

DR. HAROLD DINER MEMORIAL LECTURER

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Introduction

Thank you Dr. Rosenberg. It is a great honor to be here and to be invited to speak as the Dr. Harold Diner Memorial Lecturer. It's a beautiful day and I've always wanted to come to Wave Hill as I know of its reputation in the arts community and to come to speak to health professionals about Meltdown's creative `social service arts' programs at this time, at this place seems almost too good to be true. I will begin with a song from my earlier days as an avant garde performance artist when Meltdown first began...(sing) "The Meltdown Song"

Introduction Continued

Founded in 1983, Meltdown, Inc. is a not-for-profit social service arts organization which produces innovative cultural programming. Meltdown advances artistic expression through public performances, festivals, workshops and symposia, with particular outreach to underexposed communities. Meltdown's staff include professional theatre artists, social workers, composers and musicians, choreographers and dancers, video and film makers, painters and literary artists. Meltdown is both a producing and presenting organization, and its work has been widely documented in assorted publications. In addition, Meltdown has worked with some of America's most acclaimed performing, recording and literary artists, such as John Cage and Sun Ra.

Meltdown has consistently done vitally-needed work on the local level, providing professional arts activities to youth and seniors throughout many Brooklyn communities. Core programs include *Voices of the Armory*, a social service arts project with the women residents at the Park Slope Armory and the *Teen Leadership Center* in partnership with the YWCA of Brooklyn. Brooklyn *WAVE* (Women Against Violence Everywhere) is a new program that focuses on community violence prevention and education incorporating the work of the Teen Leadership Center and *Voices of the Armory*.

Meltdown has worked closely with many Brooklyn-based organizations through its assistance in the production of special events. These include *Seventh Heaven* with the Park Slope Chamber of Commerce, the *Fabulous Fifth Avenue Fair* with the Fifth Avenue Committee, *SpringFest* with the Prospect Park West Merchants Association, *Earth Day* with the MetroTech BID, and the *Stay Healthy Fair* for The Brooklyn Hospital Center among others. These events bring together diverse community artisans, performers and local merchants. Meltdown also provides entertainment for community-based organizations, and in 1996 was selected to produce *50Fest* for NYC Technical College to commemorate the College's 50th Anniversary.

Meltdown has been providing unique job training opportunities for young people since 1993 in work with the North Flatbush Business Improvement District. Young people have participated in job training through its mural painting project and community violence prevention programs that have been the vanguard of many

youth peer training and violence prevention programs in Brooklyn. The present Jobs for Youth program allows further development of individual job placement needs and entrepreneurial projects.

Meltdown promotes creative expression as a way in which one can better understand the world and oneself, and seeks to provide this constructive, meaningful outlet through its work. Meltdown prides itself in its diversity of programming, its outreach to a multitude of audiences, and its celebration of differences.

Philosophy Into Practice

The philosophy of Meltdown, written in 1983, states: "This 'Meltdown' is diametrically opposed to the meltdown that is associated with imminent physical disaster. The 'Arts Meltdown' promotes individualism, creativity and positivism. We believe art in this day is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity. It is true that in the event of physical and spiritual meltdowns there is risk. But the possibilities that will result, if motivated by love, are infinite. The 'Meltdown' is political in that the action to work together, to respect individual actions and to make 'art' -- which to us is to be know and express oneself -- is an action society can take to celebrate life.

Meltdown's mission, based on this philosophy, is to promote creative expression to underexposed populations as a means by which individuals can better understand the world and themselves, celebrate differences, and to provide a way in which communities can organize and take action."

AND WHAT ABOUT THE ARTISTIC FEMINIST REVOLUTION?

The social work/art connection is the vanguard of social work practice. It is a new social work that integrates the work of the community organizer with that of the artist, health professional and social groupworker in community arts programs addressing complex social issues providing a creative mental health intervention and community health education and violence prevention programming.

I call it the Artistic Feminist Revolution. By “feminist” I mean a caring perspective, an open, inclusive view of the world and by “artistic” I mean that which is for everyone, the creative and expressive opportunity. It includes all disciplines as well as the anarchic and undisciplined. This “Art Part,” sometimes called “spirituality,” needs to be awakened in each of us. Elitist definitions of what “art” is prevents this understanding. We must be careful and begin by discovering and cherishing the art within.

As an artist, I believe that the root of all political activity is within oneself. When I talk of ‘art’ I talk of the ability to be, know and express oneself. Everyone is an ‘artist,’ however few recognize it for it is a process that includes life with all its imperfections, as well as respect for the individual within the collective.

An Artistic Feminist Revolution that is inclusive and free of traditional hierarchal bonds, that cares for its members is another name for group process and/or theatre. It is radical work that goes to the root of the action -- the root of the soul. It also

challenges the root of the existing patriarchy for it is a system that encourages change and supports equality. Traditional identities are challenged as communities are organized to help each other.

This philosophy was written in 1983. In the wake of Columbine and Kosovo, and the 6th grade students who shot four little girls in Arkansas last spring in a case of puppy love gone very bad, to the battles over gun control, I am more convinced than ever of the political nature of this work and the necessity of art for the world's survival. I am sure we are part of the solution.

Lost voices are rediscovered through artistic expression. Individual and group needs are actualized, and communities are identified in this process. Change occurs within the individual first and is then communicated to the community. Health professionals who incorporate this process in her or his practice can be powerful change agents.

At the root of Meltdown's philosophy and practice is the use of theatre and art in community organizing and violence prevention programs. We have developed theatre programs with children, teens, shelter residents, senior citizens, inpatient and outpatient programs, and the general public. I have found theatre group work particularly effective with adolescents, seriously emotionally disturbed young people diagnosed with ADHD or various conduct disorders and the dually diagnosed mentally ill chemical abusers, as well as survivors of domestic and relationship violence and those diagnosed with PTSD.

