

**2004 Presidential Address:
LINKING RESEARCH AND SOCIAL ACTION:
VIOLENCE, RELIGION AND THE FAMILY**

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The contradictions, dilemmas, and promise of sociology outside the boundaries of the academy are of growing interest within our professional ranks. By reflecting upon my own research on violence, religion, and the family over the last fifteen years, my Presidential Address to the Religious Research Association argues that we must link research and social action. But while the pursuit of a public sociology can be rewarding, it is also riddled with tensions. I address three erroneous beliefs about linking research and activism and then focus on six challenges facing scholars who are determined to translate their research findings into various forms of social action in pursuit of a just society.

A Case for Public Sociology

When I chose the theme for this year's RRA Meetings, *Linking Social Action and Religious Research*, I did not realize how connected my stream of consciousness was to others delivering Presidential Addresses across a variety of national and regional Sociological Associations. But apparently the contradictions, dilemmas and promise of sociology outside the boundaries of the academy is of growing interest within our own professional ranks.

To be sure, the link between sociology and the pursuit of social, economic and political justice is far from new. Whether we are talking about writing, teaching, consulting, or practicing social activism, the interface between social science scholarship and social change can be energizing and mutually rewarding. But, sometimes it can be riddled with tensions. For those who persist, a more influential form of scholarship emerges. Partnerships form. Accountability occurs. Social change can result.

But what exactly does public engagement mean? When scholars take their research outside the walls of the ivory towers, how does this impact on both the message and the messenger? What are some of the pitfalls, and how might these be avoided? What are some of the strengths and how might these be reinforced?

Public sociology emphasizes plurality and the relationship between our work and multiple publics. From Michael Burawoy's point of view, there is a division of sociological labor both within and beyond the academy that shapes and frames what we do and how we do it, over time and between countries.

In a special section devoted to public sociology in a recent issue of *Social Problems*,¹ Burawoy invites six scholars from Boston College to offer autobiographical case studies of their practice of public sociology. In his introductory comments to their reflective essays, Burawoy notes that sociologists often enter the discipline with notions of social justice close

to the surface, but that the moral commitment of students is suppressed (but not banished) as they proceed through their studies and develop their careers. In naming and framing public sociology, scholars have the opportunity to validate what has been hidden or discredited within the university context.

“Public sociology is the conscience of policy sociology,” writes Burawoy (2004a:105). While it could never develop without a professional sociology dependent upon a body of developed theory and empirical research, its chief aim is to bring the work of sociologists to divergent audiences employing a reflexive lens (Burawoy 2004b, 2004c). Polarizing its distinction from charity work—what we may or may not choose to do in our free time—public sociology can be political and often it is infused with moral or other values.

“Going public” with our sociological voices can mean a variety of things. For some, it means helping to name problems, to voice group sentiments and to propose compromises (Ryan 2004). For others, it means using the sociology classroom to challenge students to resist the taken-for-granted, market-driven notions of the dominant culture by adopting what C. Wright Mills meant by the sociological imagination (Pfohl 2004). Such student initiated weaving of biographical experience with historical social structures enables them to identify their own individual and collective locations within larger matrices of power.

Going public with our work almost certainly does *not* mean that once our work gets published we can sit back and wait for it to be noticed (Best 2004). Using a dose of appropriate humor, Joel Best reminds us that few people world-wide care about our theories, worry about gaps in the literature, or reveal any interest in reading sentences that do not strike them as sensible or interesting or relevant to their lives. According to Best, whose rise to public fame as a sociologist was initially based on his debunking of the Halloween sadist myth, a sociological piece that first appeared in *Social Problems* and was then catapulted to public attention by a shorter piece in *Psychology Today*, we sociologists must learn to communicate to others beyond ourselves: we must bring sociology to public attention.

Diane Vaughan claims to have become a public sociologist by accident, when in the wake of the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster, her previous NASA work came back to revisit *her*. But she had cultivated the ground before hand, by writing in an accessible way, taking research results to those who had participated and publishing some work in venues where non-academics could read it. She writes that “for me, public sociology has always been intensely emotional work” (Vaughan 2004:117).

By her own account, Juliet Schor, author of *The Overworked American*, talks about the delicate and difficult relationship she experienced with peers as a result of her rise in visibility. She argues that the major mistake she made in attempting to debate in the public arena was a lack of simultaneous devotion to publishing in peer-reviewed settings. Her summation: “...professional reputation is the most fungible currency” (Schor 2004: 123).

