What’s Wrong with Them
Is What’s Wrong with Us

Michael A. Lawson, MS
Tania Alameda-Lawson, MSW

ABSTRACT. Boundary maintaining exercises and processes appear to represent a primary barrier to both community social work practice and complex change initiatives alike. This article proposes that the ways community social workers frame the need for systemic change, systemic transformation, and social justice can mirror practices and processes that perpetuate the common gap between vulnerable populations and institutions. This article offers a conceptual framework to develop social work practices that address multi-level and multi-systemic boundary maintaining processes and activities. Implications for the advanced generalist perspective are explored.

KEYWORDS. Boundaries, community practice, consumer-led practice, community collaboration, complex change initiatives, community development, inter-professional collaboration
Many approaches to community development are built on the belief that multiple individuals, groups, stakeholders, and communities can collaborate to influence and integrate community, organizational, and institutional agendas, structures, and cultures (Bond & Keys, 1993; Lawson, Briar-Lawson, Petersen, Harris, Hoffman, Derezotes, Sallee, Berns, Atwell, Nelson, Ynacay-Nye, Boyer, Western, Wisen, Ashton, Garcia, Kessin, Khaja, & Soto, 1999). Translating this belief into meaningful and replicable practice strategies, however, has proven to be a tall order (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Elmore, 1996). Moreover, even when groups do collaborate, we question whether promising working relationships and helping strategies actually transform existing structures and processes enough to affect meaningfully the lives and futures of our most vulnerable children, youths, and families (Adelman, 1996; Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Gardner, 1994; Giroux, 1997; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997).

Our practice and scholarly work has explored these issues within the context of replicating a consumer-guided and run three component model that links school and educational reform with social service reform through consumer-guided and consumer-run programs and other community development-oriented and collaborative methods. Because the complexity of this strategy exceeds the scope of this article, the following principles and practice theories define the general assumptions and foundations which have governed our work:

- Many of the challenges and problems experienced in low-income communities stem from the lack of meaningful opportunities that parents and residents have to pursue occupational development-oriented activities and programs that fulfill their aspirations for themselves and their children.
- Parents and low-income residents who are closest to community challenges—specifically those residents who are the most difficult to reach by conventional service methods, including the long-term unemployed—are the most qualified to identify the most pressing needs and/or problems in their community.
- When provided with appropriate supports, a community’s most challenged parents and low-income residents may be the best
charged with designing, implementing, and operating programs that address (parent and resident conceptions of) community needs.

- When parent and resident-designed and run programs are implemented effectively at schools, both children and families benefit—resulting in neighborhoods that may become revitalized and communities which may become more self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-sustaining.

- Sustainable consumer-guided and run change initiatives can be achieved only when a problem-solving consortium of community professionals and community residents is convened to leverage human, fiscal, and organizational resources sufficiently to affect existing institutional policies, structures, and cultures that are harmful to vulnerable communities.

These assumptions and practice theories emerged from successful work undertaken in South Miami Beach, Florida where a cadre of low-income women, known as The Rainmakers, influenced their school community through consumer-guided and run programs. Over the course of the Healthy Learners project the test scores at Feinberg Fisher Elementary have improved by more than 250%, school attendance has increased from worst to first in the feeder pattern, and the school was recognized as the premier Title One school in the state for two years during the 1990s. In addition, the consumer-led and interprofessional school-community consortium that was supported the project and facilitated meaningful changes in housing statutes and other policy issues contributing to the sustained improved outcomes for South Miami Beach’s most vulnerable children and families (Alameda, 1996; Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2000).

Thirteen states replicated portions of the Rainmaker Model during the 1990s. However, none of these efforts was able to generate the dramatic results and outcomes achieved by the Rainmakers of South Miami Beach. Nevertheless, because we believed that the Rainmaker Model could be replicated in vulnerable school communities, we conceptualized a way of practice that could help us and others understand how to engage low-income parents and community residents as leaders in, and facilitators of, complex change in vulnerable school-community contexts (see also Alameda, 1996; Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 1999; Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1994; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Lawson et al., 1999). Consequently, like other similarly ambitious community-development efforts, our practice strategy and reform model started
with trying to find a clear conceptual mechanism to help the practitioners we work with (both professional and paraprofessional) facilitate an end to the vicious, harmful and destructive cycles included in the lives of some individuals living in low-income communities. In order to accomplish this objective, however, we had to start by clearly articulating how to engage the hardest-to-reach individuals and populations.

