
hearing our elders

On My Terms: Sharing a Story of Hypocrisy and Transformation

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The 4th interviewee for the Hearing Our Elders series is Mr. Bob Zellner. Mr. Zellner's experience growing up in the segregated South underscores a commitment to stand up to obstacles and societal norms, even when to do so was life threatening. His experiences remind us of a historical time not too long ago that, to hear, one might think could never happen. And yet, witnessing his experience in the context of modern-day struggles portrayed in the civil rights movement; the 2016 Tennessee denial of service law for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals; and the 2016 Orlando shooting outside a gay nightclub reminds us that the historical events of Mr. Zellner's past are not too distant from the present. The interview captures 6 themes: being nonconforming in the face of punitive measures, living a purposeful life, pushing beyond comfort zones, early experiences as resilience building, self-evaluation as a cornerstone for commitment, and giving meaning to grief.

Keywords: Bob Zellner, Hearing Our Elders, a purposeful life

El señor Zellner creció en una comunidad segregada del sur, y su experiencia subraya su compromiso para enfrentar obstáculos y normas sociales, aunque hacerlo pueda poner en riesgo la vida. Sus vivencias nos recuerdan un periodo histórico no muy lejano que hoy podría parecer inconcebible. Y aun así, contemplar sus experiencias en el contexto de las luchas actuales del movimiento por los derechos civiles (como la ley de 2016 en Tennessee que permitía denegar servicios a personas lesbianas, gais, bisexuales, transexuales y queer; y el tiroteo de 2016 en Orlando en un club gay) nos recuerda que los eventos históricos del pasado del señor Zellner no están tan alejados del presente. La entrevista captura 6 temas: el inconformismo frente a medidas punitivas, vivir la vida con decisión, salir de las zonas de confort, experiencias tempranas como factores de resiliencia, la autoevaluación como cimiento del compromiso, y darle sentido al sufrimiento.

Palabras clave: Bob Zellner, Escuchar a Nuestros Mayores, una vida con decisión

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Our fourth installment of the Hearing Our Elders series has at its center an interview with civil rights activist Mr. Bob Zellner. His experience and legacy both overlap and connect with our first three interviewees, the Honorable Congressman John Lewis (Parham & Clauss-Ehlers, 2016a), Dr. Terrence Roberts (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2016), and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter (Parham & Clauss-Ehlers, 2016b). Mr. Zellner's interview began with his sharing of the impact the Emmett Till murder had on the community. Emmett Till, an African American 14-year-old, was murdered in Mississippi on August 28, 1955, for supposedly flirting with a White woman several days earlier. Mr. Zellner talked about how this incident made parents and the community aware of how the protection of their families was threatened.

Mr. Bob Zellner (BZ): The Emmett Till murder in the neighboring state to my home state of Alabama was tremendously important, especially for young people my age, Black young men and women and White Southerners as well. Being young, 14, 15, 16 years old, it was a revelation that parents and guardians could not protect children against adults who would kill them because they whistled inappropriately or did some small violation of the segregation laws. So that was the political, I think, and economic climate of the time.

William D. Parham (WDP): I can't even imagine what that experience was like particularly as a child witnessing that.

Caroline S. Clauss-Ehlers (CSCE): It's a part of history that we don't talk about what you were just describing.

BZ: Yes, and one of the things that I realized later when I was beginning to research the civil rights movement and especially when I was in college studying psychology and sociology and history, I realized that I had grown up in South Alabama. We call it LA, Lower Alabama. We were in a climate of just coming out of a climate of huge lynchings and a lot of racial turmoil. In fact, in my hometown of East Brewton, Alabama, a young Black man was taken out of the jail in Brewton, Alabama, and brutally lynched in South Alabama and northwest Florida. I've recently found out that Florida was one of the lynching capitals of the world as was Alabama and Mississippi.

All of that occurred right before I was born. With my father being in the Ku Klux Klan and my grandfather being in the Klan and a lot of other relatives, that was very close and personal as a child growing up but that was not discussed. They didn't talk about that but it had a huge influence on us as children, I think.

To place the current and forthcoming disclosures of Mr. Zellner into perspective, a snapshot of the political, social, and racial climate of mid-1950s America, particularly of the southern states, is hereby provided. Legalized racial segregation and the third resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) provided the environmental backdrop defined by deeply rooted racial hatred by southern Whites toward African Americans (Cunningham, 2013; Wade,

1998). During the 1950s, civil rights groups, actually diverse in their composition relative to culture, race, ethnicity, gender, social economic status, sexual identity, disability, and religion, identified both longer term and short-term goals. The longer term goals included overturning systemic racial segregation and obtaining federal protections for African Americans and other disenfranchised groups relative to employment, wealth inequity, housing, health care, and access to educational opportunities.