Judith Stacey published a co-authored article about research on the effects of lesbian parenthood in 2001, and that led to a myriad of requests by gay marital and parent rights advocates, to testify in court cases and appear in transnational media. “In the process,” she writes, “I have lost some of the innocence I once sustained about the progressive potential of public sociology” (2004: 134). In her words:

“Having been too frequently seduced and abandoned, stood up, manipulated, and misunderstood by public suitors, I find myself a more jaded, wary social science spin-ster. I am learning to screen the character and credentials of my companions with greater care, to select reasonably safe public venues in which to meet, to negotiate the terms and limits of our encounters, and to temper my

expectations about the prospects for success. Yet, if I have learned to adopt an ambivalent posture toward my public sociology prospects, nonetheless, when courted with sensitivity, I dare to continue to spin" (Stacey 2004: 144).

Others frame public sociology within an action research strategy (Couch 2004), broadening, rather than constraining notions of research utility (Locock and Boaz 2004). Derber, however, reminds us that there is a serious schism between the dictates of professional sociology and the essence of a public one. In short, while professional sociology seeks a restricted, credentialed audience for the monopolization and propagation of peer-reviewed knowledge, the core of public sociology is the quest for accessibility. But, he notes, "public audiences are broad, diverse, diffuse, and often temporary" (Derber 2004:120).

I have offered these examples simply to stimulate your thinking in this area: they are neither exhaustive, nor representative. But they illustrate in a poignant way some of the dilemmas faced by the sociologist who sticks his or her nose outside their office door.

In our own ranks, we have many scholars whose work has come out of the academic closet. Many of you are sitting here. Raising these matters with you is like preaching to the choir. But, don't forget, every successful preacher needs a great choir. It will be your work and your example that will pave the way for others to follow. Here I think of examples as varied as Eileen Barker's, *Inform*, or Carl Dudley or Nancy Ammerman's handbooks for, or about, studying congregations. Others, of course, have been called to provide expert witness to either the courts or the court of public opinion—various medias.

But we have many more in our midst who have never considered in a serious fashion the call to go public. I believe there are a number of reasons for that, some of which I now wish to illustrate.

THREE ERRONEOUS BELIEFS ABOUT LINKING RESEARCH AND SOCIAL ACTION

Erroneous Belief # 1—

Outside the academy, the chief value of research lies in its precise details.

Making research accessible is an activity that most budding graduate students are loath to perform. After all, don't most people outside university life claim that what sociologists do is actually common sense? So, learning the diction of the profession and confounding folk with its methods are precisely the weapons of mass confusion taught in most graduate schools. Collectively, we fail to realize that explaining difficult concepts and theories to ordinary people is a skill in itself; common sense, after all, is rather rare. Allow me to illustrate this notion with a fictitious story.²

A middle-aged clergyman in a colorful hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman walking through the field below. Coming closer he raised his voice and shouted "Pardon me, ma'am, I need your help. I was supposed to meet a friend an hour ago but I have no idea where I am." Looking up, the woman replied: "You're in a hot air balloon, about 40 feet from the ground. You're somewhere between 30 and 31 degrees north latitude and 58 and 59 degrees west longitude."

"Surely, you are a researcher," cried the balloonist. "How did you know?" answered the woman. "Well, everything you told me is undoubtedly correct from a technical point of view, but I have no idea what to make of the precise information you have offered me.

Sadly, despite your willingness to help, I am still very much lost. Even worse, you have delayed my trip."

The woman was flabbergasted. "You must be an administrator of a large religious organization," she replied. "Why, yes I am," said the balloonist. "But how ever did you know?" "Well," mused the woman, "you don't seem to know where you are going, you have no map and no compass and your rise above those of us on earth is dependent upon a large quantity of hot air."

She then took a large breath and continued: "You've made someone a promise that you cannot keep and you expect those of us beneath you to solve the problems in which you find yourself. The fact of the matter is your position has not changed since our conversation began but somehow you now think that your muddle is my fault."

