



ON DIFFERENCE

A student-led journal focusing on issues of social justice



VOICES

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Thank You to all the West Chester Community for embarking upon this journey for the 150th Anniversary of our great institution. The upcoming issues of **Voices: *On Difference*** serve as a reintroduction of the student led journal curating voices from past and present issues comprised of students and professors. The 150th Anniversary issue will be the first issue of **Voices** in three years and we want to inspire incoming and current students to uplift their voices to inspire, advocate and educate their peers, professors and the social work community at-large. Our student editors Amber Howard (MSW Alumni 2021) and Robert Graves (MSW Candidate 2022) have worked diligently over the past years to cultivate an issue of **Voices** to highlight the voices of their cohort, however, they created a 3 part release to feature the literary works of previous and current students, under the guidance and support of Dr. Julie Tennille and Ben Morgan. The stories presented capture the heart and soul of social workers in our immediate West Chester Community reflective of shared and individual experiences in our communities.

It is our pleasure to reintroduce to you **Voices: *On Difference***.

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Is prison like the shows *Orange Is the New Black* or *Oz*? I am asked this question when I tell someone I spent seven years of my life in prison. I have come to realize that people do not care if prison is oppressive and creates a cycle of violence, they are more eager to hear all the violent, sexual, and gruesome stories I have to offer. I understand why people are curious about prison life, which is wrongly glamorized by Hollywood. However, as a gay man in prison there is no TV show that could capture the raw experience of being incarcerated in America.

The first thing I always tell people is that there are only five things an inmate can do in prison: read, play cards, watch TV, exercise, and engage in lots of sex. I will never forget the first time I had sex in prison. It was intense, rough, violent, and amazing. There was something extremely erotic about having sex in captivity. I never understood why I was so sexually charged behind bars; maybe it was the open showers, the sweaty gym, and no pressures of a serious relationship. Sex in prison was living a fantasy in a nightmare. But for some inmates, having sex in prison came at a bigger cost: becoming HIV-positive.

Why should anyone care about who becomes HIV-positive in correctional institutions? Only 11% of the total prison population are serving life sentences (The Sentencing Project, 2015). This means prisoners, at some point in their lives, will return to their partners, families, and communities. As a result, unprotected sex in prison becomes an issue of public health. Many prison officials hate talking about HIV because of their own countertransference with sexual orientation and gender identity. I have learned that one cannot have an honest discussion about HIV without talking about sexual orientation. However, if we as social workers in correction institutions continue to ignore this public health

concern, what does this say about us in the profession?

It was during my time in prison that I had the opportunity to reflect on “What is gay?” Most of the men I had sex with behind bars were not gay or didn’t identify as having serious attraction to the same gender. People scratch their heads when I say this, but I explain that men in prison don’t have a choice about the gender of their partner if they crave sexual pleasure. Most men who are incarcerated are in their 20s and early 30s, which is the sexual peak of their lives. Of course, there is going to be lots of sexual activity.

“...as a gay man in prison there is no TV show that could capture the raw experience of being incarcerated in America.”

Nathan McCall writes about how young heterosexual men resort to having homoerotic experiences while being incarcerated in his 1994 book *Makes Me Want to Holler*. McCall describes how the young men he was locked up with

experienced “mirages.” This mirage is when an incarcerated man is in his sexual prime and has visions of a gay male as a woman. McCall and his friend are on the prison yard and McCall is questioning what is happening with his friend’s sexuality in the following passage:

“Look a’ that guy. He looks just like Wanda Malone,” said Football.

I looked at the inmate, and looked again. I thought Wanda is a girl. Seeing no resemblance to Wanda, I turned to Football and said, “Man, get outta here! That guy don’t look like Wanda!”

“Yes, he do. Look at his face. He got the same complexion and everything” (McCall, 1994, p. 193).

In this brief scene, McCall gives the reader a clear example of the homoeroticism that occurs when young men are incarcerated for long periods of time. In my own experience, I had plenty of men tell me I reminded them of a girl they had a previous relationship with outside the prison walls. These men were so desperate to be

touched they were willing to have homoerotic experience to fulfill their sexual urges.