**Replicating the Engagement of Hard to Reach Parents and Families**

Not surprisingly, we found that many of the most challenged and hard-to-employ families were hardened, burdened, depressed, and often oppressed by continuously negative interpersonal, community, professional-client, and institutional interactions. Consequently, in our view, the key to successful and ongoing engagement with these individuals and families depended on our (the practitioner’s) ability to help reverse such negative cycles of interaction by not perpetuating them ourselves. Through the use of a construct we had helped develop, called “paradoxical practices” (Hooper-Briar, Lawson, & Alameda, 1996; Hooper Briar & Lawson, 1994), we postulated that if we could find ways and means to frame consumers’ histories of “negative” actions, interactions, situations, and behaviors in positive ways—especially if we could take such experiences and translate them into occupational development and economic opportunity strategies—then engagement between practitioners and consumers would eventuate.²

The use of paradoxical practices has been successful in generating sustained and meaningful engagement of the most hard to reach and vulnerable populations included in our current work of trying to replicate the Rainmaker Model in a Sacramento County-based project called Parent Led Assistance Network (PLAN). During this time, we have learned to attribute this success to the constant blurring of conventional professional/consumer boundary maintaining practices. Because *guarding against one’s boundaries* is a staple descriptor for social workers and educators alike seeking to balance the often grueling personal tolls their work has on them, the metaphor and construct of *boundaries* has been a useful explanation to others of how social workers, educators, and paraprofessionals reconceptualize their individual interactions with vulnerable children, youth, and families.
Like other advocates of community collaboration, we have found that the absence of consumer-led community consortia results in community conditions and barriers not transformed or removed sufficiently to sustain the engagement of vulnerable community residents (Family-Resource Coalition, 1996; Himmelman, 1997; Lawson et al., 1999). We have also found that conventional service-centered, collaboratives and collaborations which focus almost exclusively on achieving service integration—and thereby improving service delivery and access—appear to be limited in their orientation because they often do not meet residents’ conceptions of what they think they need in order to better themselves and their community (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2000). Consequently, when we attempted to replicate consumer-led community consortia and collaborations in other contexts we acknowledged that collaborative strategies focusing on generating professional stakeholder buy-in may spend an inordinate amount of time defining and creating problem domains and action strategies. As a result, these consortia may not address the fundamental issues and strategies needed to improve low-income communities and social justice. This realization has challenged us to clarify points of collaboration and systemic transformation: what many professionals believe is needed to “fix” low-income communities—namely, the provision of more professionally-driven services—versus what our learned experience and expertise indicates—the need for more economic, occupational, and community development-oriented opportunities.

Authors’ Experience in Sacramento County

In Sacramento County alone, it is estimated that there are close to 200 community and neighborhood-based collaboratives (Sacramento Enriches, 1999). Although many of these collaboratives and collaborations are openly struggling to achieve their goals of improved outcomes for children, we have been continuously impressed by the ability of members from many of Sacramento County’s collaboratives to articulate their practice theories and assumptions in ways that mirror the (founding) principals and language sets outlined in the literature. It was because of this espoused knowledge of others that we began the process of addressing the need for the development of consumer-led commu-
nity consortia through professional jargon. Unfortunately, and somewhat surprisingly, many of these discussions—in spite of very cordial and seemingly productive dialogues—spawned disengagement and non-collaboration with and among our prospective community partners.