Fragile personalities are often reached through this method as it is a very soft intervention. It is not psychodrama although it may as time goes on evolve into that. Psychodrama involves more trust than I encounter at first. It is great for people who are resistant to traditional talk therapies such as those with addictions or severe trauma. There was an article in Saturday's New York Times about this. It was Dr. Vanderkolk, a psych professor at Boston University who talked of the resistance of major institutions to recognizing how reality shapes biology. I found this relevant and, in a fashion, I suppose much of my work would fall under trauma studies when I think of the young people I work with who have survived family and other forms of urban violence including poverty. Most of the Psych 7, SED, ADHD children I work with have witnessed domestic violence. 90% of the women shelter residents, now MICA clients, began having abusive relationships as teenagers and were also as children witnesses to violence. All of the women parents in my present parent group with ACS cases of abuse and neglect have experienced physically abusive relationships as children and teens. It is a downward spiral of depression, despair, drug addiction, HIV, homelessness, and hopelessness.

Theatre is the primary intervention I utilize. It is the group. It is a clinical intervention that involves a creative cathartic process that really predates Freud. Think back. How did he learn about Oedipus in the first place if it weren't for all those plays in the coliseums?

When viewed through the psychoanalytic, therapeutic lens the relationship between the client and therapist is key. In this case the client is the group. The therapeutic

relationship viewed in context of group work methodology is determined by group needs at times appearing in conflict with individual needs. But this is the work, helping the individual adapt and change according to agreed group purpose and need. It is not casework in a group, it is group work in a group (Kurland, Salmon 1990).

The problem is often systemic and herein lies the inherent social action potential of every group (Breton 1990). Specifically, with regard to Meltdown's program this is part of the group content, the task, the presentation of the play, the ongoing teaching of the work when the individuals are so empowered to act and present work learned.

I hesitate to use the word 'empowerment' as recently I have become aware of anger in the Black community when white social workers use the word empowerment, but the guiding principle of good old fashioned group work is self-determination and mutual aid. The worker, no matter what color, can only lead the way.

As a white worker mostly with non-white people, I am sorry to be politically incorrect but I never like to say 'people of color' because it implies that I am of no color, and Black lets out Asians, and I know I offend if I say Hispanic or Latino -- I just mean non-white really and I am viewing through my eyes at this time. I am perhaps hypersensitive on issues of race for I have often offended when I had no intent.

The very nature of being white and teaching about violence implied to some that I thought non-white kids violent. So, I have learned to address race early on before a

controversy, so that we may be able to talk differences and problems.

Recently, an older African-American PHD became very annoyed when I discussed the goal of the group as empowering members to advocate for themselves within the system. Of course, he happened to be in power at that particular system so that could have been the problem, but the intensity of his attack on me surprised me.

And then I was reading about a community health program by a doctor who told of an elderly gentleman saying, “if I have to hear another white person talking about empowering our community...” with all my work in the community I never heard this before. So, I'm thinking this is probably part of the resistance I encountered. I am learning constantly how to be more sensitive. It does not matter whether I intended to be racist or not. I do intend to be anti-racist and so I will try to be as sensitive as possible -- this does not mean I will necessarily stop teaching the children I love about relationship abuse, but I will try to include the discussion on race.

Racism and sexism and classism are the root of much of the violence in our communities - all of our communities, the upper middle-class suburbs and the inner cities. As a white worker I always encourage dialogue. Many of our acting scenes directly address racial controversies such as interracial dating and affirmative action as a means to engage communities in dialogue on race. It is an incredibly hot subject, with long histories of hurt and pain. Again, art plays a big part in the exploration of some of the pain. Too often we jump to the solutions such as diversity training and cultural studies without exploring the pain and allowing a channel, a vent for the rage of racism. I have seen this done in remarkable ways through theatre and poetry. After

the Diallo shooting, the poetry and performances that I saw emerge from Black artists, although maybe painful to listen to, were wonderfully healing.

I will focus on the work with young people...

In 1993 Meltdown published Teenscenes with a grant from former Mayor Dinkins' Stop the Violence Fund. It was a collection to date of the work that had developed in Meltdown's Community Programs with young people. Present work with young people involves a play called Peace Is Action, which we will be presenting as a docu-drama serial. It shows the relationship between gang and teen dating violence. It involves many subplots and characters and adult mixed races class and gender in our efforts to understand, voice and celebrate difference.

The drama scenes chosen are from a Peer-Education Theatre Training Program designed for teenagers on Relationship Violence. Workshops on abuse, respect, date rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, racism and sexism were given to the young people. Handouts that clarify early warning signs in abusive relationships, facts regarding relationship violence and identifying tips of controlling behavior in date rape situations, are helpful in training and in presentation. I have included three examples.

Through theatre the material in the workshops was processed. The young people worked through improvisation and the following scenes have been written as the results of those efforts. The scenes were presented by the young people to other

community-based centers and youth organizations. The concept of the Director is introduced in the work to provide the young people with the ability to stop the action and solicit responses from the audiences. For this reason, the Director is a character in the scenes.

In group psychotherapy the therapist is in the role of the participant observer. The therapist is an individual in the group who aids the group in defining its needs and purpose. It cannot be a successful group unless all members are able to agree or contract with the mutually defined purpose. The therapist must lead the group to this self-awareness. When there is perhaps a member who does not understand the others, this difference must be recognized. Conflict is the opportunity for understanding, acceptance and change.

Intrapsychic change is the goal of clinical treatment. This is also the essence of drama. Character and motivation. The study of the play is the study of the group. Where are the conflicts? Can we adapt and change? What did Oedipus do? Is our fate preordained? Nature? Nurture? Can we fight the gods and change the play? What are the consequences of our actions?

Programs that utilize the expressive arts build a self-science for individuals and need to be integrated in education at early age and in health practices.

Acting skills are life skills. Who are you? Where are you? What do you want? How do you get what you want? What gets in the way of what you want? This is basic

actor training. It is also basic life skills training. This is what Daniel Goleman calls in his book of the same title, Emotional Intelligence. Theatre gives words to feelings, it teaches group and leadership skills much as good team sports do, but the very important difference here is the verbalization of feelings, the critical analyzation of action and consequences of action.