With social work colleagues, I often have to remind them of the Kinsey Scale of Sexual Orientation. According to Alfred Kinsey, we are not simply heterosexual and homosexual; many of us are in between. The Kinsey Scale ranges from exclusively heterosexual (zero) to homosexual (six) and a person can fall into any of the other categories in-between (Kinsey Institute, 2015). When I would witness prison relationships and intimacy between men, I accepted that these men were only looking to take care of their innate need to be touched. As my prison case manager would say, “The men at Forrest City Correctional Institution are gay for the stay.” However, given the enormous and lethal health risks at stake, it is imperative for social workers and case managers who work in correctional institutions to explore the dynamics of sexual orientation. A more informed – and realistic – understanding of what is really happening will allow social workers to advocate, urgently, for better public health standards within the system.

Men in prison are yearning for affection and intimacy and inmates viewed me as a way of receiving sexual pleasure. Being young, gay, and sexy I was more than happy to oblige. However, I would always say to myself, “I wish I could get condoms.” Everyone in the prison knew that there

was plenty of sex going on. In addition, plenty of inmates had sexually transmitted infections but no one addressed this issue. This made me a bit paranoid, and every time I engaged in sexual activity I gave my partner a physical exam.

One day I decided to explore why prisons do not give condoms to inmates. During a meeting with my prison social worker, she told me, “You should not be having sex in the first place, TAR!, it’s illegal in prison. And if we gave out condoms

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this gives y’all permission to have sex.” I simply responded “ok” yet I was thinking to myself, “That does not make any sense.” There are inmates who are HIV-positive and sexually active and no one says anything.

The fact that condoms are not given out in prison is a direct reflection of America’s blatant homophobia. Correctional institutions all over the country appear to embody Hannah Arendt’s concept of “the banality of evil” (Arendt, 1963) regarding gay men and their sexual partners. Arendt’s term identifies the catastrophic consequences of the everyday refusal to think from the viewpoint and experience of others. As one telling example, I heard a nurse tell a prison official, “We just let the fags fuck themselves to death.” Giving out condoms in prison does not give someone permission to have sex, it empowers them to protect themselves and the partners they will return to in society. I have witnessed several heterosexual men come to prison HIV-negative and leave HIV-positive. I often wondered whether the men who are released tell their wives or girlfriends about their new HIV status or do they simply think of prison

like Vegas, “What happens in prison stays in prison.”

Condoms in prison are an issue of public health and social justice that would allow inmates who choose to be sexually active to safeguard themselves. In our society we want people to have

good sexual health, however, when it comes to the prison population we want to be ambivalent. Public health policies like this are unacceptable because people’s lives are at stake and there is a simple, straightforward way to address the issue. Communities of color should know that it is our population that is at the highest risk. As a society, it is imperative that we protect the health of one of our most vulnerable populations, prisoners.

“...I heard a nurse tell a prison official, ‘We just let the fags fuck themselves to death.’”

Sugar ain't always sweet.