Because Sacramento County in general, and the state of California in particular, continue to be seminal “testing grounds” for collaboration (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Carreon & Jameson, 1993; Gardner, 1994; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997), our work with community-based professionals has shown that national leadership and pioneering are the cornerstone characteristics of each collaborative effort. Yet, despite this, two years of field work revealed that front-line and middle management professionals interpret collaboration as a deficit-based concept indicting existing professional work practices (see also, Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Crowson, 1998; Hooper-Brier & Lawson, 1994). For frontline practitioners, the notion of blurring categorical practices, structures, and cultures serves largely to compound existing professional work loads, senses of role overload, as well as general frustrations that reinforce the growing suspicion and belief that maybe things can not get much better (Cole and Pearson-Salazar, 1999). Despite underpinnings of pride, leadership, and ingenuity, many of Sacramento County’s professionals appear to be struggling in highly negative work environments. In many respects, the conditions which define their work and the types of interactions that occur in their work resemble the interactions and experiences of the hardest to reach families with whom we have worked (see also Adelman, 1999; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997).

In sum, we learned that the ways in which we elicited professional engagement (in support of the Rainmaker Model and consumer-led community consortia) framed the need for systems change and transformation to helping professionals in the same pathological manner that tends to alienate vulnerable populations from institutions. As we began to observe other practitioners with similar views of community practice and community development, we noticed that they were making similar errors. Since sending a description of an earlier version of this article through ACOSA’s listserv, we have received national and international correspondence outlining similar frustrations with how to engage professionals in support of advocacy-based, community development practices. They too are looking for “answers.”
These contexts and experiences frame our rationale for mapping a conceptual framework that may help describe the design and maintenance of boundary-related and change-resistant structures and cultures in vulnerable, low-income contexts. We offer this framework to help underscore the need for more explicit multi-level and multi-modal, strengths-based, social work practice strategies that address multi-level and multi-systemic boundaries. We suggest that the development of such strategies may facilitate more responsive context specific approaches to ameliorating what appears to be a real problem of practice. We conclude with implications for preparing truly Advanced Generalists.

**THE SALIENCE OF BOUNDARIES IN PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS**

Boundaries denote territorial possessions, both concrete and symbolic, that can be encroached upon, colonized, and reallocated (Becher, 1989). Some boundaries are defended so closely by their constituents that they are impenetrable. Others are weakly contested and open to fluid interactions and synapses. Boundary shaping, making, and maintenance becomes interesting and salient in times of great boundary change (Halley, 1997). Community organizing and development, empowerment-based projects, and complex change initiatives provide a rich context to examine boundary-related processes, practices, and implications.

Boundary-related constructs can be used to examine the construction and interaction between structure and culture in micro, mezzo, and macro contexts (Halley, 1997; Lawson et al., 1999). Interpreted loosely, these constructs may also help scholars and practitioners describe and predict specific patterns and causes of interactions between and among professionals, their professions, and helping institutions (ibid).

Boundary-related constructs are particularly useful when the terrain under examination and/or contest is defined by values and value conflict (Lareau, 1987; Lipman, 1997). Because community organizing and development, empowerment-oriented initiatives, and complex reform revolve around competing problem-sets, values, and ethics (Reisch & Lowe, 2000), boundary-related constructs may provide a framework for
understanding and negotiating these essential, but barrier-filled, pathways to progress.

Communities that converge in terms of their fundamental ideologies, common values and frames of reference, and awareness of their belonging to a unique tradition are likely to build structures or cultures, either concrete or symbolic, with strong external boundaries (Quantz, 1988). Although numerous studies reveal professionals’ and residents’ laments toward individual and collective isolation in low-income contexts (e.g., Adelman, 1999; Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Lipman, 1997), closer examinations reveal strong individual and collective senses of belonging and association to specific ideologies, tradition(s), and community.

For example, many low-income minorities have fictive kinship networks that supersede temporal and geographical boundaries and dimensions (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu 1995). Similarly, professionals’ associations and allegiances to their professions, disciplines, and their unique traditions tend to reinforce dominant structural and cultural norms across contexts (Becher, 1989; Knapp & Wolverton, 1995). Even in marginalized communities, where residents and professionals appear to (and do) struggle daily for survival, legitimacy, efficacy, and collectivity, convergent communities exist, in spite of feelings of loneliness and withdrawal within them (Lawson, M., under review; Quantz, 1988).