Outside the academy, the precision we hold so near and dear, fight about incessantly and spend whole careers developing, can seem rather pointless. That is why translating our ideas and our findings is such important work—if indeed we believe in working towards a more just and humane society. To be sure, refereed publications depend upon peer review and the peer review process is one of the major axioms upon which the university system is built and upon it rests scientific credibility. Precision—of method, of theory and of execution—is a central feature that differentiates the qualified researcher from the novice. But a proclivity to focus on precision alone can render our work inaccessible outside the academy.

Some have argued that the propensity of academics to pontificate using language exclusive to our disciplinary boundaries has created a market niche for translators, other professionals who rework our ideas into sound bytes for a smoother transmission to a wider audience (see Dudley, 1999). While this may be so, I want to suggest that the act of translation itself is a central feature of the academic exercise and that collectively we ought to give more consideration to disseminating our own work to the publics where it might offer insights into the promise or possibility of social change. To refuse to cross the moat between the university and the broader society, or worse yet, to denigrate those who do, is to breed exclusivity in the academic enterprise and an elitist (not to mention inaccurate and inappropriate) notion of knowledge dissemination. In the words we all know well: knowledge for whom and for what purpose?

In my own work on religion and violence in the family context, I have taken up the challenge to translate and disseminate my research for purposes of social action. Such social justice initiatives, small and insignificant though they may appear on the broader radar screen of important roles for sociologists in society, have an impact, sometimes much greater than we could ever dream possible. I offer one example.

Our research team conducted a series of studies that revealed that many workers in the secular therapeutic community did not like to work with clients who were particularly religious. Devoid of spiritual credentials themselves, these professional workers found it difficult to challenge the religious ideation that is believed by the victim or the perpetrator to give license to abuse or to respond with decisive action in its aftermath. This led to the claim that it was in fact the religious ideology that gives birth to, or nurtures, the abuse. Because religion is seen as a key to a victim's reluctance to seek refuge or assistance, many secular professionals suggest that victims or perpetrators leave behind their faith community as they journey towards healing and accountability.

On the other hand, religious professionals, often skeptical about the forms of assistance available in community agencies, are reluctant to refer parishioners to offices where they

feel it is unsafe (or at least unwise) to proclaim faith. With suspicion on both sides, the voices of the caregivers drown out the voices of the victims.

As a researcher looking at issues of violence for the last 15 years, I am convinced by the data that, in order for the healing journey to become a reality for religious victims or religious perpetrators, that it must include both the language of the spirit and the language of contemporary culture (see Nason-Clark 1997,1999,2001,2004). A cultural language that is devoid of religious symbols, meanings and legitimacy is relatively powerless to alter a religious victim's resolve to stay in the marriage no matter what the cost. Correspondingly, the language of the spirit, if devoid of the practical resources of contemporary culture, compromises a victim's need for safety, security and financial resources to care for herself and her children. Moreover, to provide these bifurcated services will almost always involve collaborative ventures between the religious services and community protection.

This was the challenge we faced: how could we communicate simply and unequivocally that churches and secular agencies needed each other in the fight to end violence in homes across the nation? How could we address the tensions between religious leaders and community service providers? What medium could we employ to reach abused religious women who may not read our books or consult other published material?

We began to implement a wide range of initiatives that took seriously the chasm between churches and community services on this issue. From hosting "building bridges" workshops that were community specific, to addresses and conferences that were profession specific, we began to mobilize religious and secular communities on the need to address abuse in families of faith. But I think it is important to note that our most successful venture from my point of view was the church washroom project. We produced a series of brochures entitled *Christian Love Should Not Hurt* and provided plexiglass holders so that they could be placed in the stalls of church washrooms across eastern Canada and beyond. Funded by Status of Women Canada, this initiative took seriously that there were few safe places in the weekly routine of church life for women to learn what to do if violence struck home. While the implementation of this took place 8 years ago, as recently as last week, I received a call from a church that needed to replenish its supply of these home-grown materials.

There is no magic here. We took a long hard look at the emerging findings from our program of research concerning the prevalence and severity of violence within families of faith and we listened through community consultations on the need for resources to address church women in particular. And then we acted.

Outside the academy, the possibility of social action is enhanced when the researcher provides credible evidence to the right people.

Erroneous Belief # 2—

Emotion is outside the disciplinary boundaries of acceptable behavior on the part of the researcher.