by Amber Howard

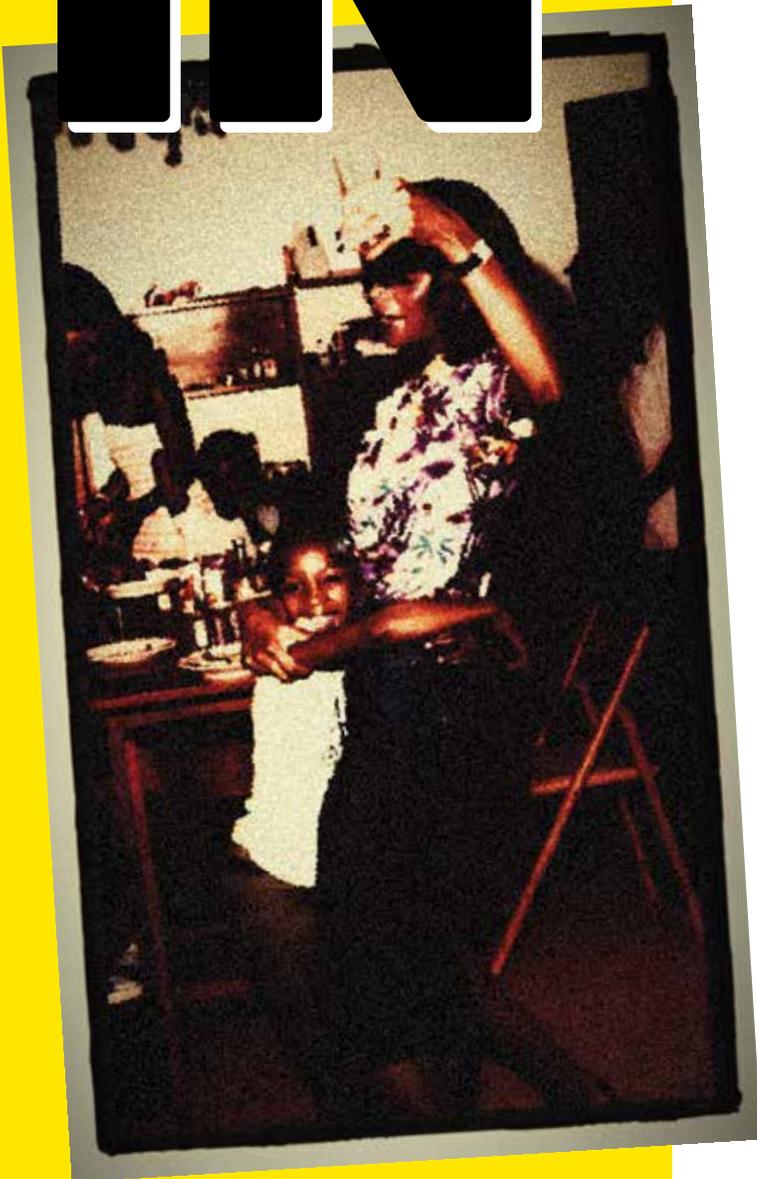
Sugar ain't always sweet. Black bodies with arms outstretched above their heads for hours on end in the sweltering heat, powering the mill under the watchful eye of the overseers who vowed to keep those who were enslaved held captive for generations – property which they would own indefinitely. But those enslaved had other plans; plans to break from the chains which kept them gagged & bound to a machine fueling their oppression. Plans to break free from the eyes of the overseer and into the arms of their creator. Breaking Free. Unknowingly, the freedom they sought would remain elusive as they would ultimately run into the arms of abject poverty- surrounded by tin walls stacked high. Freedom was not something they could achieve, for those responsible for overseeing remained vigilant – buying & clinging to the land these freedom fighters were dependent upon to survive. Despite every effort to snuff out any inkling of hope present in their spirits, the quest for liberation continues. Sugar ain't always sweet, outstretched arms in sweltering heat.



DEAL ME IN

Deal Me In Maria Gullo, MSW Candidate '13

She brought baby upon baby into the world
And you would scarcely be able to believe it by looking
At her, only five foot two with sticks for legs
If she yelled obscenities during child birth
Her husband would not really know as he was out
Tending to his butcher stop
The only one in town
It was her duty, she knew, to work in the tobacco fields
Carry the child with her in the basket
Then return home at the end of the night and tenderly
remove
Each feather upon feather from the chicken
To be served to her family
She knew her place
One evening at 3am her husband still had not returned
From the only coffee house in town where men would sit
around
And look important, play card games, and give manly
stares
That would declare them strong and wise among the
tribe
The good wife stayed at home pacing the house
Trembling fearing the worst
Without hesitation she asked a family friend to stay at
the house
Until she got back and she marched a fire
The same fire you see when volcanoes get angry
She arrived at the coffee house, wiped the sweat from
her brow
And continued into the men's domain
They tried to stop her
"What do you think you're doing? Have you lost your
mind woman! Man, can't you control your wife?!"
What did they have now that a woman trotted into their
private meetings?
How could their masculinity be so disregarded?
Flies flew in and out of their gaping wide mouths
She shook off their stares like the dirt from her feet as
she sat
Down at the table
Where her husband was sitting
His head in his hands
She slammed her hand on the table and she declared
"Deal me in!"
He never was late again, and it took him a long time
To find the confidence to show his face at another card
game
*Before there was Susan B. Anthony
Or Gloria Steinem
There was my grandmother's mother*



