, must we be identical in order to understand the other, in order to trust or be trusted? Given our different histories there will be disagreements and differences of opinion. Can we as human beings tolerate disagreement? In sum, *I believe that, if we are truly going to develop mutual relations across cultures, we must own our differences and the incredible impact of racism and classism, and, in so doing, address the inevitable conflict.*

Jan Surrey

I speak here tonight as a white, heterosexual woman with a strong cultural identity as Jewish. My four grandparents all came to the United States in the early 1900's from Russia, and both my parents were born in New York City. The Judaism I was introduced to was politically socialist and antireligious. The shadow of the Holocaust and the dangers of anti-Semitism encircled my birth, and I was encouraged toward assimilation in a very white, middle class, semi-suburban city in upstate New York, where my Judaism and my white privilege were fairly invisible to me. I did attend Jewish Sunday School where I was exposed to what felt to me embarrassing but exhilarating notions of Jewish specialness and chosenness. Extreme emphasis on learning, education, intellectual pursuit, and philosophical inquiry as well as liberal politics, political activism, and a commitment to social justice were my Jewish heritage.

When I was sixteen, I had an argument with the rabbi of our temple who claimed that the central fact of the lives of all Jews was the presence of anti-Semitism. I told him that the discrimination and prejudice most salient to me in my daily life was related to my being female. (Historically this was the dawning of the women's movement, although for various reasons I had already declared myself a feminist by age 5!) The rabbi refused to listen or take my experience seriously, and I subsequently left the temple. As a white, Jewish woman coming of age in the "60s," my own immediate experience of confusion and injustice centered around the issue of gender, and this issue was not validated within a liberal, deeply patriarchal religious system.

These facts have shaped my life and my work and my own feminist journey. For me, this journey is not only about struggling for justice in the world, but is also deeply related to the psycho-spiritual journey of coming to appreciate and embrace women's ways of being and being together. The Stone Center work has been a powerful force in my life for supporting the development of a positive gender identification and reversing the power of internalized sexism through the revaluing and reframing of women's strengths in relationships. This development has been evolving for me over the past 15 years through my life-giving and empowering connections with women here.

Yet, I recognize how my own early experience may have left me enthusiastically seeking solidarity and alliance with women, especially women of color,

without as deep an appreciation for the need to work through the complexities of race, class, culture, religion, and ethnicity as they shape our relationships and our politics. I have, over the years, been educated to this by other women, and I have increasingly appreciated my own ethnic roots and cultural dilemmas as a post-Holocaust Jewish woman.

In the past year, as the adoptive mother of a Chinese baby girl, my own experience and consciousness of white racism, Anglo-centrism, and issues of difference have been raised exponentially! The primacy and centrality of race in every situation and every interaction is something I could never have experienced before. From the frequency of racist comments we hear about our daughter, often so-called "positive" racist comments ("She's such a china doll!"), or learning, as I take her at 16 months to her first gym class, to scan the environment within the first moment to see if there are any other Asian or nonwhite children or adults there and to watch people taking in the biracial adoptive relationship between us. All this in one glance, as I begin to see the white world through the eyes of the mother of an Asian daughter. I know that we are only beginning to learn about living as a biracial family, as I commit myself to the ultimate connection through diversity—within the mother-daughter relationship.

The theory groups at the Stone Center have started to explore questions of how our own ethnic particularities and social location as white, privileged, middle-strata, professional, North American women have impacted our models of development: our language, concepts, and visions of mutuality and connection. I can no longer say that our model represents women's development without naming our particularities and potential blind spots, seeking opportunities to educate myself about these blind spots and to engage with women of different experience in an open dialogue.

Over the past seven years, my work with my partner Stephen Bergman, in running intensive workshops focused on creating mutuality in male-female relationships, has moved me to appreciate the dynamics of the struggle for mutuality within the context of inequalities of power and privilege. I have seen over and over again the resistance of the more powerful group to truly hearing, taking in, and being moved and changed by opening to the real experience of the subordinate group. Through watching men relate to women, I have become greatly sensitized to

my own limitations in relating to other groups of women. I have experienced a growing sense of the meanings of my whiteness and white privilege and am learning about myself as a member of a dominant group which, like men in relation to women, relies on the subordinate group to keep the issues in the foreground and which has a vested interest, though not necessarily an intentional motivation, in maintaining the status quo. Men's lack of interest and inattention to gender is itself a sign of privilege and is inherently oppressive. Seeing how men behave has helped me to accept the inevitability of my own white power and privilege and what Pheterson (1990) has labeled our "internalized domination" and, therefore, our participation in systemic white racism, often through "not seeing" or "not noticing." As a result I have been moved to work with other white women to educate ourselves about our privilege, to examine how it impacts our lives, our theories, and our clinical as well as our political work. Such internalized domination also takes the form of unrecognized class privilege, heterosexual privilege, married privilege, able-bodied privilege, and others, all of which need to become part of our awareness of ourselves and of how our relationships are affected.