Sixteen years ago when I first started reading court records detailing cases of child sexual abuse, I remember my body's overload response was to purge itself. Ten years ago, I remember feeling very frightened as I saw a large-framed man approach me in distress after I had just finished delivering a homily in an Anglican cathedral. Three years ago, I experienced a profound sense of helplessness when it became clear that the number of women victims attending a workshop in Malaysia were so desperate for healing resources and yet so secretive about their own experiences, fearing for their own safety if their stories were

known by others. Last summer, I remember being outraged when I learned that a priest I knew well had just been charged.

Sometimes tears well up in my own eyes as a survivor is telling me of her brutal assault at the hands of someone she still loves. Sometimes, I am so disappointed when I hear undergraduate students say “what did she do to make him so mad?” Sometimes, I grow impatient repeating again and again to religious audiences that family life can be dangerous to your physical and emotional health.

Emotion is never far from the surface for many of us who work on issues of abuse. How could it be otherwise? For me, emotion is a reminder of how painful and heart-wrenching violence is for so many people. Like anxiety before an exam, a moderate degree of emotion serves a very useful purpose in my work. It reminds me of its importance and its potential impact.

Erroneous Belief # 3—

Researchers must ensure they carry limited baggage with them on their travels.

Last January, I learned an important life lesson about setting aside your luggage. I was traveling to Eugene, Oregon for a variety of research-related activities. In my carry-on luggage, there was a change of outfits so that I could be transformed from jeans and a sweater into clothes appropriate for a late-afternoon talk, and there was the text and accompanying overheads for several speaking engagements. I boarded the small commuter plane from Fredericton where you deposit your carry-on at the foot of the stairs. Two hours later, I descended those same stairs and to my horror my dark green roll-bag was gone: in its stead was a chubbier, lighter green bag that bore only a mild similarity to mine. Despite the flight attendant’s announcement over the intercom, the traveler with my carry-on did not report to the baggage claim area to recover his bag. Rather, his friend stopped by to say that no doubt he was traveling home by car from the airport and offered me his cell number. I called and left a plea message begging him to return my work bag as soon as possible to the airport. Meanwhile I boarded my next flight en route to the U.S.

Arriving in Eugene, after another transfer, and later than scheduled, I was in a great rush to get my checked bags and head straight for my speaking engagement. One small problem: my bags were no where to be found. So I headed off unencumbered: no carry-on, no checked luggage. In my purse was a toothbrush so I knew I would have sweet-smelling breath at least. When we arrived at the auditorium where I was to speak, the platform guests were already making their way to the front. I had time to brush my teeth and consider the fact that I would now produce an outline for my remarks whilst the preliminaries were underway. Once on the stage, I opened my small purse in search of a pen and a notepad. Neither were to be found: in my deliberate effort to reduce duplication and excess weight, I had placed them in my carry-on. I stood to give an hour’s address without even an outline.

The point of the story is clear: traveling light has some advantages but it is not to be recommended. Most of us carry quite a lot with us: our ideologies, our theories, our preferences, our anxieties, our biases and so on. Often we fail to see just how much we carry around until it is stripped away, by design or default. Value-free we are not. Value-free we can never be. Rather, we must be intentional about what we value and why we value it. We need to examine our ideologies, our theories and our methods of viewing the world. Some of the time we will be surprised at what we find. We carry a lot more baggage than we think.

I turn now from these erroneous beliefs to the challenges we face. In the remaining portion of my talk, I outline six.

Challenge # 1—

We must have the courage to dream.

Over the past few years, I have made several trips to Croatia, a country in eastern Europe that is well acquainted with struggles of violence. In the faces of men, young and old, who sit hour after hour each day in the outdoor cafes spotted around the countryside, you can almost touch the sense of hopelessness of those who once had employment, but for whom paid labor has now vanished like a pre-dawn vapor. Old women walking with their grocery bags, filled with market vegetables—onions, potatoes and cabbage—tell the same story: the struggle for daily living is profound.³

Here, family violence mixes inextricably with post-traumatic stress disorder, high levels of unemployment, intergenerational living arrangements and a lack of funds to provide a seamless social security net for the vulnerable.

Within this context, no where does hope seem more elusive than in the orphanage setting. But in the midst of what many of us would call great despair, I came to see a flicker of light. As part of my initial travels to this warn-torn region, I asked to visit some orphanages, to witness first-hand the context of care in the space available: so few workers, so many children, so little room to maneuver.