Young people like to talk about relationships. I first became involved with teaching teens drama in 1989 because I was concerned about teen suicide and wanted to share my art which I was certain prevented me from jumping off bridges. The ability to express oneself has nothing to do with money and I wanted to share my own survivor skills. John Cage, who was a great influence on our early experimental work, once said "Teach what you know."

Teen Dating Violence

Meltdown's first Teen Drama program was with Good Shepherd Services and the work evolved into the Peer Training program on relationship violence.

I have also found the scenes on Relationship Violence a stimulus for discussion in approaching students in schools, especially if in a classroom for just one session. The scenes are handed-out and read aloud. Young people react to the dialogue. If the young people have trouble reading, plot outlines can be given with character objectives, and the young people can "act out" improvisationally. The traditional lecture/class format has been opened to a more interactive process.

Incest, sexual assault, rape, relationship violence, domestic violence, substance abuse, depression, loss of self-esteem, homelessness, urban violence, date rape, mental illness and school violence are inter-related. Often violence in urban life stems from values and behaviors nurtured in family life. At the root is domestic or some form of relationship violence. It is rare that one problem exists alone. In families with domestic violence, young people model the behavior of the parents, usually playing out the mistaken stereotypical behavior of “real men” and “a lady” wherein the male is dominant and controlling and the female submissive. Mistaken notions of love and respect get lost in abuse and control. In gay and lesbian relationships there is the ever-present control issue of being “outed” by the abusive partner. With young people, fear of losing newly found independence will prevent a young person from telling a parent or guardian. Gay and lesbian teenagers’ fears are doubled with the threat of revealing sexual preference to family and peers. Suicide is a choice.

Acquaintance rape is 60% of all reported rapes and the majority of victims are between the ages of 16 and 24. The latest statistic indicate that 40% of all homicides are done by victim’s husbands and boyfriends. The same percentage applies to female teen victims aged 15-19. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people, second only to gunshots (the leading cause of death for white and Black males) and drunk driving. Clearly, young men and women are dying and there is a great need for life saving intervention.

How we love or not love each other in the most intimate lives of our families and homes, the how and why of "rage" and our ability to control our emotions are keys to the root cause of much of today's relationship and urban violence.

As wife abuse and domestic violence came to the public's attention, so has our awareness risen regarding incidents of teen dating violence. Many teenagers find themselves unable to break free of abusive relationships. Patterns modeled after abusive parents are recreated in the young adults. Fear of losing newly won freedom intensifies the shame and isolation and often prevents young women from seeking help from parents or other trusted adults. In order to fully comprehend the myths and the facts concerning relationship violence, the historical significance of the patriarchy's domination of women needs to be considered, as well as the principles of power and control, abuse and respect.

Myths are prejudicial, stereotyped false beliefs. The belief that rape is done by the stranger typifies the rape myth. Statistics disprove this but date rape is still not considered a "real" rape. Due to such myths, incidents of sexual assault are excluded for the classification of a real rape. Many times, young people don't even realize they were raped. So completely has the societal standards of blaming the victim been internalized. Saying "No" is not even an option. Some of these myths are that "nothing happened," "no harm was done," "she wanted it or liked it" and that "She asked for it"ⁱ

Nothing is more detrimental to a young person than the “nothing happened” myth. Oftentimes victims are simply not believed, or the reported rape is considered a fantasy or wishful thinking. Particularly, in working with young people the message must be given that they will be believed if they seek counseling.

Similarly, the “no harm done” myth undermines and negates the violence of a rape. In date rape a young woman's wishes are ignored and she is controlled by the assailant. She is told to “relax and enjoy” and later the act is minimized as “just sex.” For young women, the threat of ruining reputations by having others find out may be enough to silence and feed into the “no harm done” controlling aspect of this particular myth. Also, the idea that certain ethnicities and certain types of girls get raped supports the “no harm done” myth.

The “she asked for it” myth is supported by the phrase, “your lips say no but your eyes say yes,” and is the belief of many young men. There is also a belief that women are teases, that women don't want to take responsibility for sexuality and that they lead men on but want to say they resisted at the end. On the “she deserved it” are claims that women are “sly, manipulative, devious and underhanded.” She also deserved it because she provoked it wearing certain clothes and working late hours. The rape is her fault. In working with young people, workshops wherein they are asked to brainstorm qualities that make a “real man,” and a “lady” are useful in identifying these stereotypical beliefs.

The fundamental principle that underscores work with young people on relationship violence is that the principal cause is male domination of women. In 95% of the cases, it is abuse by men against women. The remaining 5% is for homosexual couples and by women to men. Recently I heard the argument that men are often too ashamed to report abuse and hence it goes unreported and that 5% is really much higher. I believe this is symptomatic of the increasing backlash to the new wave of feminism. Many women also don't report abuse as they are isolated, ashamed and victimized by public scrutiny. The need for life-saving intervention is the same for teenagers as it is for adults.

Historically, women have been literally under “the rule of thumb.” This was the nineteenth-century law that said a husband could beat his wife with a rod no thicker than his thumb. Wife battering was not abolished in the United States until 1871. Ten years after child abuse received public attention, wife abuse was recognized as a societal problem. Despite public disapproval of wife abuse, in 1989 27 states still ruled that men cannot be prosecuted for sexually assaulting their wives and the laws protecting battered women are often not enforced.ⁱⁱ

It is important to understand that in homes where the mother is being abused the children are likely to follow similar patterns. This is not to say that all abused children will be abusers, but it is probable that sex-role stereotypes that enforce the submissive woman and the dominant controlling man will be reinforced. Teenagers, often in their struggle for adulthood, identify intensely with sex-roles they have been taught.