Clinical applications

Every relationship, including the therapy relationship, is fraught with the impact of these interlocking differences and blindspots. For example, when I work with an African-American client, I must be able to hold her profound anger at white racism, be aware of and open to her concern about my potential for color blindness, and be available and capable of talking about all this in the therapy without imposing my need to do so. (I do not believe this can be done without some prior personal work on confronting racism.) The attention to difference is essential, for example, in working with another Jewish woman, where it may be extremely important to explore our religious, class, or family's country of origin differences, and where there is potential for internalized anti-Semitism to impact the movement of connection and disconnection in our work together through transference and countertransference. And, it is also true in working with a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant client, where my Jewishness may be very present, as well as the possibility that, as white women, we may miss the significance of our shared privilege and its impact on the client's life story, her

relationships, and the quality of our connection.

For example, in my work with a very affluent, white, anorexic woman, we were able to make a profound connection around a picture of a starving Somalian mother and child which she brought with her into a therapy session. She began to talk about the meanings of her own "starvation" in the context of her family, as well as her guilt and confusion about the affluence and privilege she had grown up with. This provided a framework for our exploration of her eating "disorder." She was strongly identified with the starving child and the powerless mother, and she was also experiencing a real sense of guilt about her contribution to creating starvation in the world. I took all sides of her experience seriously and did not interpret or reduce her guilt to family "pathologies." We explored her privilege as a real and significant issue for her, especially as a backdrop for her experience of emotional and spiritual deprivation.

I am learning the necessity, as well as the tremendous resistance, to keeping these cultural perspectives in mind, in every hour, with every client, as I have been learning to do with my gender awareness.

Relational mutuality

As we talk of building connections through difference, we are using the Stone Center relational model of mutuality as a theoretical framework. My own vision of building healthy, growth-fostering connections involves a process of direct engagement and authentic interchange between groups or individuals, where each participant can speak from their experience and can attend and respond creatively to the other. This is a direct perception, connection, and joining with the subjective experience of the other—what Belenky et al. (1986), describe as connected knowing—the building of knowledge based on empathic connection. As Stone Center theorists (Jordan et al., 1991) have described, such mutually empathic connection is the basis of relational growth and healing. Intensity of feeling and powerful conflict are frequently part of this process. When the struggle for mutuality (we think struggle is a good word to describe this process) involves individuals or groups with unequal power in the world, especially the power to "name" reality, we see what Bergman and Surrey (1991) have described as the "double standard" on the road to mutuality between the genders. Members of the dominant group have particular work to do in

recognizing their own internalized domination and resistance to change, and how they assume their own experience is normative.

In the relational model, the struggle for mutuality is a transformative process as power dynamics change, and both groups can feel enlivened and empowered in new ways through the connection. When working through cultural differences, the particularities of each experience become more clear, yet the appreciation of the common experiences of oppression and internalized oppression can ultimately lead to a greater understanding of the interlocking systems of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. This vision of growth though connection has important implications and applications for theory building, for developing cultural competence in clinical work, as well as for building political alliances.

Relational impasses

In the struggle for mutuality in relationships, papers by Stiver (1991) and Bergman and Surrey (1991) have described impasses that create disconnection, that is, that stop the movement of relationship towards mutuality. I will suggest a few key impasses in the struggle for mutuality among women, especially focusing on what I have experienced as difficulties mainstream white women may contribute.

1. White middle-class women have to do the work of coming to terms with our own internalized domination and our personal and collective history of exposure to, and participation in, "power-over" relationships. When our power to oppress remains invisible or unexplored, we can feel blamed and then get personally defensive when it is pointed out. With this, we take ourselves out of relationships as we become unreceptive and unwilling to hear, be moved, or have our consciousness raised by the experience of women of color.

The whole American emphasis on individualism and psychology's over-emphasis on personal motivation promotes a failure to develop a mature sense of self in the context of the larger forces of systemic power. In our colloquium last year, Heyward, Jordan, and I (1992) described this consciousness as central to the ethical task of therapy—generating knowledge of our lives in the context of knowledge of the world.