I will never forget meeting Sonya as long as I live. She was about 19 when we first met, a child who had been rescued from grave circumstances when she was just a toddler. Raised in an orphanage, she was now living in a transitioning facility where she was learning the skills required for independent living. And Sonya was one of the lucky ones: many girls leave the orphanage and return less than a year later with a baby in arms and the cycle repeats itself. But, at 18, Sonya had been chosen to live in a small home where she would learn to cook, garden, make candles for sale, and care for herself and those with whom she lived.

In 2002, in the presence of the social worker responsible for her care, this young woman granted me permission to tell her story. This was the third time Sonya and I had opportunity to be together. With great excitement, she showed me things she had learned to do and I enjoyed the lunch that she had prepared. As we talked, through an interpreter, Sonya told me about life as a child, growing up with so many other children under one roof. Things were predictable: there was regular food, clothes, a bed and occasional outings. The discipline was harsh by times and the routine boring. "Did you ever try to run away," I asked. With a perplexed look on her face, she replied: "Where would I run to?" "Were you ever afraid?" Her only fear was that one day she would no longer be able to call the orphanage *home*.

We spoke of her new life in the smaller transitioning facility. She was so proud of her accomplishments and she had every reason to be. Towards the end of our conversation, I asked Sonya one last question. Thinking of my own children—and the gulf that divided them from the experiences of Sonya—I asked about her dreams as a young girl, or as a teenager, living amidst so many others. Her words still send chills through the essence of my being—as a researcher, a writer, a mother and a very privileged inhabitant of the first world. She looked at me for a very long time. Intermittently, she looked at the social worker who was interpreting our conversation for each of us. Then Sonya replied with words I will never forget: "I didn't dare to dream!"

Colleagues gathered here this afternoon, I do not need to be dramatic for you to catch the impact of those words to me. How could I not tell Sonya's story for it represents for me one of the many, many reasons why we must—*why I must*—think about the implications

of what I know to be true. Violence is real and its impact is enormous. With knowledge comes social responsibility. For me it is very hard to separate social responsibility from taking direct action. And who is better equipped to argue, to persuade, to allocate resources and to take risks than academics.

As many of you know, I grew up a very shy adolescent and if I had been told that my life work would involve so much public speaking, I would have crawled under the covers and never wanted to get out of bed. But we must shake off sleep. We must leave our ivory towers. We must dare to dream. When we dream big, and share that dream with others, the unexpected can happen.

Challenge #2—

We must have eyes to see—and then the courage to address—the gap between our own rhetoric and reality.

My husband, Dave, is a clinical psychologist whose research involves depression and obsessive compulsive disorders.⁴ In addition to his university appointment, he maintains a part-time clinical practice. Amongst the patients he sees are those with anxiety disorders. A few years ago when we were on holiday in Jamaica, Dave experienced a mild degree of anxiety himself whilst learning to scuba dive on the resort where we were staying. His initial experience ended in defeat. He couldn't seem to get into the rhythm of moving continuously and breathing effortlessly under water without reference to the air so many meters above.

Believing that he needed to conquer his mild bout of fear, Dave began scuba lessons when we returned home to Canada and eventually completed his certification in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean last March. The question he posed to himself was rather straightforward: how could he in good conscience ask patients to combat their fears, and persist until they were successful, if he was unwilling to overcome his?

For me, researching violence has had an enormous impact on my personal life. In an essay I wrote several years ago entitled *From the Heart of My Lap-top*, for Jim Spickard's (2002) co-edited book on ethnography and religion, I began a process of thinking about how my abuse work had altered who I was, how I spent my time and what I considered important. One of the not-to-be-underestimated challenges in linking academic research with social action is its long-term implications on the researcher.

I am a field researcher with a very important sociological story to tell. It is my responsibility to understand it well: its overarching themes and the subtle nuances. By using a variety of methodologies and conducting studies in many contexts, I am able to weave my skills as a sociologist into a portrayal of the web of violence in families of faith. Of course, there are the grant applications, the submissions to Research Ethics Boards, the blind feedback from peers and the almost endless interruptions that are part of implementing major research projects. This is to be expected.

However, when we translate our research for a wider audience, we face a number of specific paradoxes. For this enterprise to be successful there needs to be sufficient flexibility to accommodate both the rigor of our disciplinary boundaries (as evidenced by the peer review process, for example) and the passion of an activist (as evidenced by activities attempting to change people or places). While passion without data can be misguided or even dangerous, passion based on empirical validation can be powerful. And that power has the potential to shape not only the path the data travels but also the heart of the researcher.