THE NEW JOB

or “If you’re gonna have a nervous breakdown because you’re newly separated and the HR rep at your new job was your husband’s mistress, it helps that your co-workers are also therapists trained in how to deal with people in messed up relationships”

by Ginneh Akbar

My therapist told me not to make any sudden moves. She said, “when you’re in the middle of a crisis, you are running on emotion and not rationality. You absolutely should NOT make any big, life altering decisions because when the smoke clears, you are likely to see things differently!” Makes perfect sense. I’m a trained therapist, I understand these things. So what do I do? Quit my job. I QUIT MY JOB.

Aside from the regular annoying stuff you have to deal with just simply because you have a job (having to wake up, put on pants, the expectation that you have to be places at certain times, the occasional obnoxious coworker or client) there was nothing terribly wrong with my job. It paid well, I liked it, and I got along with my coworkers. I worked from home and made my own schedule and worked as little or as much as I wanted. It was kind of perfect, particularly for someone going through a crisis who was often depressed and couldn’t get out of bed to work a 40 hour work week. But, nevertheless, here I go making my already complicated life more complicated, by quitting. So on top of adjusting to being separated, a single parent and new mother of 2 children, I was also now adjusting to a new job and new work schedule, and new coworkers. The new job was a good opportunity too, good location, downtown, and I envisioned myself eating sushi outside, meeting handsome strangers at happy hour, or maybe talking with a business man on the train on the way home from work. The reality, not so much, but what actually happened I could have never planned for.