Securing voting rights for African Americans represented the particular and more immediate rally call of “the Movement.” In Mississippi, for example, voter registration required paying a poll tax and passing a literacy test (Bullock, Gaddie, & Wert, 2016; Salvatore, 2007; Wang, 2012). Given African Americans’ scant financial resources, the poll tax placed them at a distinct disadvantage. For the literacy test, White voter registrants were asked to read *or* interpret one section of the U.S. Constitution, whereas African American voter registrants were asked to read *and* interpret one section of the Constitution. White Americans claimed the power to grade African Americans’ “interpretation” of one section of the Constitution with conclusions that often resulted in African Americans being labeled as illiterate. Consequently, they were not able to register to vote. These socially sanctioned practices resulted in some geographical areas having either low African American representation or no representation at all (Bullock et al., 2016).

To remain focused on accomplishing agreed-upon major social, political, and economic reform, civil rights organizations adopted strategies to develop a series of major campaigns characterized by civil disobedience and nonviolent protests. These goal-directed, strategically planned, and well-orchestrated civil resistance campaigns, characterized by peaceful demonstrations, march-ins, teach-ins, and sit-ins, were met with violent resistance.

The violence was perpetrated especially harshly by the KKK through lynching, whippings, shootings, beatings, rape, castrations, cross-burnings, arrests, jail sentences, hosing with water, and fire bombings (Cunningham, 2013). In fact, fire bombings were so prevalent in places like Birmingham, Alabama, that the city was nicknamed “Bombingham.” Targets of violent and vicious assaults against African Americans were directed at children (e.g., Emmett Till) as well as community leaders (e.g., Medgar Evers). Not infrequently, “sympathizers” of the civil rights movement (non-African American men and women who participated actively in the movement) were also targets of venomous attacks by White individuals and the “Klan” who steadfastly and vehemently opposed racial equality (Davis & Muhlhausen, 2000; Eisen, 2013; Lewis & D’Orso, 1998; Williams & Bond, 2013).

procedure

Mr. Bob Zellner was contacted by Dr. Parham to set up an interview for the series. An interview protocol was constructed prior to the interview (see interview questions in next section). The interview was conducted over the phone and recorded with permission. The interview was subsequently sent to a transcription service. The interview transcript was reviewed and the co-authors independently identified key themes. The coauthors then compared

identified thematic content to assess similarities and differences in content. The coauthors found great interrater reliability across themes, identifying six overall (see later for description of thematic content).

interview questions: on my terms

1. Mr. Zellner, take us back to the days of the civil rights movement and give us a glimpse of the national and local political and emotional climate that framed those turbulent times.
2. What fueled your drive to join “the Movement” and what factors contributed to you sustaining your long-term involvement?
3. We can only imagine the emotional ups and downs that you and your peers experienced during that decade of turmoil. What did you do, specifically, to get through the tougher times . . . those times when you felt like giving up?
4. From your lived experience, what advice would you give young people who are committed to change and meet great obstacles? How can they persevere?
5. The Movement is often associated with African Americans and characterized as a “Black” movement, so talk to us about your experiences as a White ally.
6. What changes did you see come out of the Movement? What implications do those historic changes have for the society we live in today?
7. Finally, what are the changes yet to come? In other words, what do you see as the work that remains to be done currently and for future generations?
8. What advice would you share with this generation of young people and early career professionals as they respond to current and likely future challenges?

thematic content

The identified themes reflect the turbulence and adjustment during the period in which Mr. Zellner was born and grew up. As the interview unfolded, it became apparent that Mr. Zellner’s being born into a family with a father and relatives who subscribed to the KKK, who then found a way out of that familial and societal zeitgeist, embedded skills and insights about how to transform oneself amid inflexible and unbending structures. Indeed, his story is one of a man who was able to promote change—both within himself and the larger society—through the reflective ways of being to which he prescribed.

Mr. Zellner’s ability to respond to structural inequities on his own terms is a model to consider in the context of ongoing violence and disparity in the United States. These realities are seen through recent incidents such as the passing of Bill 1556 by the Tennessee Senate on April 6, 2016, under the leadership of Governor Bill Haslam. This bill supports a denial of service law stating that mental health counselors can refuse to provide counseling to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals, and others seeking services if their sexual orientation conflicts with religious beliefs (Broverman, 2016). Only 2 months later, on June 12, 2016, the world witnessed the trauma of the Orlando, Florida shooting that killed 49 people and injured 53 outside

a gay club (National Public Radio, 2016). Through a steadfast commitment to do things differently, on his own terms, and in solidarity with the rights of others, six themes were identified from the conversation with Mr. Zellner—Theme 1: being nonconforming in the face of punitive measures; Theme 2: living a purposeful life; Theme 3: finding value in going beyond one’s comfort zone to be involved; Theme 4: incorporating the emotional impact of early experiences as fuel for continuing to fight; Theme 5: critical self-evaluation as a cornerstone prerequisite for long-term commitment and dedication to a cause; and Theme 6: giving meaning to grief. The sections that follow expand on these themes. Table 1 shows how these themes encourage oneself to make individual and structural changes in one’s life.