Challenge #3—

Social Action Requires Partnerships Nourished Over Time by Mutual Respect

Commitment to social action normally involves partnerships and collaborative ventures *outside* the university environment. These are time consuming to create and to sustain. The rules of engagement and exchange vary and most of the participants do not speak from the same comfortable position of security as the university researcher. There are explicit and implicit hierarchies that need to be recognized, both within the academy and between it and the broader social culture. Social location is an important ingredient in facilitating or ruining partnerships of purpose.

Last year, I participated with several others in editing a collection of articles we entitled *Partnering for Change* (Stirling et al. 2004). The book's purpose was to demonstrate how difficult academic/ community initiatives are to launch and then to maintain, and how varied the models that seem to work. Some collaborative ventures appear to thrive when all members are engaged in a wide range of activities; other teams streamline responsibilities by skill and job function. Buy-in to a specific project is imperative, especially early in a partnering relationship. For collaborative work to pass the test of time, there must be a degree of success in terms of goal attainment and a satisfaction with the process of getting there. Ideological homogeneity guarantees little, but mutual respect is a central ingredient in partnerships that are effective and efficient.

My own personal story over the last decade has been that some of the most fruitful partnerships have involved professionals (religious and secular alike) whose members differ dramatically from one another but yet whose commitment to common goals remains firm. Since violence knows no faith boundaries, alliances between and across workers sharing distinct and different religious values need to be fostered. If creating a safe place to talk about these issues seems like a challenge, this experience of tension then becomes a specific example of the pervasive problem the team is trying to tackle. The lessons it learns within the group can be transformed into strategies for collective action. In a spirit of mutual mentorship, academics and activists can (indeed must) learn from one another.

Challenge #4—

Learning to understand and respect the bidirectional nature of research and social action.

Several years ago Carl Dudley, in his 1999 RRA Presidential Address, noted that dissemination of our research results ought to be an integral component of the research process (not tagged on as an afterthought). He went on to suggest that one of the healthy byproducts of the SSSR and RRA holding their meetings in tandem was the conversations between practitioners and researchers.

Extending his observation, I want to argue that dissemination need not be the final act of the researcher, but rather a part of the research process itself, and more generally a phase in the ongoing link between what we know and what we do with what we know. This notion, of course, is not new, even in our midst, but it is not practiced often or well-understood.

I would like to use the structure of my garden to illustrate what I mean. For sake of brevity, a garden has some high interest structures, some developed beds, stairs and height, background context, waves of colour and texture, bushes and evergreens for year-round interest and grass, mulch, paths and fragrances to pull it all together. Some perennial plants or shrubs

signal a new season; others are very showy but die fast. Dead wood becomes the mulch that retains the water that helps the new plants to grow.

The bidirectional nature of research and social action means that each season of our work together enriches the overall initiative. As researchers listen to those they have studied wrestle with the findings and the implications of what has been found, new questions emerge, analytical tools that once seemed dull are sharpened again, and the toolkit expands. When action fails or proves much more difficult to implement, new insights drive the researcher back to the lab or to the literature. In these ways, social action becomes part of the cycle of the research venture.

Viewed from this vantage point, data collection and data dissemination becomes a two-way street. Through mailed surveys, personal interviews, telephone interviews, focus groups, community consultations and field work with leaders and followers, I am told both life stories and insights that reflect the questions I ask within ethically bounded research protocols. How could I be bound by anything less than a serious commitment of my time and energies to communicate this knowledge in a way that has a potential to lead to action, to augment social change? As the process of dissemination extends in its many and varied forms (press interviews, talk shows, publications, brochures, lectures, sermons, invited addresses), rich textures of understanding emerge. Nuanced field observations become thicker; survey data is interpreted through a myriad of lenses, case illustrations are given further contextualization, and so on. Often, this sends the researchers back to the privacy and safety of their university offices to try to sort it all out (once again). And sorting it all out we cannot do alone. We are an important piece of a complex puzzle but the isolation that fosters our publications sometimes detracts from our ability to transition smoothly to other public arenas.