If they are not taught stereotypical roles at home, they are certainly taught them by the media and their peers. Inexperience confuses and the message that it is okay for men to be violent and controlling prevails. Inexperience is also the reason for confusion regarding appropriate behavior, sexuality, decision making, birth control and safer sex practices. For these same reasons, however, teenagers are often open to direction and seek out a better understanding of relationships. Education on the meaning of relationships and the differences regarding abuse and respect is of paramount importance to young people. They are at the beginning of their journey through life's relationships, and the hope is that an educational program that teaches how to love with respect may change their world view. The concepts, however, in the re-education of young and old revolve around power and control. Popular forms of abuse include emotional, economic, sexual, threats using male privilege, intimidation and isolation. In relationship violence the extreme abuse is physical. This includes punching, kicking, grabbing, slapping, choking, pulling hair, twisting arms, biting, tripping, beating, throwing down and using weapons. In domestic violence the abuser often uses children to make the woman feel guilty, by giving messages and harassing through visitation. Using the children is least likely to occur in teen dating violence but all the other forms of abuse apply.ⁱⁱⁱ

A woman is a victim of isolation when her partner controls where she is and who she sees and talks to. Sometimes young people are fooled by the attention and what looks like a real desire and need of the abuser to be with them. Jealousy and possessiveness are seen as signs of love. Over time a young woman may find herself alone and afraid.

In relationships, intimidation techniques such as yelling, smashing things, threatening looks and destroying property are used to terrorize and control women. Abuse of male privilege involves acting like the “master of the castle,” making all the decisions and treating her like a servant.

Emotional abuse lowers self-esteem by making the woman feel bad about herself through put-downs and name-calling, making her think she is crazy and through other mind games. Many women feel the effects of the emotional abuse are far worse than physical abuse and much more difficult to heal.

Economic abuse is controlling the money a woman has or is allowed to make and includes making her ask for money and giving an allowance. Young women are given gifts and controlled by the amount of money spent on them and then this money is taken away when they are bad or in some way displease their partners. A system of rewards and expectations around money is built into the youth dating relationship. The amount of money spent in a relationship is confused with love. The American culture reinforces the misconception.

Many of the myths and facts regarding teen dating violence are the same as those experience in domestic violence situations. It is important to dispel the myths with facts in interventions with young people and adults.

Meltdown’s Peer Leadership Violence Prevention Drama Program focuses on teen dating violence. The purpose is to create preventative educational peer training

programs for young people on violence in relationships. Through the use of drama and comprehensive workshops on sex-role stereotypes, abuse and respect, power and control, young people are trained to educate their peers on relationship violence. Through theatre, information is processed and emotional issues explored. Guest speakers from community safe homes projects, local police and victim service agencies are encouraged to participate by providing workshops to the Peer Educators. Important issues included in the training are racism, sexism, violence in gay and lesbian relationships and leadership training.

In gay and lesbian relationships, the same issues of power and control apply. However, some of the threats used by the dominant power in the relationship differ such as threatening to “out” the individual by telling parents or others. Also, police and authorities often do not take reports of this abuse seriously and the isolation can be more extreme. In adult relationships, the person who is dominant is often the one whose name is on the lease and the threat of losing a home with no legal recourse, as the homosexual relationship is not recognized legally, is particularly abusive. For teenagers it is even more important as the isolation and the threat of being “outed” is so fearful that many young people attempt or commit suicide. Also, by including in workshop recognition of gay and lesbian relationships, gender stereotypes are further explored, as well as providing a very needed message to gay and lesbian youth who may not be identified but need to be included.

After the first part of the training is completed, the young people present the information to their peers at other community-based organizations in public

presentation. The role of the director is incorporated into the presentation of the scenes as a vehicle for peer education. The action would be stopped occasionally, and the director/peer educator would solicit questions and comments from the audience regarding the presentation. At times, the director would ask the characters to answer questions regarding their feelings. This allowed for deeper analysis of the values and the motivations behind the abusive teenage relationship.

In one program, the young men recited the myths and facts in performances following an introduction by the young women that included other facts such as, “If it feels scary, it's abuse,” and “You are not alone.”

Each young woman in the introduction said her name and a fact they thought important from the content workshops. In having the young people select the facts relevant to them, the presentation is strengthened and of greater impact on the participants and audience. Empowerment is actualized and self-esteem enhanced in the selection of choices.

Often, I forego what I call a “teaching” point in the creating of a scene if the young people felt the dialogue is not true to the situation. It is a wiser choice to have them involved than alienated by rigidity. An important part of the program is re-training and educational points are repeated when necessary.

It is also important to keep in mind that sometimes in this work we are just opening the door a crack. Maybe ten years later the door will be completely opened. This is

what the clinician would say is staying with the client. In the process of using theatre as an intervention the worker needs to stay with the young people and accept their choices in creating the scene. In discussions, the scene can be questioned and understanding probed.

Journal writing is also integrated, if possible, in training. Often personal incidents of abuse are uncovered in this process, as the workshops may stir up and clarify confusing, forgotten past events. Incidents of child sexual abuse and domestic violence are frequently reported. I found journal writing invaluable for my understanding of the teens' process. Hopefully, they will be better able to defend or avoid future attacks and as adult women the memory will not be quite so confusing as it will not be as repressed.

Every presentation began by stating clearly that the goal was to prevent relationship violence and if people are or know victims of violence there are places they can go for help, that it is not their fault and they are not alone. Presentations would always close with a list of phone numbers for safe home projects or victim services. This is standard procedure for any of the instructional programs, whether didactic or theatrical in nature, designed to break the silence on relationship violence.^{iv}

When I direct teenagers in scenes, I ask them to look for the conflict, the trouble -- the more personal the better. The conflict is the essence of the drama. As the scene progresses the conflict is resolved. We do not have to have happy endings. Different endings are played as to the suggestions of the young people. I encourage them to

show their feelings but to use words, for this is the theatre and it is a wonderful opportunity for us to share our thoughts and to educate on the possibility of non-violent interaction.

In scenes depicting relationship violence we wanted to show the consequences of violence. Utilizing theatre as an intervention, young people develop skill in expressing their pain as they are encouraged to find the words and not just the action of violence. In so doing, the developmental needs of teenagers are fulfilled as the rebellious “acting out” can be explored through art. Identities are formulated, and self-esteem is built as they begin to express themselves and see their ideas incorporated in the creation of the play.

They also have fun. It is fun. I always tell them that an actor enjoys sharing feelings in front of others. Sometimes the work is painful as one must be self-aware -- however, this self-awareness is the goal of social work theatre.