When the actions of insiders or outsiders threaten allegiances to a community’s shared ideologies, values, traditions, and discursive practices, attempts to modify the status quo often result in the permanent dismissal, expulsion, or alienation of the change agent from the community4 (Becher, 1989). Because collective resistance to deviations from dominant norms is often so severe in convergent communities, community practitioners who eschew social action and who continue to advocate for change in spite of resistant forces, are often left with the daunting task of one-person systems change. Over time, this take on the world approach causes burn-out and suggests that institutions are not amenable to change from within their boundaries (Lawson et al., 1999).

However, convergent communities and communities do undergo internal processes of critical reflection, examination, and change (Schon, 1993). When they do, the processes and conditions from which systems and institutions can be changed and transformed from within can be ex-
amined and better understood (Crowson, Boyd, & Mawhinney, 1996; Lawson et al., 1999).

Halley (1997) describes these critical processes as pathways to boundarylessness; whereby boundaries, instead of being constantly reinforced, are perpetually blurred by heretofore separate communities and interest groups. Others, such as Giroux (1997), envision this process as an arena for the development of new and sustainable (discursive) mechanisms for institutional transformation, democracy, and social justice (see also, Crowson, Boyd, & Mawhinney, 1996). However, because institutional boundaries in fact resist change, many of these contest laden intra-community processes are incorporated into existing mental models and modes of thinking, theory, and action (Brint, 1994; Kuhn, 1975; Lawson, 1997).

As such, a central and primary function of boundary shaping and making is to help protect a community’s solidarity or collectivity. Yet, in so doing, boundaries are also maintained by keeping “others” out. Consequently, when a different behavior, problem, or value set, either through implicit or explicit action, is introduced to or into a convergent community, it can be expected that, as a means of protection, individuals and groups which shape and reinforce the status quo may undertake activities and efforts that will manifest and reinforce the community’s external boundaries (Ogbu, 1995). These implicit or explicit actions of resistance can be described similarly in both psychological and sociological contexts.

For example, when someone suggests we, our family, community, culture, or interests have committed an act of deviance, incompetence, or immorality, we may respond by directly engaging in boundary maintaining activities, or we may achieve the same end by disengaging from the process altogether (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). One example is when a child welfare worker tells a low-income mother that she needs to go to classes to learn how to be a “good” parent, her reaction to curse at the social worker may be explained as a boundary maintaining activity, as may her non-compliance by choosing not to attend a court-mandated parenting class.

Similarly, community social workers, community practitioners, and social work educators often argue that the impetus for successful intervention stems from consumer and client identification of the issues and needs that are most pressing in their lives (Briar-Lawson & Drews, 1998; Family Resource Coalition, 1996). Post-modern scholars and
practitioners challenge conventional concepts of whose knowledge and expertise is important, under what conditions, when, and why, in advocating for culture- and context-specific practices and theories of helping (Lawson, 1999c). While these scholars and practitioners praise the practice of consumer/client identification of needs, it may nonetheless counter the positivist assumptions that govern existing concepts of professional expertise and therapeutically driven practice(s) (Brint, 1994).

Such divisions and/or differences in theories of practice may also prompt boundary making, shaping, and maintaining activities. Thus, when community social workers advocate for non-conventional interventions and practices in low-income settings, their opinions and actions may be interpreted by others—including social workers in the child welfare system—as a challenge to existing cultural and structural value-laden problem sets and procedures, resulting in boundary maintaining behaviors such as direct resistance, sabotage, or disengagement (see also Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Crowson, 1998).

Although the above may represent tacit knowledge for those invested in community practice, we believe that any prescription for generating strategies which can improve social justice with, and on behalf of, vulnerable populations should include an explicit understanding of stakeholder and community boundaries. We also believe any strategies should include understanding of the structural and cultural dynamics which shape, make, and maintain them. Without this understanding many helping professionals and scholars may repeat the same deficit-based articulation of needs that has separated these populations from schools, child welfare programs, and the practitioners and social workers within them.