THEME 1: BEING NONCONFORMING IN THE FACE OF PUNITIVE MEASURES

Critical to an understanding of Mr. Zellner’s experience is his deep commitment to values that encouraged him not to bend to societal norms, even when faced with life-threatening circumstances. As Mr. Zellner shared his journey, which he described as “moving from KKK to MLK” (in reference to Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.), he talked about the important role of parental and elder modeling in making choices that support our shared humanity. His experience reflects the influence parents can have in teaching their children about the value of civic involvement (Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000). Research

TABLE 1

Thematic Content

Theme	Looking Inward to Make Structural Changes in One’s Life
1. Being nonconforming in the face of punitive measures	The importance that parents and mentors can have in teaching the value of civic involvement Parental warmth and encouragement can promote youth involvement
2. Living a purposeful life	Adults can play a pivotal role in mentoring young people Having an identified purpose can promote life satisfaction Having a sense of purpose can promote hope
3. Pushing beyond comfort zones	Pushing oneself beyond personal zones of comfort and convenience—parents and elder mentors play an important role in supporting these efforts, as well as the linkages such efforts can have to living a purposeful life Being a mentor can help both mentor and mentee have a sense of purpose Young people are encouraged to take risks that move them toward living a purposeful life
4. Early experiences as resilience building	Learn how to reconcile contrasting experiences Continue to persevere rather than give in to the status quo
5. Critical self-evaluation as a cornerstone prerequisite for long-term commitment and dedication to a cause	Encourage oneself to engage in critical self-reflection during down times Engage in ongoing learning focused on being oneself
6. Giving meaning to grief	Be aware of pressures to conform to negative behaviors Be aware of surrounding supports and the sense of togetherness that can emerge from grieving jointly

has indicated that a good predictor of civic involvement among young people is their parents' level of community involvement (Fletcher et al., 2000). Mr. Zellner shared what it meant to him to see his father leave the KKK despite being disowned by family members for doing so:

WDP: It staggers me how you said two generations before you were steeped in the Klan mythology and philosophy and practice yet you as a youngster saw a different way and subsequently moved in a different direction. Can you take us through that shift and that journey for you, that mental shift and emotional shift?

BZ: Yes, since I do a lot of lectures now, I call it going from KKK to MLK. That was a long journey from the Klan background to working in the civil rights movement. One of the great influences and the reason I was able to do that was that my father had gone through a break with the Ku Klux Klan. When he quit the Klan, it was a huge family crisis. His father disowned him and his brothers never spoke to him again. I never understood as a child how hurtful that must have been for my father to be disowned by his own family. But he had the intestinal fortitude to go through that break. His conversion from working with the KKK and being a KKK organizer to actually working with Martin Luther King and Joseph Lowery in integrating Alabama was a tremendous journey. So it helped me along my way when I joined the civil rights movement. I had the support of family, not the opposition.

At the same time, research has shown that for parents who are committed to civic involvement but are unable to engage in such activities themselves (e.g., long work hours, other commitments), parental warmth and parental encouragement are two influences on youth involvement (Csikszentmihaly, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). In some ways then, parents who encourage their children to become active in civic activities are themselves engaging in a parenting style. Parental warmth, for instance, has been connected with adaptive child outcomes (Csikszentmihaly et al., 1993). Thus, warmth, reinforcement, and civic engagement reflect three differing parental influences that may have an impact on children's social engagement. Research has found that parental warmth and reinforcement predict civic involvement among youth, and are moderated by the level of parental involvement (Fletcher et al., 2000). The following scenario captures how Mr. Zellner's mom, with her warmth and reinforcement, was a loving and even humorous role model:

CSC: I'm wondering if you could just share with us a little bit about the sort of mentoring [you received], both for our readers who are professionals and maybe haven't done mentoring and for students or future students who really could benefit from that. Your life experience really embodies the importance of that, of having role models, of having mentors in it.

BZ: Well, my early mentors, of course, were my mother and father. They both were graduates of Bob Jones College, which became Bob Jones

University. They were Christian fundamentalists and dad being a member of the Ku Klux Klan, I come from a long line of fundamentalist terrorists. So when my mother, her family was anti-Ku Klux Klan, although they were Christian fundamentalists, and my father's family was Klan. But when my dad quit the Ku Klux Klan, my mother rather joyously took his Klan robes and cut them up and made white shirts for the five of us boys to go to Sunday school in.