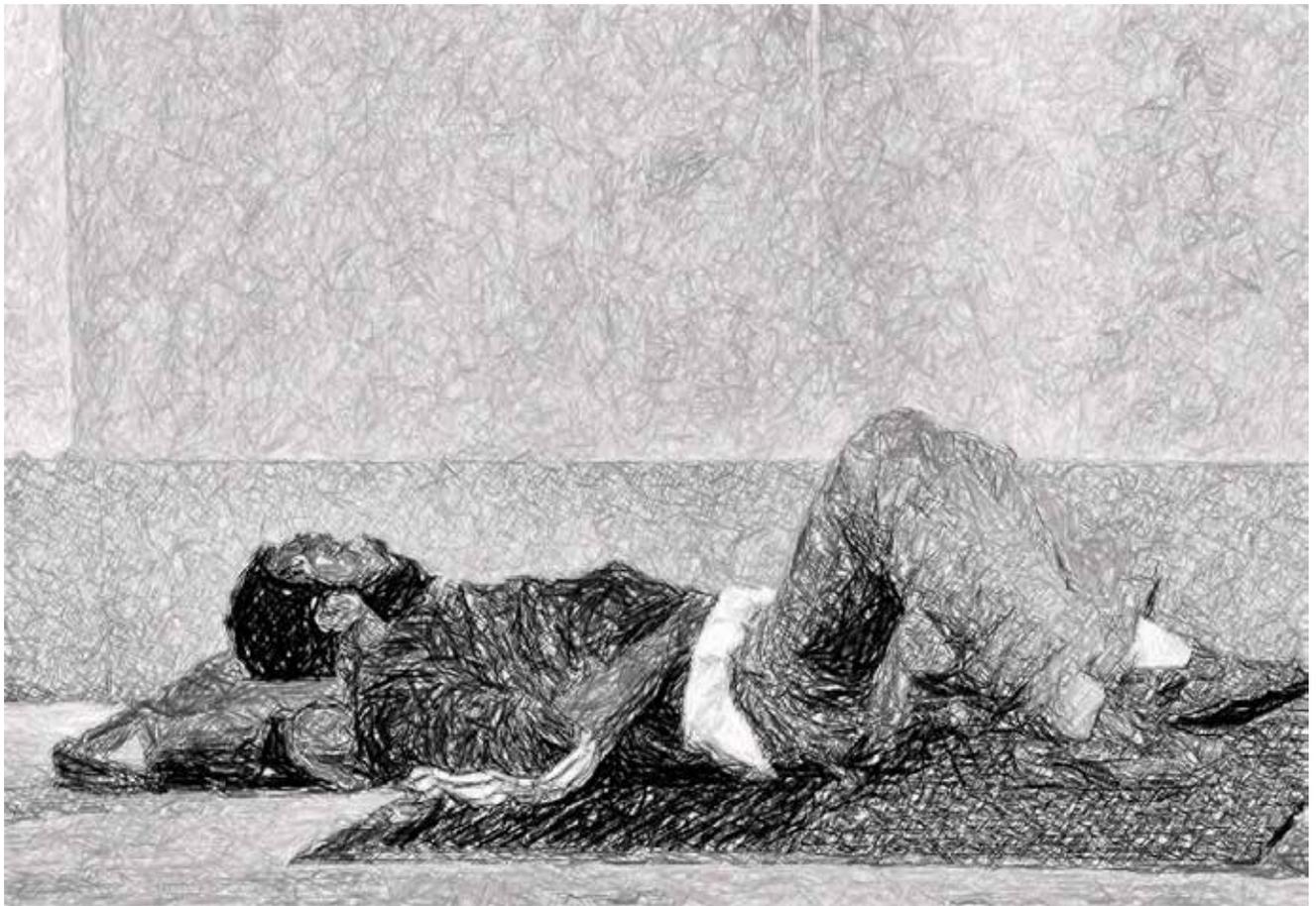
I have always believed that sometimes you end up places for some other reason than you *thought* you were there. And from my very first day there, when Nina, a complete stranger aside from the 3 hours we had spent in orientation that morning, had to talk me off the ledge at lunchtime, because by another random twist of fate, I’d have to spend my first week of work in close proximity with the woman my ex-husband had an emotional affair with. From that day on, it was clear that these women would somehow play an important role in my journey. At lunch, I contemplated not going back. How the hell was I supposed to spend a week in orientation being trained by this woman? But also as fate would have it, Nina was a marriage and family therapist, so after I poured my heart out to Nina at that first lunch, she reeled me back in and we got back to work.

For some reason, in a dingy, poorly ventilated office space, “working” on a research project, The Creator saw it fit for my path to cross with an amazing group of talented and beautiful women. Calling Nina, Kiri and Kathy “coworkers” is vastly understated and almost insulting. By pure demographics, it makes no sense that we would have anything in common - separate stories, various backgrounds, races, religions, sexual orientations, marital status and ages. In fact, if we hadn’t been working together, we probably would never run into each other anywhere.

We spent so much time laughing, that I’m sure people in offices close by would wonder what was going on. Sometimes they’d peak their head in. And we wouldn’t stop, we’d try to bring them into the fold. Our humor wasn’t for everyone... it was crass, and you had to be quick because if you slacked for one second, you’d be lost, and there’s no catching up. We were hilarious! We were Internet researchers! We were matchmakers! We were fine lunchtime diners! We were sushi connoisseurs! And in our spare time, we’d actually do what we were paid to do - treat children and families who experienced trauma. And we were amazing at that too.

Sometimes the universe gives you just what you need at just the right time. I thought I was taking a new job as a trauma therapist. But what I actually got was support, safety, empowerment, love, healing and what I’m sure will be lifelong friendships. They taught me about authenticity. They taught me that it’s ok to be vulnerable. By working with them, I realized that I had spent much of my education and career thinking that how I felt about the nature of humanity was an anomaly. They helped me to see that as one of my social work professors put it, it’s ok “to take the human condition home with you.” It doesn’t make you weak or a bad social worker or therapist to feel deeply for coworkers or clients. It makes you real and authentic. It makes you a genuine person. They were such an important part of my development as a single woman, a social worker and a feminist. Although our time together was short, I value those memories and friendships and pay forward the lessons I learned from those amazing women. I will forever be grateful for my time with them.