When we frame the need for change and social justice by articulating the oversights associated with existing practitioners, organizations, and institutions, we communicate that they need repair. When we articulate the need for change in deficit-based terms, we fall into the same trap of boundary-shaping, boundary-making, and boundary-maintaining exercises as scholars and practitioners whose pedagogies and practice strategies are based on market driven, professional-knows-best methodologies designed to fix others. When we enter the boardroom to tell them their wheel is broken, what is wrong with them becomes what is wrong with us.
NEEDS FOR MULTI-MODAL, STRENGTHS-BASED CHANGE STRATEGIES

Dialects and dialectical intersections enable institutional processes to be collectively deconstructed by community stakeholders so that those normalized practices that are harmful, and hurtful can be transformed (Gergen, 1994, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Knapp & Wolverton, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This section is intended to map what appear to be some of the relevant boundary-related barriers to the creation of dialects and dialectical intersections. We hope that such a mapping can be used as a linking mechanism to reach, in practice, the process of reconstruction—whereby new modes of thinking, theory, action, and social production result in institutions that are not only more helping, but more helpful as well (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Gergen, 1994, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Hargreaves, 1996; Lawson et al., 1999).

We believe that one of the primary barriers to the development of these dialects, dialectical intersections, and discourses that facilitate and create meaningful change strategies stem from inter- and intra-community, organizational, and institutional boundary shaping, making, and maintaining practices and activities. While we recognize the social reproductionist elements and functions of institutions, we do not believe, however, that people are passive recipients of structural conditions (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Rather, we proscribe to the notion that people possess a social agency that enables them to influence, shape, and change their environments (Quantz, 1988).

Our focus on how to begin the process of deconstruction is to conceptualize a framework that is based on promoting and developing social agency, discourse, and new (discursive) community practices between and among professional and community stakeholders in context. We believe that one way to facilitate this process is to provide a framework for addressing, and eventually removing, the boundary-related barriers that inhibit the development of more helpful, helping systems.

Using Halley’s (1997) terminology of boundarylessness, the intended outcome of this framework is to help create interactions, discourses, and eventually, systemic processes and discursive mechanisms in which turf is constantly blurred instead of reinforced (see also, Abbott, 1988; Giroux, 1997). However, to accomplish this end, individuals, interest groups, communities, and institutions interested in com-
plex change initiatives need to learn how to more meaningfully engage each other (Himmelman, 1997).

Sections of the systems reform and collaboration focused literatures postulate that the integration of services, systems, and reform efforts can be achieved by addressing their overlapping spheres of influence and problem domains, as well as their individual and collective organizational, systemic, and institutional interests (Bond & Keys, 1993; Gray & Wood, 1991). Giroux (1997) believes that this process can be achieved through the development of new languages based on postulates that the way people talk about their lives reflects and determines the way they think and act. In this view, the goal is to develop, in part, what Kuhn (1975) describes as similarity sets whereby people find ways to describe and communicate similar phenomena to each other in spite of different perspectives and interests.

Others argue that pathways to collaboration are best facilitated by those individuals, communities, systems, and institutions who not only realize that collaboration and change are in their self-interest, but are also enlightened because they know that their survival depends on their interdependent relationships with others (e.g., Lawson, 1998, O’Looney, 1997). These scholars posit that one way to facilitate movement toward positive and outcome generating collaborative practice that supports complex change initiatives is to frame needs for responsive, collaborative practice strategies as meaningful additions to those existing approaches.

Indeed, collaboration and facilitation processes that acknowledge the importance of existing knowledge and expertise are one way to generate a framework for boundarylessness (Lawson et al., 1999). On the other hand, affirming existing practices may legitimize many of the elements which may interfere with the structural and cultural improvement of helping systems. The ways in which self interest is facilitated and/or determined may further existing and harmful power differences and dynamics among helping professionals, policy makers, and community residents (Himmelman, 1997). Moreover, professionals’ recognition of their interdependence with others may not necessarily result in significant changes in the ways in which they conduct their everyday work routines (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Halley (1997) suggests that boundaries and boundary-maintaining activities can deter progress to systems (and services) integration and change on at least eight different, albeit oftentimes interdependent, lev-
els. These levels include, but may not be limited to, ideological, physical, factual, procedural, organizational, programmatic, relational, and personal boundaries. We believe that professional disciplinary boundaries may also present a distinct and salient boundary level in complex, change-related contexts.