In addition to family as the first mentors, substantial research has identified the important role that adults play in mentoring young people. Outcomes related to mentoring include supporting positive youth development (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002) and building social capital (Terrior, 2006). Throughout our conversation with Mr. Zellner, we were struck by the critical role that examples of elder modeling played on the life choices he made, and the courage he had to make them. It was as though the elders in Mr. Zellner's life embodied a direction that he could follow, and choices that he could make, as they had done before him. This speaks to the tangible benefit and importance of civic engagement among elders and the lived examples they provide younger generations. Mr. Zellner shared how joining the Movement was a highly personal decision, based in part on elder modeling:

CSCE: If you could just share some more about what really fueled your drive to join the Movement and what contributed to your long-term involvement. You were talking about your father and his being a role model. We're wondering what other factors contributed to that.

BZ: Well, it was interesting. I think that I grew up in Alabama at that particular time, I graduated high school in 1957. The first Black student had gone to the University of Alabama in 1955. So as I was a high school student, I graduated high school in Mobile, Alabama, when my father as a Methodist minister had been moved from the small town of East Brewton to Mobile. It was amazing to be graduating from high school and going to college in Montgomery in the middle of what was the beginning really of the modern civil rights movement. The 1954 decision [i.e., U.S. Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision] had come down and the Montgomery bus boycott was tremendously important in the modern civil rights movement.

The fact that as a sociology student and a psychology student at Huntington College in Montgomery, Alabama, that I was able to meet Dr. King and Mrs. Rosa Parks and be taken—they actually took myself and a few other students from my college and they became our mentors. We were in an all-White school, church school, and we were very interested in the Movement. The fact they kind of adopted us was amazing.

So we experienced the Montgomery bus boycott fairly personally, and then when the sit-ins started in spring of 1960, we were very interested because those were students our age who were Black

young men and Black young women and some White Southerners involved in the sit-in movement. We were intrigued by that. Then the Freedom Rides also came to Montgomery, so I was able to witness the violence against the Freedom Riders. So all of that prepared me . . . I either had to accept the southern way of life and segregation or I had to oppose it and join the Movement. Luckily I was able to make the right decision. I joined the Movement.

WDP: We can only imagine the emotional ups and downs that you and your peers experienced during that decade of turmoil. What did you do specifically to get through the tougher times? Those times when you felt like giving up?

BZ: One thing that we had was really good examples. We got to know Mrs. Rosa Parks personally and how quiet she was but how solid she was, as solid as granite, and Dr. King as well, very courageous. We had that as an example. We also had the example of when the Freedom Riders, for instance, came to Montgomery, they were so brutally beaten. I visited them in the hospital. Jim Zwerg was a White student from Minnesota and he was so brutally beaten he couldn't see, couldn't walk. I remember at St. Jude's Hospital in Montgomery saying to this Freedom Rider, Jim Zwerg, I said, "Jim Zwerg, your Freedom Ride is over." And he said, "Oh, no. When we're able to, we'll get back on the bus and we're going to ride through Mississippi." I said, "If they treat you this way in Alabama, they're going to kill you when you get to Mississippi." He said, "I know. We've written our wills." So that was the kind of examples that we had.

THEME 2: LIVING A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

Our contention is that parental and elder mentoring are linked to and support the second categorical theme, living a purposeful life. Although this notion is aptly illustrated through Mr. Zellner's sharing of the impact mentors had on the purpose he identified in his life, further research is needed to explore connections among mentoring, elder modeling, and having a sense of purpose.

What we do know from existing research is that having identified a purpose in life is correlated with life satisfaction across adolescents, emerging adults, and adults (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009). In contrast, however, searching for a purpose in life has only been found to correlate with life satisfaction during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Bronk et al., 2009). It may be that, within a U.S. developmental context, the exploration for a purpose in life is important during the adolescent and emerging adulthood stages. It might be assumed that, by adulthood, this sense of purpose is somewhat achieved, or that adults stop seeking it out as actively as in the adolescent and emerging adulthood stages.

Like other interviewees for the Hearing Our Elders series, Mr. Zellner's story is one of hope—the hope for one's own freedom, for self-definition, and for making

the world a better and more humane place. The notion of hope, like purpose, “represents a focus on significant future aims” (Bronk et al., 2009, p. 501). While there is a dearth of research that examines connections between hope and purpose, existing research has found that hope is present among those with a sense of purpose during adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood, with some differing mediating variables. For instance, the agency aspect of hope (e.g., the sense that one has the ability to move forward) was found to mediate the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction for adolescents, emerging adults, and adults. This means that feeling one can move forward with one’s future goals is associated with increased life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009).

In contrast, the pathways aspect of hope (e.g., knowing how to go about achieving those goals) did not mediate the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction for adolescents and emerging adults. However, pathways did partially mediate the relationship between purpose and life satisfaction for adults. This suggests that adolescents and emerging adults might assume that having agency, or the will to move forward, is enough to meet their purpose and experience life satisfaction. However, by adulthood, having a way to achieve goals, in addition to the will to do so, becomes somewhat important (Bronk et al., 2009).