Through the Window
~ Casey Heninger



This image, taken in a busy, populated area of Philadelphia, speaks volumes. The man is alone, and sleeping on an average street in the city. Is he homeless, using a knapsack as a pillow with only the clothes on his back? The image itself appears gritty and dirty and one may wonder if he has been homeless for a while. What this image communicates is that even though social problems like homelessness are so visible, this man remains invisible to most everyone that walks by him. Many avoid the issue of homelessness, averting their eyes in an attempt not to see it.

A MALE SOCIAL WORKER'S BRIEF GUIDE TO SUPPORTING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

by Joseph Kerr

I was nine years old when my uncle first raped me. I say first because it happened countless times until one day, I gathered the courage to make it stop. But I don't know if I would have ever done anything if it wasn't for my sister. When I was eighteen, she was in rehab and told my mother she had been raped by the same uncle. At first, my mother didn't believe my sister, but when I told my mother what happened to me, she believed us. This was the moment I knew I would devote my life to helping survivors of sexual assault. I understood then what it meant to have someone believe you and stand in your corner. But I always knew that my privileges as a white male gave me specific advantages that my sister wasn't given. Why didn't my mother believe her? Years later, while I went to college to get a degree to learn about how the criminal justice system affects survivors of sexual assault, my sister's struggle with heroin got harder. Eventually, I started a job assisting survivors of sexual violence through the often revictimizing criminal justice system and civil litigation process, and I completed training to become a Certified Sexual Assault Counselor. It was in this work that I was further convinced that my role as a male working with survivors of sexual violence has unique challenges and opportunities.

Sexual violence is a global pandemic that impacts the lives of all people regardless of gender identity and expression. The important work to combat sexual violence is too often left to marginalized individuals. As a survivor of sexual violence and a person who benefits from white male privilege, I recognize the importance of men in this essential fight. Social workers, specifically male social workers, possess a unique and important role in this work. Social workers provide direct support to survivors of sexual violence in numerous settings including hospitals, schools, and anti-sexual violence organizations like WOAR Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence. To support survivors of sexual violence and eliminate all forms of sexual violence, male social workers have a unique role in micro, mezzo, and macro practice. This article outlines a grief guide for male social workers in supporting survivors of sexual violence through micro practice.

Gender can impact the relationship between the survivor and the social worker in several ways. For example, some survivors may prefer to speak with a woman social worker. Often, survivors are uncomfortable discussing assault narratives because of social and gender norms, or the nature of the assault. For example, a 2011 study found that sexual violence survivors generally prefer to speak with female social workers. The researchers hypothesized women are more frequently subjected to rape and sexual violence, survivors of violence may assume a female social worker to be more sensitive to the individual's experiences than a male social worker (Choi, 2011). In addition to differences between male and female social worker's perceived empathy, a male social worker's voice may be more likely to remind the survivor of the perpe-

trator, as men are responsible for the majority of sexual violence. According to a survey completed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in 2010, approximately 80% of perpetrators of sexual violence are men. That rate increases to 90% when the target of sexual violence is a woman (Black, 2011). Let's be clear: The perpetration of sexual violence is not exclusive to men as women are responsible for a significant yet lesser percentage of sexual violence in the United States.

Non-cis gender individuals experience even higher rates of sexual violence and often feel uncomfortable seeking help because of a deep history of oppression and discrimination. For example, a 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey revealed that almost half of all transgender people have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives, and this rate is even higher for trans people of color. Fifty-seven percent of non-cis gender individuals said that they feel uncomfortable seeking help. (James, 2016). It has been implied that non-cis gender individuals may also feel more comfortable seeking with female social workers.