As a result, the relationship between the activist and the academic can be stormy. So too can be those battles fought in the mind of the scholar who is attempting to be both. Offering empowerment and personal agency to a victim of violence is not the same thing as choosing her course of action. The tension between activism and academic study can be energizing for the researcher, where it calls us back to re-evaluate our frameworks, our theory and our methods of data collection. But it can also be exhausting—for the real world is usually more nuanced than we want to believe. Passion grounded in empirical reality—toward this we must strive.

Challenge # 5—

Restricting and expanding our vocabulary to meet the needs of various audiences.

Over the past few years, I have delivered more than 100 talks or invited lectures related to my research on religion and violence against women. Through these experiences, I have learned a lot about how others perceive me. And, by and large, these perceptions are quite different than those received by the students one teaches. As a result, it is very hard to *get it right*. Allow me to explain. Sometimes I am accused of being too male in my style; other times, apparently, I am too female. Sometimes, I am accused of being too academic; other times, apparently, I am too passionate. Sometimes I come across as being too religious; most times I am seen as too secular. In terms of dress, I am accused of being clothed in too professional a manner; other times these same clothes come across as too casual. I have some who have refused to ride the same elevator with me; others who feel that no per-

sonal question is off-limits. Some ask if my husband knows what I am doing. Others ask why I don't bring my children along. The list is very long. Suffice it to say that context is extremely important. Our vocabulary and our mannerisms need to reach a level of comfort within the constituencies with which we work. This is extremely difficult. But pitching the message in accurate, sensitive, yet forceful ways is imperative. It is not an optional extra.

Sound-bytes and key phrases that work in one setting may falter in another. Here I tell another story. Our cottage is located on the east coast of Canada, near the shores of the Saint John River, just a few miles from the Bay of Fundy with its world renowned tides. In this part of the world, building a dock for your cottage is no small matter. It needs to be responsive to the waves, the wind, the tides, the level of rainfall and the occasional, but generally unannounced, opening of the power dam up river which allows tons of water to flow in a short period of time, temporarily raising the shoreline in its wake. Dock building here is an art as well as a science.

Some features of its development can be learned from textbooks and manuals written by engineers and builders who have never traveled to the region. Other features require local knowledge and experiential wisdom. A fancy dock may look great in calm waters, but when the winds and the waves turn the river water rough, its pleasing form is rendered useless.

Translating the story of my home-built, functional, dock, fashioned by our family needs and our local environment and culture is a perfect transition for me to describe how I began to work with theologian Catherine Clark Kroeger. We teamed up in response to the emerging results from my program of research. Our team was learning of the centrality of religious forces in helping victims and their families cope in the aftermath of violence in the family context. And yet, our clergy studies revealed the paucity of available materials, especially for those ministering in evangelical or conservative religious traditions. I supplied the data: she supplied the theology. That's how our writing partnership began. In time, my religious vocabulary increased as did her sense of comfort with statistics. We were both equally gripped by the stories of survivors. In *No Place for Abuse*, we sought to weave sociological data with theological insights in order to assist religious leaders (Kroeger and Nason-Clark, 2001).

As is often the case, the book took us places where we had not planned to go: radio talk shows being a case in point. Here it was far more difficult for me to employ a language that made listeners *hear our message*. When it turned to findings and data, of course, that was a language I spoke with greater ease. At times, we needed to either expand or restrict our use of distinctive vocabulary. Our united goal was to employ a language that was comfortable to the constituency we hoped to reach.

The positive response to *No Place for Abuse* pushed us to write a book especially crafted for victims. Recently published, *Refuge from Abuse*, was our attempt to speak directly to victims based upon what we had learned from victims (Nason-Clark and Kroeger 2004). Victims had told us their stories of pain and of hope, they had told us of their need for explicitly religious narratives to foster their empowerment and curb their despair. *Refuge from Abuse* is our attempt to respond, usually language that is extremely accessible, Biblical stories that are familiar, and data that is drawn from my research program.

As I worked on this manuscript, reworking my portions of each chapter several times to rid them of disciplinary jargon, and university-enriched vocabulary, and the copious footnotes and endnotes behind which we hide, I tried to envision the faces of some of the abused women whose stories had helped me to understand the data. These women's faces became

my companions as I sat late at night in my university office. I was motivated by my desire to write for them, even as I realized how feeble my efforts were.