This research has developmental implications for the importance of mentoring during adolescence and emerging adulthood. For example, it might be that parental and elder mentoring during his early years shaped Mr. Zellner’s sense of purpose and hope, giving him the courage to pursue his life’s purpose despite threats to well-being.

WDP: You know the Movement is often associated with African Americans and sometimes characterized as a Black movement. Can you talk to us about your experiences as a White ally?

BZ: Yes. First of all, one of the main teachers about the civil rights movement was Eyes on the Prize. A lot of my colleagues in SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, were instrumental in making that series Eyes on the Prize. That was made at a time when Black Power was very, very popular and it wasn’t very popular or fashionable to talk about White people in the Movement. So in some sense the Movement was described more as a Black movement than anything else at that particular time. It was a little bit overlooked how interracial the Movement was, especially the SNCC part. We had the beloved community, which was all races and all religions and nationalities and all that. So that was part of it.

The other thing is just the term “White ally” itself. In the future it won’t be fashionable to refer to White civil rights workers as allies. A lot of people ask me, for instance, why did you go South to help the Black people? I said wrong on several counts. Number one, I was already in the South and I didn’t join the civil rights movement necessarily to help Black people. I joined because I was not free. When I visited the Black campus next to my all-White campus and got to know Martin Luther

King and Rosa Parks, I was asked to leave school because I had broken the civil rights laws, the segregation laws. The Klan burned crosses around my dormitory because I chose to have some Movement activity. I was called into the office of the Attorney General of the state of Alabama who said you're under Communist influence. So I as a person was not free to associate with the people that I wanted to. So I joined the Movement for my own freedom. So rather than being described as a White ally, I think of myself as a fellow revolutionary.

THEME 3: PUSHING BEYOND COMFORT ZONES

Pushing beyond comfort zones supports the notion that there is value in "jumping into the mix," taking risks, and pushing oneself beyond personal zones of comfort and convenience to experience lived situations (as opposed to standing on the sidelines as an observer). Theme 3 builds on prior themes given the important role that parents and elder mentors play in supporting these efforts, as well as the linkages such efforts have to living a purposeful life. Mr. Zellner's life exemplifies building on what has been learned from mentors to take risks that support a life purpose as well as by serving as a mentor to others. He shares his advice for young people who want to make a difference and be civically engaged:

CSCE: And in telling the story, I guess you've lived this and you put yourself in danger to live this and to make the right choice for what you feel is right. I guess I'm wondering for others, for young people who have a commitment, who want to make a change, who want to make a difference and they meet all of these obstacles like you have met and you have seen others meet, what advice would you give for them in their journey?

BZ: I do take the privilege as a 77-year-old to give some advice, although it's very risky. I think that with young people I have two pieces of advice, at least two. One is to take a risk—no matter what profession you're going into or what kind of work you're doing, take a risk. We're very risk adverse these days in therapy and all the things that pursue. We're told to keep your head down, go to a good school, get a good education, get a good job and live well. I don't think that's enough. So you have to take a risk. The other thing with young people, especially my outreach is to White youngsters who are wanting to involve themselves in social justice struggles. That is you have to work and you have to plan and you have to organize if you're going to have a diverse integrated life. American life still is very segregated. There's a lot of walls and barriers and we have people like Trump that are trying to build the walls and barriers higher. We have other people who are doing the hard work of building bridges and not walls. So if you want to have an integrated life, young people, you have to plan that, otherwise you're going to have a pretty monochromatic life.

So you have to take a risk and you have to plan to have a diverse life and they go together. If you take a risk and you are working with Muslims and immigrants and Latinos and LGBTQ people and so forth, you are going to have a great life. You're going to make a difference if you take a risk and live a deliberately integrated life.

THEME 4: EARLY EXPERIENCES AS RESILIENCE BUILDING

The strength to grow as captured in the first three themes is rooted in experiences reflected in the fourth theme. Gleaned from the conversation with Mr. Zellner are moments when he had to reconcile two sets of early childhood experiences. Arguably, this reconciliation influenced his entry into the civil right movement and his persistence with it across a 50-year period. Early emotionally positive experiences with his parents juxtaposed to scary experiences with the Klan represent the ingredients that set the stage for reconciliation. On the one hand, Mr. Zellner witnessed and experienced unconditional care, comfort, and compassion from his family. On the other hand, the venomous and vindictive postures of neighboring Klan members posed threats to his and his family's safety. Approval and acceptance by neighbors and the Klan were predicated on the Zellner family choosing to embrace racially oppressive ideologies and practices.