Despite these challenges, male social workers can support survivors in schools, organizations, and communities in several critical ways. Male social workers should know the effects of trauma, understand sexual violence, be able to assess safety, and create safe spaces to encourage self-disclosure. Male social workers can begin to support survivors of sexual violence in several ways.

LISTEN WITH PATIENCE, WITHOUT JUDGMENT, AND WITH RESPECT. Active listening helps build trust and establish rapport through verbal affirmations, asking specific appropriate questions, paraphrasing, reflection, and empathy. Survivors may often feel misunderstood

and need someone to listen to them. In fact, the fear of not being believed is the most cited barrier to disclosure of sexual violence (Barone, 2007). Some specific phrases that a male social worker can use to build rapport and encourage a safe, comfortable space of disclosure include, I believe you, It took a lot of courage to tell me about this, It's not your fault, You are not alone, and I'm sorry this happened to you. It may be helpful to develop language to de-weaponize gender when working with survivors. Also, many male social workers may use tactical self-disclosure of personal or interpersonal experiences to de-weaponize gender as it displays an understanding of the survivor's experiences. Ultimately, the male social worker must find ways to help the survivor feel safe.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE WITH EMPATHY AND COLLABORATION. The key in creating a collaborative, empathetic space is recognizing the importance of self-determination and choice in practice (Choi, 2017). All people have the right of self-determination, which is especially true for survivors because a key component of that violence is the loss of choice. A survivor's choice to engage in sexual activity was taken away from them. Therefore, the male social worker should emphasize and support the survivor's right to self-determination and autonomy. The male social worker's role is to help survivors direct their own journey of healing, not to persuade a survivor to take certain steps such as contacting law enforcement.

Male social workers should be steadfast on their commitment to recognize cultural, racial, and religious differences among survivors of sexual violence. Renowned feminist critical race scholar Dr. Sherene Razack authored *What Is to be Gained by Looking White People in the Eye? Culture, Race and Gender in Cases of Sexual Violence* and described how cultural and racial differences impact sexual violence services. For example, the article highlights that many indigenous peoples consider looking someone in the eye is a sign of disrespect, which has been a contributing factor to how and when support is offered (Razack, 1994). As such, a male social worker should never make assumptions about a person's cultural, racial, and religious beliefs or customs. Always ask questions with empathy and compassion. This person-centered approach accentuates a survivors' independence, privacy, rights, choice, and sense of safety – which is they may feel the sexual violence has taken from them (McCormack, 2020).

EDUCATE YOURSELF. Male social workers should understand sexual violence, including, but not limited to, the intersectionality of gender, race, social status, and sexual violence. Males, specifically male social workers, are given discrete and realized privileges because of their gender and employment. As such, men often benefit from social, economic, and political advantages

that are frequently less available to women. Racial intersections should be acknowledged as it may impact the interaction between the survivor and male social worker. Racialized and marginalized peoples often experience sexual violence differently due to structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual racism (Patil, 2015). Male social workers should build their practice with a full understanding of how this intersectionality may impact their work (Macomber, 2018).

There are numerous resources available to social workers helping survivors in micro practice. The work of Bessel Van Der Kolk at the Trauma Center and his book *The Body Keeps the Score* are hallmarks of understanding trauma and the effects of sexual violence. Other helpful resources include *Counseling Skills for Working with Trauma* by Christine Sanderson, *Drawing Power: Women's Stories of Sexual Violence, Harassment and Survival* by Diane Noomin, and *To the Survivors: One Man's Journey as a Rape Crisis Counselor with True Stories of Sexual Violence* by Robert Uttaro. *WOAR Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence* offers a litany of resources, including training on promoting primary prevention to end sexual violence. *Women Against Abuse* offers workshops, training, and helpful documents translated in more than five languages.

ENGAGE IN MICRO PRACTICE WITH SURVIVORS WITH HUMILITY AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS. It is critical that male social workers acknowledge their own personal bias and beliefs about sex and sexual violence. Sexual violence is a deeply personal experience that can look different for each survivor. There is not a uniform response to sexual violence. A male social worker may never be able to

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fully empathize with a female survivor's experience. Therefore, it is critical that male social workers provide competent services through continued education, training, and consultation, as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics. Male social workers should consult with other social workers to better understand the complexities of the intersectionality of sexual violence and gender while adhering to privacy and confidentiality standards. It may be helpful to speak with female social workers about the complexities of gender and sexual violence.