Particularly as a prevention technique, the esteem building qualities of this program need to be emphasized. An antidote to abuse is respect and self-esteem. If a young woman learns to feel good about herself; that is if she gains confidence and self-knowledge through a program that teaches skills in which she can express herself, it is unlikely that she will find herself in an abusive relationship and if she is in an abusive relationship she may find the esteem needed to leave.

Life skills develop simultaneously with the theatre skills. As a young person learns to speak loudly and clearly on the stage, she does so in life. The basic actor motivations

apply to the real-life drama we live everyday: Who am I? Where am I? What do I want? How do I get what I want? What's in the way of what I want and what do I do to get what I want? as the impetus to action applies equally to theatre as to "real life." Conflicts are resolved or not resolved, and the process is analyzed in the course of building a scene or a play. Young people are empowered as they learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Identity issues are of paramount importance to young people and creating a theatre that allows them to express themselves enhances and supports that understanding. They are heard and their actions affect change, specifically in the creation of the scenes, however these changes reverberate, as well, in their everyday lives.

The majority of scenes are on relationship violence and racism. Racism and sexism are inextricably linked and shape the many social and political realities our young people encounter. There is, as well, a scene on teen pregnancy and one on safer sex as examples that peer training drama techniques can be applied to all teen issues and that safer sex and AIDS education/re-education is necessary to include in all work with young people.

Once in the program on relationship violence, a tape was played with women who are survivors of domestic violence. The first woman was Puerto Rican and the white women from the local battered women's shelter suggested we stop the tape after she spoke. The young people and I wanted to see the rest of the tape and later watched a group of white women from the Midwest discuss their battering. When it was over, a

young Latina woman said, "I didn't think white women were battered too." I am sure that the women from the center thought that the young people could relate to the first woman because she was obviously from an environment like New York City, however, by showing white women also as survivors we accidentally broke through a racist boundary.

Another time I showed a tape of men who were recovering alcohol and drug abusers. I showed this tape because it showed men talking about their feelings and I thought it would be a wonderful tape to show the young men in the group. Instead, they reacted fiercely against my showing the tape as all the men were Black and Hispanic and they found it racist. They did not want to see another story about Black men in negative, stereotypical roles. It was a difficult moment because I did not intend to be racist, but they saw it as that.

However difficult it is to start an honest dialogue, I have found myself awkwardly approaching the subject of racism many times. As a white woman social worker, I often am working with a client population not of my race. The selected scenes are either from discussions I have had with young people or situations the young people have experienced. I tell the young people that I don't know really how to fix it, but I do know that talking is important. People are afraid to talk, and we are never going to understand each other if we don't try to understand by talking. Get it out there! Maybe by our talking about it on stage others will begin to understand.

At a youth center in Brooklyn, we focused many of the group discussions on sexism and feminism during March, Women's History Month. This engendered much controversy among the young people. Each week, at House Meetings, the word of the week had a women's slant –“Feminism,” Sexism,” “Patriarchy” and “Matriarchy.” Reactions were unlike any other I have ever experienced in five years at this center. The young men were openly hostile and aggressive saying they were sick of this women “thing,” saying it was sexist that they don't have a month for themselves. When talk of the basketball team came up, it was very clear that they did not want women. I asked that they think about how difficult it would be for a young woman who wanted to play to join this team with that attitude. The very idea brought an enormous uproar of discontent.

One young African-American woman intern was very angry with me. I asked her if it was because many Black women don't like feminism because they feel it tears apart the Black community, pitting men against women. She didn't answer. I told her I wasn't against men. I believed we had to work together but we need not be afraid of teaching the young people the meaning of words.

It seems “abuse” also, is hitting a deep cord. “At my school if a guy hits you they say that means he loves you,” one young woman recently said. A program that defines the meaning of respect and abuse goes to the root of the violence in society. Power and control must be understood and the ways in which we have learned to love each other need to be re-examined and redefined.

Other teaching elements emphasized in the scenebook and suggested subsequent discussions are tips on how to talk to a victim and perpetrator, alternative ways to express anger, the warning signs of an abusive relationship and the individual right for a woman to say “no” at any time. Programs vary according to the needs of the participants and the amount of time for development. It is my hope that these scenes are a touchstone for discussion by increasing self-awareness for young women and men.

Testimony

Domestic, teen dating and gang violence are inter-related. It is a cycle that repeats itself. There is a long history of silence regarding domestic and relationship violence. Community violence prevention and education programs are part of present prevention efforts of Meltdown.

Testimony depicting this violence follows, culled from work with women residents of the Park Slope Armory shelter and teens in Meltdown's programs in neighborhood centers:

My father abused me, had sex with me. I can't really talk about it a lot, but it hurt me. I hate him. I thought about talking to him, but I just want to kill him.

I made him mad. He wants to control me the way my father does my mother. Sometimes I think it is our fault. We do something. They get angry and Maybe I deserve it. He is a really popular guy and I'm really lucky he likes me.

Sometimes you got to hit them to keep them in line. That's what my dad does to my mother...That's the only way. You got to take control...show her who's boss...Look man, it's his girl. It's between them, stay out of it.

My mother doesn't realize she is in an abusive relationship and now my sister is going to be just like her. I feel very upset...I need to talk to someone about this. I can't do anything to help the people I love....

At my school if a guy hits you, they say that means he loves you.

I never abused my kids, I sent them away, so they'd be safe. They didn't deserve to live like me. I never abused them. I left so I wouldn't hurt them.

We need some NA meetings right here. Yeah, we can all go outside somewhere else, but we need them. It's hard.