The Zellners decided to remain steadfast in their belief in equality for all. Mr. Zellner shared that he had a front-row seat witnessing the transformation of his father from member of the Klan to renunciation of their hate-fueled ideologies (see interview content in Theme 1). The strength expressed by his father to escape the legacy of hate and embrace the notion that all men and women are created equal propelled Mr. Zellner toward the social justice movement. These early experiences jettisoned Mr. Zellner into a life of meaning and purpose and provided him with much needed fuel to keep going when all around him suggested that he give up and give in to existing status quo pressures. He said:

When you have those examples and later on when I joined SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, I had the example of Anne Braden, of Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, one of the great Freedom Fighters of all times. Those were people who put their lives on the line. That's how we kept in the Movement. That's how we kept our spirit of a band of brothers and sisters in a circle of trust and we have that to this day.

THEME 5: CRITICAL SELF-EVALUATION AS A CORNERSTONE PREREQUISITE FOR LONG-TERM COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION TO A CAUSE

Given the painstaking road of justice on which Mr. Zellner and his revolutionary peers were traveling, inevitable feelings including emotional exhaustion, frustration, and sometimes futility emerged. Mr. Zellner was able to see these "down" moments as opportunities for critical self-reflection. In the very beginning of his journey, Mr. Zellner evidenced the skill of critical self-reflection. He shared:

Well, one of the ways that I persevered was that I knew very early on that being a White, a White person of great privilege of being a White male, Southerner, educated, etc., etc., I had a lot of choices. If I was going to work with oppressed people, then I had to make a decision. I had become dedicated to do that. I knew that almost any time I could turn back. I could go back.

He went on to say:

Well, one thing I learned about myself was to be yourself. One of the things that people tried to do in the Movement was sometimes transform themselves so much . . . I don't like a White male Southerner so the last thing I'm going to do is be a White male Southerner. Well, I always felt that I needed to remind myself I'm a White male Southerner growing up in a racist society.

At various junctures along the way, Mr. Zellner took time to refuel and replenish his spirit, recognizing the toll his journey was taking on his life and the lives of his peers to whom he was intimately connected. His pain was their pain and theirs was his. Peers relied heavily on each other for strength and fortitude. He said:

Oh, yes. It was very empowering. When we made that commitment to each other, we knew people who made that commitment and who gave their lives. So you couldn't very well be in a situation where somebody gave up their life and then later on you turned tail and cashed in.

This interview for the Hearing our Elders series served as another opportunity for critical self-reflection, even 50 years later. This time, however, there was something different about Mr. Zellner's self-reflections. Past self-reflections seemed goal-directed to monitoring his pulse and energy with the intent of answering the question, "Should I continue to move forward?" As we reflect on time shared with Mr. Zellner and witness his embrace of "now" moments to look inward and self-examine, what stands out is Mr. Zellner's motive to use his self-reflections as "lessons learned" that he can now pass along to current and future generations of mental health professionals. He shared:

Yes, one thing I would like to suggest is that as you are developing this tremendous thing that you're doing, multicultural counseling, you're encountering a lot of opposition because that's what establishment does. That's what status quo does. It leans against any kind of change.

So one way that you can change this profession, and I've been watching it for 50 years now because I was involved with Bob Cole and Alvin Poussaint and a whole bunch of people 50 years ago doing the same revolutionary work you're doing in psychology, psychiatry, and so forth. One of the things you have to do is bring those people in touch with the struggles of people in this country, the struggle with Latinos, immigrants, Black people especially. The whole history of race in this country is important to understand if you're going to do multicultural counseling, I think.

THEME 6: GIVING MEANING TO GRIEF

The challenges inherent in participants in the Movement and allied sympathizers responding wholeheartedly to the South of the 1950s were enormous,

overwhelming, and frequently angering. The tumultuous environment evoked a full range of emotions including but not limited to fear; individual, family, and community hypervigilance; depression; anxiety; grief; and sadness. Internalized oppression (Pyke, 2010) was also a by-product of these past dark days in America. There is no question that navigating the gauntlet of psychological ups and downs drained the human spirit. With that being said, the oppression of African Americans and the Movement sympathizers also triggered an effect possibly not anticipated by angry Whites and those holding Klan allegiances. This observation leads to the sixth theme, giving meaning to grief.

Oppression rooted in racism, classism, sexism, and other “ism-based” ideologies is a complex phenomenon the scope of which is beyond the limits of this article. The short and longer range impact of oppression on individuals, families, and communities is equally complex (Pyke, 2010). Needless to say, for Mr. Zellner and colleagues, the emotional toll was quite costly, and the temptation to succumb to pressures to conform to and resign to dignity-stripping practices of the perpetrator was quite compelling and consuming.