There are many benefits of male social worker participation in supporting survivors through direct practice. As is often said, "men are the part of the problem and must be part of the solution." Sexual violence is a "men's issue" (Macomber, 2018), and this involvement may help advance conversations about the intersectionality of sexual violence, gender, and sex. Male social workers must work and act humbly to combat sexual violence. Male social workers in direct practice can be a part of the solution by acting with empathy and humility; developing an understanding of the intersectionality of sexual violence; and creating a space safe for survivors.

In 2018, I lost my sister to addiction. She overdosed alone in a bathroom shortly after she was released from a three-month stay in prison. It was the hardest thing I've ever been through. Although her life was short, she continues to have a profound impact on my life. She continues to inspire my work. As such, male social workers have the responsibility to use our privilege to support the millions of survivors of sexual violence, like my sister. The course won't be easy, but it will be worth it. Are you ready?

Contributors

Dr. Ginneh Akbar. Currently serves as Program Director and Department Chair of Graduate Social Work at West Chester University, where she teaches in advanced practice methods, mental health/mental illness, as well as electives she recently developed: The Intersection of Social Work, Social Movements, and Social Media; Radical Social Justice, and Environmental Social Work. She recently started Akbar & Associates, a consulting and training firm providing workforce support and staff development training.

Robert Graves, MSW Candidate '22, is a recipient of The Philadelphia MSW Cohort Scholarship. He has a professional background in advocacy, education, behavioral and mental health services and program development. He is also a multidisciplinary visual and performing artist, curating advocacy documentaries, art shows and short films. Throughout his enrollment in the MSW program he has served as Graduate Assistant at the PASSHE Student Success Center and as a student evaluator on the Newcombe Scholarship Committee.

Casey H. Gonzalez is the Social Services and Admissions Manager at White Horse Village, a Continuing Care Retirement Community. Casey is passionate about working with older adults and she has been afforded the opportunity to use her social services degree to learn about the aging services discipline and has continually refined her social-work skillset in varied and diverse capacities. She graduated from West Chester University in 2015 with a master's degree in Social Work. Casey was recently accepted to the 2021 Fellows in Leadership Program through Leading Age Pennsylvania and is excited to develop her leadership skills and to continue to be an advocate for older adults.

Maria Gullo graduated from the WCU MSW Program in May 2013.

Amber E. Howard, MA, MSW, is a recent graduate of the MSW Program (2021). During her final year in the program, in addition to being the inaugural recipient of the Laura Masse Memorial Scholarship, she was also a 2020-2021 HRSA grant recipient. Amber was also selected as the 2020-2021 Leadership Education in Adolescent Health (LEAH) Social Work Fellow at CHOP. Previously, she was awarded the Golden Rams Initiative & James McErlane scholarships which funded her participation in the 2019 study abroad course on Human Rights in the Dominican Republic. Amber has a wealth of experience as a direct service provider for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, mental health, chemical dependency, and other disabling conditions in permanent supportive housing and shelter settings in the greater Seattle and Philadelphia areas.

Joseph Kerr, BS, MSW Candidate '22, is a Certified Sexual Assault Counselor which has been driven by his own experience as a survivor of child sexual assault. He received his B.S. in Criminal Justice and completed an A.A.S. in Paralegal Studies. His many years of professional experience advocating for and counseling survivors of sexual violence is supported by his focus on addressing revictimization at the mezzo and macro levels – particularly the court system. He has led numerous trainings on providing trauma-informed legal services, and has worked with WOAR Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence, Joseph J. Peters Institute, Prisoner Visitation and Support, and Laffey, Bucci & Kent, LLP, a law firm specializing in representing survivors of crime nationwide. Joseph lives in Philadelphia with his partner and their dog, Amelia.