I had really fallen and my boyfriend he was there for me when no one else was and he told me that I didn't have to fall all the way, but he says all kind of things to me about what he's going to do to me if I leave him and he's just so jealous. Like the other day I told him I had to go down to the Welfare office, and he went down and just sat there, watching to see if anyone talked to me. I love him, I really do but he lives on the same block as my mother and that's where I left my son. I wish I never left my son there. My mother she has a had time, and she doesn't really have it together and if the social workers came and saw where my son was living, they

would take him away. I know it. All I want is to be with my son, but I can't take him here and I didn't know what to do. My boyfriend wants me to marry him, but I don't want to because he just doesn't let me do anything and his is afraid whenever anyone talks to men and then he gets loud and it's scary. It really is, but my son could use a father. My son is the best kid. God gave me a great son, born drug free, he's so sweet and smart and he doesn't have any problems, and he should get out of that house and have a father. A kid should have a father. But he scares me but then I think maybe we could get ourselves out of this welfare stuff. I love him. Don't get me wrong. There's a lot that's great about him. He knows how to take care of his woman.

You want to look like me. I lived with a guy who use to hit me whenever he felt like it. Get out. I'm telling you, he won't stop. Then I went to the dentist, and I can't afford to go back. He wrecked my teeth. I can't get a job until they look better. I can't look better until I get a job. I can't do anything. I want to go back to school.

I had a problem this week and I just talked to my son today and he said, Mommy, I think Daddy found out where you are. I heard him say something about a shelter. See, I'm here because I was burned out of the apartment that I went to after I left my husband. See, my husband he would abuse me a lot and he is a police officer. When the neighbors would call because they would hear me scream, the police would come and they would see his badge, and they would just say it's a family matter and go away and I don't want him to find me because he wants me back and I don't want to go back. That's why I can relate to a lot of what you were saying because my

husband he always wanted to control me. If I talked to anybody, he used to just get me in a corner and hit on me.

I tried to kill myself three times. But I'm not going to do it anymore. The third time my cousin was there and she cared. She said, "Why are you doing this?" ...

Why do we always talk about all this abuse? I don't want to talk about it. I don't even know you.

I don't want to reveal everything about myself either, but I have definitely had my struggles with drugs and alcohol. Many people in this community have drinking and drug problems. And abuse, domestic violence is everywhere. Last month 1,058 cases of domestic violence - violence mostly against women were reported for the past 8 months in the 78 Precinct.

You're not a mother to me. You're just a drug addict. I don't care about you. Why did you leave us? Were we so bad that you had to go take drugs and leave us?

They don't want a drug addict mamma.

I used to hate people like you, white people. I'm a Muslim. Then when I was in jail there was a white woman that kept saying hello...she was in jail cause she killed her husband cause he use to hit her every day, even when she was pregnant.

I am talking about the politics of oppression, the government. Why are there so many drugs in our communities.

A lot of us got beaten by boyfriends. That's a big reason for coming to the shelter, to get away. Or girlfriends...I was put on this medication, and they thought I killed the baby, but I didn't. It was crib death. I just didn't believe...I kept changing the diapers....

A 19-year-old girl came with her face slashed and the staff is testing...

A lot of the women don't recognize incest as the problem, but I know for myself it messes with your head.

Don't get me wrong. I can be responsible. I came from what you call an upper middle-class community. I had a husband and kids. Now my husband would beat me a lot, but I was in a nice house and the kids, and I didn't ever really think it was that bad... I left...I really wanted to kill myself. I had a plan and everything. I had the pills. It was after a party and I guess I was really out of it, and she called me up and said, "you know you have a drinking problem, don't you? I'm still in recovery and that's how I got here..."

Last week, Grace Dew, the former director of the Armory shelter...a friend to Voices that first year, was shot and killed by her husband who then shot himself. This work is in honor of her.

These problems cross all race and class barriers.

The participants have chosen to share their lives so others may learn. It is powerful work that teaches the dynamics of power and control as well as identifies the difference between abuse and respect, between healthy and unhealthy relationships. This is valuable information for our young people as well as the community.

I call this process theatre group work. It is also terrific job readiness training as participants learn through the acting and performance process to work together in groups and to present their individual self in a positive creative light. If participants learn the basic skills needed for a community presentation on domestic violence and integrate parts of their own fragile and often tormented lives in the work, the knowledge and empowerment gained far surpasses that of most college graduates. Job readiness is attained and the skills needed to compete in today's job market are provided.

I read an article recently in the Times that said experimental theatre was a thing of the past. The work of artists like Joseph Chaiken, Ellen Stewart, Judith Malina, Julian Beck and Peter Brook are gone. I contest this, unless of course experimental theatre is only defined by elite academics. As we approach the millennium, we need to look at what is happening in the communities, in the schools and the neighborhoods. It is arrogance to say it doesn't exist. It is happening. It is always happening. It is up to those artists who are doing it to claim the name.

Meltdown's Community Violence Prevention and Education Theatre Program is radical experimental theatre and the vanguard of theater and social work practice. The artist within is awakened. One of the dictionary definitions of a radical is “going to the root.” In this context, community violence prevention theatre programs are radical experimental theatre. It is a theatre that is both personal and political as personal pain is made public. In so doing, a positive creative channel is provided so others in the community can benefit.

Children, teens and adults need health education and prevention programming that address family violence issues. Meltdown provides public presentations and workshops in schools, clinics and community centers that address these issues. The format includes a presentation of acting scenes that provides the basis for the dialogue with the audience. Valuable lifesaving information is shared and awareness increases. A topic that only recently and sometimes still considered a very private issue is made public.

The training for the Community Violence Prevention and Education Theatre Programs incorporates an improvisational actors workshop format, and job readiness and team building skills training with traditional group process. For the teenagers of Meltdown's Teen Leadership Center, the women of the Voices of the Armory program and the professionals who join the program, training begins at the first group meeting wherein the members of the program introduce themselves and various scripted materials are read and improvised. The work has begun. Bonds begin to form and trust is built. The early stages of group work process are analyzed as

members are given time at the end of each training to reflect and analyze according to group work theory on stages of group development.