Our experience in replicating the Rainmaker Model suggests that the process of addressing, and/or attempting to blur, one of these boundary areas does not necessarily mean that any or all of the others will or can be addressed simultaneously. It does suggest, however, that a failure to address or remove any one of the aforementioned boundary areas can result in significant, and in certain cases irreparable, damage to the change process. Moreover, when we have tried to engage professionals from a what’s wrong with them is what’s wrong with us frame of reference, we have learned that the processes for developing paradoxical practice-like strategies for professional engagement are more difficult and complex than those for engaging our most vulnerable clients. This lesson learned highlights the need for practice strategies that address multiple levels and modes of thinking, theory, and action (practice) simultaneously.

Table 1 lists the boundary-related challenges that manifested themselves in our weekly experiences. We list them within the context of the nine interdependent, yet distinct, boundary areas mentioned above. We hope these areas act as a conceptual framework for further development of integrated, strengths-based, multi-modal, and multi-level approaches. These might help professionals improve formerly hurtful institutional and professional processes through interprofessional, community collaboration.

Although Table 1 defines the boundary-related practices and processes of our work, we’ve found that professional schools do not address such issues in proportion to their occurrence in the “real world.” Additional contextualized descriptions of critically driven, strengths-based strategies are needed to address the boundary-related barriers to complex change. The ability to create pathways to boundarylessness, and more importantly, the institutional transformation that improves outcomes for our most vulnerable clients, depend on such lesson sharing.

While we recognize that the realization of such context specific approaches represents a formidable journey in and of itself, without such strategies, we are fearful that modifications of Simon and Garfunkel’s hallowed words will resonate in vulnerable communities, institutions,
### TABLE 1. Sketch of Boundary Maintaining Activities

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<tr>
<th>Boundary Area</th>
<th>Manifestations of Boundary Maintenance</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical</strong></td>
<td>• Limitations of space</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Insider-outsider biases and prejudices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Geographical restrictions such as questions over zoning and jurisdiction including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• State-county disclaimers and conflicts</td>
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<td>• State-city disclaimers and conflicts</td>
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<td>• County-city disclaimers and conflicts</td>
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<td>• County-municipality disclaimers and conflicts</td>
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<td>• School district-school district disclaimers and conflicts</td>
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<td><strong>Relational</strong></td>
<td>• Rigid reward structures</td>
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<td>• Rigid accountability structures</td>
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<td>• Loose reward structures</td>
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<td>• Loose accountability structures</td>
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<td>• Limiting and delimiting policies</td>
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<td>• Comprehensive policy</td>
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<td>• Vague policy</td>
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<td>• Needs for capacity building</td>
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<td>• Categorical decision making</td>
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<td>• Holistic Decision Making</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Indecision</td>
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<td><strong>Factual</strong></td>
<td>• Includes different interpretations and perceptions of similar phenomena and shared experiences stemming (usually) from different culturally constructed meanings:</td>
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<td>• Outcome vs. output arguments</td>
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<td>• Half-full vs. half-empty arguments</td>
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<td>• Conflicts over whose data best frames the problem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Methodological conflicts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Actions and task espoused vs. actions and tasks accomplished arguments</td>
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<td><strong>Professional-Disciplinary</strong></td>
<td>• Methodological conflicts</td>
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<td>• Epistemological conflicts</td>
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<td>• Ontological conflicts</td>
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<td>• Specialization conflicts</td>
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<td>• Language and nomenclature differences and conflicts</td>
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<td>• Funding conflicts</td>
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<td>• Market-driven changes</td>
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<td>• Reward conflicts</td>
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<td>• Union conflicts</td>
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<td>• Union restrictions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Historicity</td>
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<td><strong>Procedural</strong></td>
<td>• Rigid individual work routines and conceptions of competent practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Canonized individual and collective work routines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I am/we are already doing that” statements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Soft-money/Categorical Mandated Limitations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technology introductions, implementations, or changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boundary Area</td>
<td>Manifestations of Boundary Maintenance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Organizational** | • Inter-organizational rivalries and conflicts  
• Intra-organizational rivalries and conflicts  
• Threats of down-sizing  
• Threats of job cuts  
• Static missions  
• Reformitis/Projectitis  
• Unstable missions  
• Threats to existing missions  
• Vision arguments  
• Lack of vision arguments  
• Problem domain conflicts  
• “Bureaucratic outs”  
• Soft-money/Categorical mandated limitations |
| **Programmatic** | • Limiting soft-money/categorical mandates including:  
  - Rigid problem focus and settling  
  - Categorical objectives  
  - Competition vs. collaborative dichotomies  
  - Mandated collaborations  
  - Evaluation conflicts  
  - Non-compliance |
| **Personal** | • Political agendas  
• Career anchors  
• Personality conflicts  
• Conflict resolution problems  
• Communication difficulties (including silence)  
• Realism vs. Idealism dichotomies  
• Racism/Classism/Ethnocentrism  
• Anger/Rage  
• Fear  
• Despair  
• Personal history-experience with pain/transference |
| **Ideological** | • Includes and/or relates to all of the above, and the following conflicting world views and mind sets:  
  - Morality vs. immorality  
  - Caring vs. negligence and indifference  
  - Fatalism vs. optimism  
  - Different and Competing Spiritual Orientations  
  - Strength-based vs. deficit-based  
  - Dominant cultural traditions/mores vs. minority cultural traditions/mores  
  - Collaboration vs. individualism/isolationism  
  - Subject-centered vs. service-centered  
  - Service or subject centered vs. child-centered  
  - Service, subject, or child-centered vs.:  
    - Family-centered or -supportive  
    - Community-development oriented or -centric |
and consumer-led efforts throughout the 21st Century: “After changes upon changes, things are more or less the same. After changes, things are more or less the same.”