One unanticipated consequence for Mr. Zellner and his colleagues, however, was their forced togetherness. The silver lining in this conscripted social organization positioned them, as well as other individuals, families, and communities, to take advantage of “not-as-you-thought” benefits of the race-based ostracism. As a result of their experiences, they met people from similar backgrounds and circumstances, bonded around commonalities, identified shared strategies for responding to and managing difficult times, mentored each other and those willing to learn, and built coalitions to take a stance against systemic and legally sanctioned injustice. Mr. Zellner and his revolutionary colleagues were able to reframe their harsh and often daunting experiences in a manner that allowed them to draw strength from one another, thus creating synergy sufficient to sustain them long term. He talked about a recent experience attending a memorial service:

I just went to a memorial service in Washington, DC, last week for Ivanhoe Donaldson, who was a great SNCC field secretary. Somebody said at the memorial service [that] all of the people from Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, especially from the beginning, none of them have ever deserted the group, turned on the group or become a traitor for their own benefit, political or economic or whatever. We stuck together. So that was very important for me as a White organizer to stay the course. That's what we've done.

conclusion

An often-quoted Taoist proverb, paraphrased, proclaims that a person will never see his or her reflection in running water. Only when the water is still will a person's reflected image begin to emerge. The opportunity to witness Mr. Zellner's stillness-infused reflections of self and times past triggered our gratitude for the honor of coparticipating with him in an emotional journey back to America's dire and frightful past, now close to 70 years ago. The resulting shared journey through time offers several lessons that serve as

stimuli for individual self-examination and larger group conversations about advancing mental health professions and America's future.

One lesson is the notion that life does not happen to us, life happens for us. Mr. Zellner understood this principle. All too frequently, he bore witness to events, not of his own doing, that were life altering. On many occasions, he mourned lives of friends and peers lost in the struggle for racial equality. He did what he could, when he could, to respond steadfastly to the underbelly of America's dark side. This was reflected in the following segment of the interview:

WDP: Let me take a minute, Mr. Zellner, and check in with you. How are you doing emotionally now in this interview reliving and recapping those stories?

BZ: As you can tell, it's pretty emotional because we have to remember the people who didn't make it. In '64 [1964], three of our civil rights workers were murdered. In my first 36 weeks I worked with SNCC, I lost six or eight of my colleagues. They were murdered by lynchers.

CSCE: It's really hard to have lived that and have that level of loss.

BZ: Yeah, but we're survivors. That's why we have to tell the story. That's why we have to relive this a lot because it's our responsibility to tell the story.

In short, Mr. Zellner did not lay down or give up the fight despite the constant presence of malice. He acknowledged that he did not cause the horrific events that engulfed surrounding daily realities. At the same time, he recognized that he could do something meaningful to respond to the challenges he and others were forced to face and endure. He understood that hate-based ideologies and practices represented invitations for him and others to do something. He and others decided to convert this negative into energy to hopefully make a positive difference in the hearts and minds of the very people perpetrating atrocities against African Americans and other disenfranchised communities.

A second lesson, closely tied to the first, invites consideration that obstacles actually represent the paths on which a journey is to be taken. Ample and generous opportunities exist to gingerly confront life's challenges and to navigate related ups and downs within personal zones of comfort and convenience. Furthermore, choices to respond cautiously to both unanticipated and foreseen life obstacles often result in important progress and healthy self-satisfaction. However, history records and offers persistent and recurring reminders that important and life-altering changes (e.g., legislation supporting equal access to education, employment, housing, and health care) occurred on the backs and shoulders of persons who took risks and decided that giving in to comfort and convenience, relative to human rights, was tantamount to colluding with the status quo position of maintaining an "as is" posture for the good of the whole. In his own words:

One of the things we did in the Movement was we deliberately went to those places where terror was the order of the day, where lynching and castration kept Black people in their

place. We exposed the hypocrisy of the United States to fight for democracy all over the world and Black GIs could come back to Alabama and Mississippi in uniform and be lynched because they were wearing the uniform of the United States. Black people could be killed because they went down to register to vote. That was the most hypocritical thing in the world. We're holding ourselves as the great beacon of democracy and hope against the slave states of Soviet Russia and you could have a bus burned by a Klan that held the doors after they set the bus on fire to make Freedom Riders inside die because they wanted to do what? Ride together on a bus? This is an incredible history you see.

A third lesson invites consideration of the reality that responding in any meaningful way to systemic and legally sanctioned inequities demands a full-time and sustained commitment. It involves believing that the journey will not be easy, anticipating that targeted outcomes will be achieved intermittently, and discovering deepening camaraderie with Movement peers. Mr. Zellner shared:

We have an analysis right now, and I won't go into this in great detail, but of the third reconstruction. I studied sociology, psychology, and history. The first reconstruction after the civil war was overturned by violence and the Klan. The second reconstruction of the civil rights movement was overturned by violence and the Klan again. They killed Martin Luther King, Malcom X, Medgar Evers, the two Kennedy brothers, all of that death and destruction. We thought that women's rights and labor rights and voting rights would never be challenged again. That civil rights movement, the second reconstruction, was overthrown by violence.