Through the study of acting skills, the improvisational work and the writing of scenes, the play is created and presented to the general public. Information learned by participants in small groups is then shared with the larger community. Empowerment increases as self-knowledge and group process is learned. Attention is paid to how the creative experience channels rage and fear. Personal pain is transformed in an empowerment process where everyone gains. Self-awareness is encouraged but never pushed as the source of the material are acting scenes developed after many years working improvisationally with actors and teens. Actors are taught ways in which a painful past can be transformed in a creative process, but they are not encouraged to share in public performances any personal events that have not been fully incorporated and this process has been particularly effective with women shelter residents whose lives are most destroyed by violence. Often substance abuse and mental illness are dually linked. Lives are completely disorganized. Many of these women are on medication, diagnosed with schizophrenia and borderline behavior further complicating substance abuse and addictions. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome deserves special mention as a diagnosis often found in survivors of rape, sexual assault and battering. Due to these combined factors, many talk therapies have failed. Meltdown's programs are under the direction of clinical social workers with expertise in groupwork and community organizing and have been particularly successful with this population.

It is important to note that the process entails ongoing support and counsel for participants. If integrated in schools and shelters through collaboration with staff members, necessary counsel would be provided and community supports identified.

A Case Study is Kate, a 38-year-old woman with a history of mental illness (had been on Thorazine), drug addiction and dealing, incarceration, with many incidents of violence where she had been beaten on the street and in her early family life manages to have 90 days clean and sober. Her children in two separate foster homes, having lost them due to drugs, are reunited with her after she leaves the shelter system. This was no easy chore and the five months prior to Kate leaving the shelter, getting an apartment and her children back, she participated in the Voices of the Armory theatre group. In the community she needs childcare and GED training, legal services for rent and housing disputes. Her emotional state, although stronger than previous when she was a resident of the shelter and using, is still fragile. Continued involvement in a community action plan that incorporates group process through theatre provides necessary job training in basic life skills and continued empowerment. She needs a job. Not only violence prevention but leadership, community building, personal responsibility and most importantly, independence from the welfare system are the goals of such a program. Kate also needs counsel as she struggles to maintain recovery, become a parent and deal with life's realities in which she was previously unsuccessful -- with a positive involvement in community activity, and the development of necessary skills, survives.

Community presentations of “Voices of The Armory” program have been likened to a soft version of Get Tough, the prison drama wherein inmates talked to high school students about the perils of drugs, violence and crime. In our program women survivors of domestic violence would tell their stories and engage participants in acting scenes and discussion on incest, substance abuse, homelessness and all other forms of violence against women. In such Health Education and Violence Prevention programming, the process of empowerment continues as knowledge of self and community increases, self-esteem is gained as individuals learn they can contribute to the world and be part of the solution to the violence that nearly destroyed their lives.

Present community education programming of Meltdown's young people depicts the inter-relationship of teen and dating violence. A case study is that of 13-year-old, Ana. She was raped by a group of boys in a stairwell. She told her brother who got a gun and reportedly shot and killed one of the young people, also 13. She had told a ‘trusted adult,’ who told her parents. A ‘trusted adult’ is someone who will believe and help if the young person feels for whatever reason they can't tell a parent or guardian. This could be a teacher, social worker, or relative.

Ana's parents did not believe her. Ana retracted the story saying it was all a lie.

Hopefully, it was indeed all a lie. Certainly, it is preferable to believe and hope that Ana be a liar, rather than to have been raped and to hear that a son who is an exemplary student has shot and killed a 13-year-old boy. Yet young people turning to

friends when not believed by parents is not an isolated story. Many young people I've encountered affirmed this reality.

Coupled with the fact that there are even fewer services for adolescents in relationship violence situations than for adult domestic violence victims, young people turn to their friends for protection when there are no protections from the adults in their lives. These friends appear to be gang members. Often the obvious and respected solution is violence. Presently my work takes me to run groups in schools, mental health clinics and community centers throughout Brooklyn and beyond.

The purpose of all community violence prevention and education programs is to increase awareness of the general public of the depth and breadth of teen dating, relationships and other forms of urban violence. Fundamental beliefs are challenged in this process. Recent efforts have been in corporations to reach the parents of others like Ana, to inform them of the ever-present reality of violence in the lives of the children. The rich kids are not exempt. The white kids are not exempt. The adults need to believe the children.

Resistance To The Work

We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

Elitist ideas about art and theatre, that theatre and art are trivialized by health professionals or marginalized by educators, that the artist is feared because why? because they may cry? because they don't make money?

I am going to read something I wrote when I was in graduate school...

(read) "The Angry Poem"

Last night at the Teen Leadership Center I run at the YWCA of Brooklyn, I opened a discussion with the young people ages 13-22 about this week's Colorado shootings. I asked if any had been talking about it in school. They said no. I was surprised. No teachers? students? no... and then the conversation seemed to jump to racism and police brutality, the Diallo shootings. I wondered to myself, my clinical skills are weak in retrospect, and I refocused on the students and the killings and why I thought our work with theatre to address problems was so very important, verbalization of feelings, understanding complex social problems etc.

"You always hear about how bad it is here. All the crimes, the killings and whenever something like this happens it's always these other places that no one has ever heard of?" Gregory, a quiet, mild mannered 13-year-old remarks. "What's wrong with these white people killing themselves and everybody else?" comments an 18-year-old actress with newly heard hostility. Previously, I had said something about these problems crossing race and class, but this wasn't what I now heard. What do you mean? I probed. "That's it. No one is talking about it. It's not our problem. My college intern responds. Nobody cares at the school. White people want to kill themselves it's fine." So much for compassion from the new human service professionals.

I am deeply disturbed by this. Where is the empathy? And this is my company. Our philosophy is anti-racist and certainly my practice, or so I thought. Once again, I most likely presumed too much. My thoughts race, I am the director of the company, I don't want to stifle the conversation. We had started to talk about the anger. I addressed the channel for anger to be in the acting creative process, that anger is also healthy if used properly. It can motivate. It can protect. Ernest states "fear is his best friend" and talks of the violence he has encountered in school, of going to school with a blade. It made him feel safe. I recall the sixth grader I unarmed the other day in school. I threw his blade in the trash. We talk each week. We talk of weapons and protection.

Anger and fear can protect only if one is aware. Yet, there is a need to express the rage, the confusion. It is energy that must be channeled, perhaps transformed. This is why we talk. But it is late in the year, and the students are expressing their opinions, and those opinions are very disturbing and hypocritical and yet my job is to teach, to influence. It is difficult to confront the hypocrisy without alienating. This is why we talk periodically on events in the news as well as those portrayed in the play. The play is based on real life and maybe it will help.