**Challenge # 6—
Finding the gem.**

As an editor, I get lots of mail: email, snail mail, registered mail, and mail delivered by courier. Most of it is welcome. Most of it is friendly. Some of it is annoying. The most annoying of all are those who send entire dissertations as one or more attached documents with a short email message that goes something like this. “Dear Dr. Nason-Clark. My supervisor has suggested that I send my dissertation to your journal. Could you see if there is something in my work that you would like to publish? I will contact you in a couple of weeks because I am just about to leave to go on holiday. Thank you. Signed, Super Student.”

I understand full well the weariness of a student who has labored for many years on a project which they cannot face for one more moment. I can also understand quite well the weariness of a supervisor who has labored for many years on a project that they do not wish to face for one more moment. But to suggest that it is the work of an editor to do this: well that I just can’t understand!

As researchers, sometimes we cannot see either the bigger picture or where our research fits into the wider cultural context, or we cannot find the “gem” in the haystack and thereby are rendered stymied as it relates to translating our work into either publishable form or social action. We cannot find the keys to unlock the nuances of the social relationships, of power, of actors and of structures that our results suggest.

I am currently working on a project that explores the interface between faith, accountability, violence, and justice in programs for men who batter. As you might expect, justice, accountability and change are the most salient features of any intervention services offered to men who batter their wives or girlfriends. Many religious women who have been victimized are especially prone to place trust in services or ministries that seek to change the violent ways of the men they love. It was through this angle that I first became interested in faith-based services for abusers. As a group, many religious women want to continue their relationship with the abuser, but they also want the violence to cease. Since keeping marriages together continues to be a high priority for many conservative faith traditions, understanding what intervention services for violent men may reduce the risk of further abuse is imperative.

In one project we analyzed over 1,000 closed case files of men who had been involved in a faith-based, state-certified, program for batterers. Analyzing their personal characteristics, we demonstrated that while these men had similar rates of alcohol abuse and criminal history as men in secular programs, they were more likely to be older, married, employed, educated, white and from families where they had experienced or witnessed violence in their childhood homes (Nason-Clark, Murphy, Fisher Townsend and Ruff, 2003). But the “nugget” in the data—that which has the potential to spawn social action—was the finding that men who were “mandated” by religious leaders to attend such a group were more likely to complete the program than those who were mandated by a judge through the court system. Amongst the small number of cases where both the clergy and the courts referred the men to the program, completion rates were very high.

Attempting to understand why this might be so is part of my ongoing scholarly work. Attempting to get the message to clergy that their referrals make a huge difference is part

of my decision making for speaking engagements over the next couple of years. Helping jurisdictions to make links between the courts and the churches becomes part of the social activism that will initiate the possibility of change. Working together with others to host conferences becomes a time-consuming but critical activity. Efforts between the various forms of activism need to be co-ordinated to ensure that one's ultimate goal is never lost. In the work I am motivated to do, the primary goal is to reduce violence and to create safe and peaceful homes, for women and children as well as men.

CONCLUSIONS

My Presidential Address is a call for action amongst researchers who want to make a difference in the communities where they live and more broadly in the social world they inhabit. Some of us will do this primarily through motivating our students. Others of us will translate our research findings into various forms of social action in the pursuit of a just society. With knowledge comes great responsibility.

Let us not lack the courage to carry out our convictions!

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NOTES

¹*Social Problems*, vol.51, No. 1.

²Story adapted from one told by Locock and Boaz, 2004:377.

³Together with colleagues at the University of Zagreb (Sinisa Zrinscak and Marina Ajdukovic), the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek (Ela Balog) and within the social science delivery sector (Suzanna and Zoran Vargovic), I have been considering the interplay between religion and family violence in a postcommunist context. After three fieldwork visits, we have collected both quantitative and qualitative indicators of the resistance and openness to discussions of abuse in Croatia. This material has been supplemented by conversations of both an informal and formal nature after workshops I have conducted in the region.

⁴Clark, D. A. (2004). *Cognitive Behavior Therapy of OCD*. New York: Guilford Press; Reinecke, M. A., & Clark, D. A. (2004). *Cognitive Therapy Across the Lifespan: Theory, Research and Practice* (edited). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; Clark, D. A., & Beck, A. T. (2002). *Clark-Beck Obsessive Compulsive Inventory*. San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation; Clark, D. A. & Beck, A. T. (with Alford, B.) (1999). *Scientific Foundations of Cognitive Theory and Therapy of Depression*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

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