Further, we have learned to see the white experience as normative and all others as other. We must learn to see our own particularities as simply part of the spectrum of cultural diversity and not the measure by which others are judged. For example, as we sit in our offices seeing white clients, how much is our consciousness of our ethnicity and our class privilege impacting our understanding of our work at the moment and of our clients' concerns in general?

2. For many white feminists, the consciousness of white male dominance and the power of sexism in our lives and relationships is historically relatively newly acquired and may feel tenuous. This feeling contributes to the difficulty we have dealing with the complexity of our double identity as both victim and oppressor which is necessary for engaging in this dialogue. It is especially hard for many of us as women to confront the ways we may be participating in destructive or harmful actions partly because of the strength of our identification with the victim and the difficulties we have in thinking of ourselves as hurtful, especially as we try so hard not to hurt others. Among women, there is also a kind of hierarchy of pain, where women feel they must give up their own feelings when someone else's pain seems more intense or deserving of attention. We need to learn to hold our own and others' feelings simultaneously.

3. As we come to explore the particularities and commonalities of our experience as women, white, heterosexual women have to directly confront our complicated and often obfuscated relationships to white men—fathers, husbands, sons, teachers, brothers, bosses—with consideration of both the social and economic subordination we experience and the significance of the access to power and privilege we gain through these relationships.

4. Another major impasse to staying engaged in the struggle for mutuality is the emotional response of shame and guilt in many white women in dialogue with women of color. As Jordan (1991) has written, shame is characterized by movement into isolation, and an experience of feeling wrong and unworthy of being in connection. Shame gets in the way of relational movement, and leaves the person feeling helpless or dependent on the other for release from this painful state, and can lead to withdrawal or

avoidance. Women of color have rightfully been angered and frustrated by this experience with white women and need to be able to trust that we are doing our own working through of these feelings, so that we can remain open and connected while discussing racism. It is essential for white women to do this work together, to some extent, prior to undertaking real engagement in intergroup confrontation and dialogue.

5. Finally, the power of opening up to the pain and anger in the relationship sometimes leaves white women feeling afraid of real engagement. Avoidance of real connection results in superficiality and caution about saying anything because it might be misunderstood or interpreted as insensitive or racist. This keeps relationships from the creative power of shared authenticity and growth through connection. The fear of not being safe and our difficulties receiving and holding anger keep the real, mutually empowering connections from happening. We must have safe enough and structured enough opportunities to do this important work, but we must also give up our expectations of absolute safety and protection, as risk and vulnerability must be a part of all creative and transformative struggle.

Working through impasses

What do we need to build such connections? Commitment, persistence (what Dorothy Soelle calls "revolutionary patience"), and structure. We need to appreciate the inherent value and richness of cultural diversity and to see the enormous significance and urgency of working through difference and the possibilities of psychological and political empowerment emerging from this work. We need to educate ourselves and also to create opportunities to work together to build cross-cultural connections. Such work requires that we create enough structure and support for relational processes so that difficult subjects and feelings do not lead to disconnections or angry impasses, but rather can be supported, sustained, and worked through to some new and shared understandings. A prior commitment to staying through the process is essential. I hope to see the Stone Center take a very active part in helping to create such opportunities through ongoing groups, workshops, and continued colloquium presentations.

My experience has been that working at a group

level is more possible and powerful than between individuals. Nearly all the diversity work I've participated in suggests the value of alternating intragroup with intergroup dialogue. Working with differences within groups and developing a sense of group support is essential to complement the process of working with intergroup differences. The potential impasses, disconnections, and violations that we have all inherited and bring with us into the struggle for mutuality are very powerful, but I believe that we can learn to rechannel the power of the forces that divide us into energy for connection and change.

Discussion Summary

After each colloquium presentation a discussion is held. Selected portions are summarized here. At this session, Dr. Beverly Tatum joined Drs. Garcia Coll, Cook-Nobles, and Surrey in leading the discussion.

Question: Hi. I'm a student here at Wellesley. I've noticed that when these discussions come up in class or in social settings that a lot of my white women friends who are not Jewish make the comment that they feel they have no culture, no ethnicity. I was wondering if you could address how that could be an obstacle to overcome in making these connections.

Surrey: There is nobody who does not have ethnicity, but the sense of being empty implies that there is a norm versus ethnicity. That's the whole shift we're talking about, the shift has to be "we are all ethnic." Most people need to explore a couple of generations back into their families and really tap into the richness that's there. We all need to begin to appreciate the roots and to really explore, to become sensitive to our own ethnicity, to the family traditions, even to the class issues.