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOUNDARY SPANNERS AND THE RETURN TO A “SOCIAL WORK OF BOUNDARIES”?

Bond and Keys (1993) describe the importance of “Boundary Spanners” who can relate to multiple groups and constituencies and help mediate the differences between and among them. While they caution that role conflict and role ambiguity can make boundary spanning not only difficult, but counter productive, we believe that, if boundary maintenance is indeed a preeminent barrier to complex change initiatives, there is a specific need for schools of social work to actively and explicitly increase the development of social workers who can help vulnerable communities mediate and negotiate these extremely complex multi-level, multi-modal, and multi-systemic barriers to community, organizational, professional, institutional, and overall systemic transformation. Because of the range of knowledge and skills needed to accomplish such an ambitious objective, and because social work continues to be the lone profession with the foundational focus of liberating oppressed populations (Briar, 1989), we believe that the Advanced Generalist Perspective can be utilized to help provide all social work students with multi-level and multi-modal practice skills and frames of reference.

Abbott (1995) describes the initial focus of social work as a “social work of boundaries.” He depicts the original intent of the profession as a creator of interstitiality, whereby social work served to mediate between all of the other professions. As we move into a new century of social work, our experience suggests that this age old focus is still salient to the profession today.

It appears that the devolution of bureaucracies will continue in the coming decades (Himmelman, 1997). It also appears that the movement toward grassroots, bottom-up, and value-contested change related projects, initiatives, and collaborations may expand further in scope and complexity (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Lawson et al., 1999). Given the daunting tasks associated with supporting additional needs for specialization in an ever and rapidly changing age (e.g., Dear, 1999), perhaps it is time to more actively facilitate the profession’s return to a social work
of boundaries. Although we recognize the multi-level and multi-systemic challenges and barriers associated with such a paradigm shift or revolution (de-evolution to others) to a paradoxical and non-conventional, generalized specialization, we ask simply: “If not social work, then who?”

Finally, our experience indicates that, through the leadership of truly advanced generalists, the most effective “boundary spanners” will probably be constituted by our most vulnerable community residents. Given the proper voice, means, and skills, we have found that because community residents tend not to think, talk, act, or behave in rigid, categorical ways or terms (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 1999), they are able to provide what we believe is sometimes a lone trump card to the vast array of boundary maintaining activities in complex change related contexts: an appeal to human decency—and within—an appeal and calling to the profound simplicity of human wants, needs, aspirations, and desires.