But there is an undercurrent here that I am not sure of. Only in light of today am I beginning to see what was going on. I sensed the same thing was happening when the war in Kosovo broke out. White faces are of no interest. There is no connection to the pain. Maybe if it were Black faces there would be identification. Why can't we all get along?

I said this last night to the group as they had heard it before from me that the biggest sin of racism is the separation. That it is thought that the two cultures are so different. I talk of the commonalities. The same fears and dreams, the same confusion and the anger and the pain.

I am not afraid to hear the pain of racism. That is why I am here. And it is painful. It hurts deeply. I am hurt deeply. Sometimes I could scream, but if you do they say you are crazy or they deny my pain because it is white pain, somehow not as painful. It is impossible to rate injustice, hurt and pain. But please do not label my pain. I am not feeling because I am guilty. It is me. Of course, I was raised Catholic and I've got the same kind of mixed-up guilt we all do as children, we are so confused, but this is not the reason for my screaming...

I will take it I will hear it... I will stop my own screaming so others, my kids, our kids, will heal... if it helps to yell at my white face okay fine, yell, but I am not a saint and sometimes I will yell back... and I will say as soon as possible I am sorry for cursing cause it is against the rules but not for being angry...

Racism, Sexism, Classism.

A principal tenet of social work with groups is everyone's right to belong. What does this mean? It means we are only as strong as our weakest link.

Outside the Park Slope Armory is a monument of a World War One soldier with bayonet running into battle. The women inside were considered by some as the weakest link in our society. Some would like not even to consider them as a link, however. I always thought that they were our hidden strength and that it was quite fitting that the homeless be housed in our armories. I saw their strength every time we did a presentations for the Park Slope community of which there is a fairly high rate of domestic violence, as their courage could address an issue make public the private and all could learn... the same is true with the young people in addressing gang and relationship violence. In teaching adults how to express anger creatively and maybe teaching us all how to cry, how to accept a little imperfection...

We are only as strong as the weakest link. As a society, we need to find ways to strengthen that weak link.

We try to get children to express their feelings. I tell 6th grade boys that it is okay to cry, that it takes courage to share thoughts and feelings with others and yet there is a hypocrisy here. As a mental health professional, I have been called crazy by sharing my feelings with my colleagues. This gets a little tricky because I want to be understood, and I fear being ostracized and I don't want to be called crazy. But I have definitely been considered the weak link and quite expendable.

I could tell more than one occasion of very serious incidents of institutional abuse of hierarchy based on power and control, not equality and shared leadership, the principles I am teaching the young people. Even in my present situation...I work with

acting-out young people, and if they act out the program is blamed. The worker is blamed. Are we not trying to heal, to give a venue? I my last Board of Education contract I had to delete the words “violence prevention” and “racism” from the proposal. The superintendent told me the parents would be offended, that again it implies violence.

The worst scenario of organizational abuse occurred when I left the Brooklyn Hospital and helped write a winning grant for an interagency collaboration on domestic violence. The testimony I read here today and the clinical information as to the effect of abuse gave the Brooklyn Team the highest rating nationwide of all interagency teams. At the conference, Dr. Tolan from the University of Michigan talked about Meltdown's work with young men in prevention and education on relationship violence, and I commented as an artist a couple of times on the use of theatre with young people and domestic violence survivors and MICA clients. This caused controversy within the team when later we broke into our respective groups to determine actions plans for our community on domestic violence -- quite a bit. Tears of frustration rose to my face when I was admonished by a hospital clinical director for having my own agenda in a brainstorming session wherein I suggested community violence prevention and education programs utilizing creative arts -- “But are we not to add what our agencies can provide, and is this not brainstorming, no one else has been criticized for their suggestion... The next day the high-powered executive directors said I was too emotional to represent them as a community team leader. When we returned to Brooklyn, they did not invite me to meetings. The team action fails although this particular domestic violence shelter executive director is

implementing a similar program of community education using theatre. But that is fine with me, and I am here and you are here, but I know racism, sexism, and classism, oh yes, prior to calling me too emotional she asked Meltdown's budget. When she found our budget was less than her salary that clinched it, I am sure. She did try to offer me a job but that didn't silence my advocacy for creative arts programming. And the team was made up of very high-powered women of influence. The training was on domestic violence. How to affect change and understand those effected by Domestic Violence, and yet the colleague who cried was ostracized as crazy, just what has traditionally been done to women who assert themselves by women who should know better. But we don't. These issues bring up very personal painful issues for all of us. Many of us have trouble handling conflict. Most of us will avoid trouble if we can. It is really hard.

But theatre and art can be fun. Sharing ourselves is love... When working with the women at the Armory, Meltdown was ostracized. Few people came to the programs, they really don't want to embrace the weakest link. Well, it does and most people don't have it, so they are often threatened so it is important to be strong so be prepared if you share your soul. We cannot ask our kids to show courage that we have not asked of ourselves. We must accept our imperfections and practice more kindness with each other.

Again, the adage that we are only as strong as our weakest link...

The weakest link is why we are all here, to help to serve to make better the spiritual and the physical...The link between the mind and body in healing is well documented and more is being added daily. Treatment for cancer, trauma, chronic pain, mental illness, sexual assault are embracing creative art therapies. Arts programming is returning to the schools, people are realizing the kids are killing themselves and we don't know how to help. Emotional intelligence is needed as well as visionary leadership whether creating art therapy or educational programs or establishing public health policy creative alternatives are needed. It begins with each of us, inside us, some say the inner child. Find the artist within...

Closing

This is the year of the butterfly...everywhere I love it...I think it is about the inevitable metamorphosis that the world is going through...and no, I don't mean Y2K although that's a thought, but I'm trying to be positive...

In Albert Camus' Notebooks, 1951, the year I was born, he called it..."compassion in the original sense, that is, ultimately love and poetry... but that calls for an innocence I no longer have. All I can do is look forward to the Age of the Innocents..."

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