Cook-Nobles: In a workshop about these issues that I participated in recently, what came out was that for some white people, to celebrate pride in being white conjures up images that they're not comfortable with, such as the KKK. That was the first time that I was in touch with some of the shame and guilt involved in white pride.

Tatum: This is a very common response that white students in my classes will talk about—the fact that they feel embarrassed about being white once they become aware of the racism in this society. European-Americans really had to give up their European identity when they came to this country in exchange for whiteness, and so part of the healing process is really to go back to reclaim that connection

to being European-American.

The book *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* has chapters from almost every ethnic background you can imagine. It's written about what it means to be from a particular cultural background in terms of your own heritage, and it helps students to realize a lot of things that took place in their families really were rooted in particular cultural heritages. Only then can they have other ways to think about being white. In addition, there is a history of resistance, for example, to racism, the abolitionist tradition or white allies, but most people don't know what that history is, and that's a history that needs to be reclaimed.

Surrey: In teaching ethnicity in therapy we always have trainees break up into their different cultural backgrounds, and we usually have a WASP group. They talk about the expectations for therapy and how white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism might be interfering with coming to therapy and with the ability to express emotions. Also, they acknowledge this is a culture and that it has implications for who they are as therapists.

Cook-Nobles: One of the most powerful exercises that I ever did in coming to consciousness about racism and culture and ethnicity was as part of multicultural issues training for staff in which we did an exercise where each of us brought an object which represented part of our cultural background and presented that object to the group. Each of us had to claim a culture as part of us, and what came up was that each of us felt different and a sense of isolation. Whether that was because of ethnicity or race or class or sexual orientation or immigrant status or educational level or family quirks, whatever, it brought a generic sense that everybody has a culture and everybody has some sort of cultural identity.

Comment: I wanted to thank you for introducing the issue of power into the discussion of difference, and the whole realization that we are, at the same time, oppressor and oppressed in different contexts. I want to recommend James Baldwin's essay, "Being White and Other Lies," which was given to me by an African-American student in my clinical doctoral program as we struggled with whether or not she would hate me for having nothing to teach her but white people's psychology. Baldwin's point is that this is a nation of immigrants and of people who were oppressed somewhere. The deal that we cut with the dominant culture when we got here is that we will trade our legacy of oppression in our countries of origin for the opportunity to be white at the expense of black folks. This essay states that we have to give up the position of power and privilege and exchange it for a more honest kind of vulnerability, if we are to make genuine crosscultural connections.

Question: I'm Mexican, I was born in Mexico and I came over to this country when I was six. One of the things that's always seemed very strange to me in this country is the polarization between black and white. In my country, there are all shades and there is racism. People there do look down on people who are darker, but it's not as polarized as it is here. It's not like here where if you have one molecule of blackness in you, you're a black. I wonder if some of you could comment on that?

Cook-Nobles: Well, I think it has to do with the history of slavery in American history in that that molecule of blackness made you able to do labor. Did anyone see the movie "Queen"? It didn't matter that she looked white, once it was found that she was Black then the anger and the abuse and the rejection were there. She kept saying, "I'm white, I'm Black, I'm both." It wasn't until she accepted her Blackness, because it was the Black community that accepted her, that she came to some kind of resolution; so I do think it's rooted in that history.

Question: I have noticed that when we talk about solidarity of women of color, white people see people of color as a term that's an insult. They think it's a revolution in disguise because people of color are out there and they're united by being people of color and then there are white people who are out here on the other side. Was this addressed in your work at any time?

Garcia Coll: We are struggling with how to name ourselves. The Stone Center's work has always talked about the use of language and how precise we have to be; yet we can't come up with a term we feel comfortable with. We feel, as women of color, uncomfortable with the term "women of color." There are two problems with it: one is the implication of minority or colored as something pejorative; the other is the implication that we are homogeneous. The dilemma is: do we try to come up with a term or do we just resist coming up with a term because there's really nothing to be termed? The critical notion is 1) that diversity reflects something that actually comes very much from the biological sciences in which there's an incredible variability in genotypes, phenotypes, and species, and 2) that the beauty of

human beings is the variability in shades and rainbows and permutations and combinations, and 3) that the notion of trying to put us into strict categories is wrong, because strict categories come from a political struggle of trying to put people in categories that they won't be able to move away from. So, as you see, we have been struggling with it.

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