Because we believe that the vast majority of helping professionals enter their professions and specializations, in part, to achieve a vision and mission that is larger than themselves, the processes included in helping to enable community residents to boundary span, may become a vehicle in which conventional practitioners can continue to use their expert knowledge in ways that help support people in addition to serving or servicing them. In turn, such a process, in and of itself, may be a mechanism to avoid some of the levels of boundary maintaining activities sketched above. Yet, the question remains, how can we meaningfully and effectively begin that process of engagement across contexts, cultures, and systems?

**CONCLUSION**

Our work in trying to replicate and better understand the pathways to bottom-up systems transformation in support of consumer-guided and consumer-run efforts indicates that boundary maintaining activities are a primary barrier. We also believe that our methods and means of framing the need for change have represented a significant part of the problem. If we are not alone, and the challenges associated with negotiating boundaries, both perceived and real, do in fact represent a primary, “real problem of practice,” then we believe social work educators can be lead
agents in answering this call. Whether or not existing curricula and degree structures are also in need of transformation (e.g., Dear, 1999) is the subject for additional research, debate, and inquiry. Nonetheless, as Abbott (1995) notes:

The environment, in fact, looks in many ways as it did 100 years ago. Again, we have a welter of social services so confused that no one can figure it out. Again, the populations to be served are often both difficult and despised. Again, there is a diffuse sense that those institutions that ought to be caring for individual welfare in this society are failing in that task. It was from such a complex conjecture that the old profession of social work emerged. (p. 562)

Perhaps a return to a “social work of boundaries” is the greatest contribution to social justice that social work and social work educators can make in the 21st Century.

NOTES

1. The term “consumer” has been the subject of consumer-producer/market-based service analyses which critically question who benefits from conventional service delivery strategies and exchange frameworks. We continue the use of the term, in spite of its limitations and susceptibility to power differentials, because we find it the “lesser of two evils” when compared to conventional, client-based terminology. The need for new languages which may greater support and facilitate complex change initiatives remains.

2. The basic assumptions and action steps of paradoxical practice can be divided into four parts:

   • Help consumers achieve their potential through intensive supports and advocacy.
   • Consumers need to be viewed as experts over their lived experiences, values, and frames of reference. Practitioners can help consumers achieve their potential by helping them to discover and nurture their talents from these “negative” lived experience(s).
   • Consumers need practitioners to help provide meaningful and accelerated learning opportunities for personal and professional growth—not remedial practices aimed at erasing pathology.
   • Practitioners need to help consumers address concrete needs and economic stabilization before addressing root causes of their challenges and/or problems.

3. The loose terminology of “boundary-related constructs” refers to what we believe to be non-dichotomous elements of boundary theory, career theory, institutional the-
ory, social deviance theory, conflict theory, stakeholder theory, and critical theory (see also, Gray & Wood, 1991). Recognizing that such a leap may prompt boundary maintaining activity in and of itself, our intent in “blurring the boundaries” of these theories is not to minimize the unique elements of these macro theories, but to try to more broadly conceptualize what has become a contextualized problem and challenge associated with our work.

4. Discursive practices refer to the construction and maintenance of a community’s entire system of symbols and signs—both explicit and implicit (Lawson et al., 1999).

5. According to Briar-Lawson et al. (2000), “Dialects” are embedded in multi-modal intervention and improvement strategies that promote new knowledge, values, and sensitivities. Dialectical intersections refer to the points of engagement which enable such strategies to eventuate.

6. Discourse refers to recurrent patterns of language used to reflect individual and group practices and values (Giroux, 1997; Lawson et al., 1999).

REFERENCES


CORRECTION

The Journal of Community Practice regrets the errors in citations, Volume 7, Issue 2, pages 97 and 98, in Rothman’s article. The four citations for “Khinduka, 1987” should read “Narayan, 1994.” We regret any confusion this error may have caused.