We're in the third reconstruction period now and we have to have a political and social revolution that Dr. King was pointing to when he organized the Poor People's Campaign. So that's the struggle we're into now. We had a tremendous change through the civil rights movement but the work is not done yet. We have to have a thoroughgoing economic and social revolution and that's the period we're in now.

A final lesson invites consideration of the assertion that real change can occur through tough and difficult conversations between factions whose ideological positions and political stances are diametrically opposed to one another. Resisting the urge to avoid expected confrontations, frustrations, and aggressive push-back, choosing instead to meet these entrenched attitudes and viewpoints head-on positions multiple constituencies for movement toward the center. This lesson learned was reflected by Mr. Zellner:

I'll say one more thing on that. Liberals and progressives, and especially White radical socialists, always talk about the working class and doing away with racism. The last thing they want to do is work with any people who are White and racist. That's what I've done for 50 years. I've worked with the Ku Klux Klan. I worked with my relatives who came out of the Klan. I'm working now in Belhaven, North Carolina, where it's Trump country. I'm working with a White Republican mayor of Belhaven to save the hospital. He and I are working together with Reverend [Dr. William J.] Barber and the NAACP and the Moral Fusion Movement. So we have to bring people together across lines not on the basis of right and left, not on the basis of Republican and Democrat, but on the basis of doing the right thing, doing the moral thing.

At the same time, authentic change can occur through the supportive roles of mentor and mentee. Mr. Zellner's life story clearly shows how having mentors influenced his early identity in ways that remained throughout his adult years. Mr. Zellner shared:

One of my early mentors I remember when I was still in grade school I worked in a little country store in East Brewton, Alabama. My mentor was Malcolm Edwards. He was a Unitarian Universalist in East Brewton, Alabama. How would you expect to find a populist Universalist Unitarian White store owner in Alabama who could teach me about race and who could teach me about poor people getting together? So that was one of my early mentors who said to me, you know, we can talk about race all we want to but there's a whole lot more poor Black and White people than there are rich people. We need to get together and make a change in this country. That was 50 or 60 years ago. So he was a tremendously important mentor to me to open up my eyes to universalism or to have a progressive outlook rather than a reactionary, backward, right-wing, extremist outlook. So mentoring is very, very important.

Therefore, whether the context involves difficult conversations or supportive mentoring, change can happen by engaging in relationships that help us understand other viewpoints and develop empathy.

In the final analysis, life's ever-unfolding scenarios defined by both expected and unexpected circumstances present innumerable opportunities to make decisions (Clauss-Ehlers & Parham, 2016). Understanding that it is impossible to not make a decision (i.e., even not making a decision leads to an outcome), the question on the proverbial table is, "What kind of decision am I going to make?"

During the last several decades, numerous decision-making theories and models, with their applications across industries including business, finance, politics, military, law enforcement, education, health care, customer buying, consumer satisfaction, and career development, have proliferated American scholarship (Finucane, Peters, & Slovic, 2003; Hastie & Dawes, 2001). Some theories, models, and applications emphasize improving decision making (Dhami, 2003), whereas others focus on predicting (Payne & Bettman, 2004), evaluating (Cobos, Almaraz, & Garcia-Madruga, 2003), or explaining decisions (Oliveira, 2007). Weaknesses as well as strengths of existing theories, models, and applications are well documented.

Johnson (1992) offered a way to look at decision making that captures the essence of the current interview. Johnson proposed a yes–no model of decision making, with a premise that each decision opportunity has at least two components. One component, the "head," underscores the importance of identifying the practical, intellectual, and fact-based features of the decision. The second component, the "heart," acknowledges the emotional, intuitive, gut-level, and inner-voice features. Decision makers arriving at a yes–yes alignment of the two components have set the stage to move forward with their decision. However, decision makers arriving at yes–no, no–yes, or no–no head-and-heart alignments have positioned themselves to stop and take a closer look at the decision they feel compelled to enact.

Mr. Zellner and his fellow revolutionaries had abundant opportunities, across the decades of their involvement, to reconcile what head and heart were telling them. Revealed in the interview are numerous moment-in-time choice points at which Mr. Zellner and his revolutionary peers arrived, and most of their decisions resulted in fighting for equity and social justice. The incredible

journey of Mr. Zellner and his revolutionary peers that continues in this 21st century is chronicled in his 2011 book, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement*. Mr. Zellner's lived experience invites questions for the current generation of students, early career professionals, and seasoned teachers, scholars, and activists that include: (a) Do I want to actively involve myself in the movement for equity and social justice? and (b) With what degree of involvement do I feel comfortable? The alarm clock has now come on awaiting responses to one of the two questions.

sneak peek

Our next distinguished Elder bore witness to the courage of three American citizens who took principled stances against the post–Pearl Harbor internment of Japanese American citizens. Revealed in this intriguing story is evidence of government collusion, relative to the justification for the imprisonment of these three citizens, and the successful appeal of this case through the United States Court of Appeals.

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