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Professor Pugh

Midterm: Social Action Report

- 1. Write a paragraph of the mission of the organization. Some questions to consider are: what are the organization's goals? What do they do? (1 paragraph) (8 points)**
 - a. Make sure in this answer that you hyperlink to the agency/organization. (Hidden Water is a local organization that.....)**

For this Social Action Report, I chose to look into the mission and goals of the [Restorative Justice Initiative](#). The Restorative Justice Initiative (RJI) is a New York based organization that has concerned itself with increasing “support for, and access to, restorative justice approaches for all New Yorkers” (RJIa, 2021). They have stated that one of their goals includes actively listening and responding to the needs of any and all victims that request for restorative justice practices while in search of self-healing (RJIa, 2021). The needs of the offender would also be properly assessed and their process of re-entering into society would be made as seamless and barrier-free as possible. This would of course be done with the consent of all parties involved and no coercion would be used to get anyone to the table to communicate (RJIa, 2021). This process would most commonly take the form of having victims and offenders sit down to talk out what would be the most appropriate solution for both parties in attaining a peaceful, healing resolution to whatever harm was caused. Some examples of the work done by the Initiative include organizing public presentations about restorative justice practices, joining an advisory group of the NYC Commission of Human Rights to guide the implementation of restorative justice practices in city policy, developing a model of accountability for those who have committed sexual harm, and hosting citywide roundtables to discuss visions for citywide restorative practices (RJIc, 2021). The RJI has established itself as a leading voice in restorative justice practices in New York. Through

their calls of active listening, accountability, and reconciliation, the group has successfully worked to ensure that New York can be a place where restorative practices can become more widespread.

- 2. Pick a 1) review an archived webinar, 2) a live virtual event, 3) listen to a podcast episode (if they have one) or 4) read a resource document or report (any type of written document regarding the organization's research/advocacy, etc) and write a short paragraph summary (1 paragraph) on what it was about (8 points)**
 - a. Make sure you hyperlink to the resource/webinar/podcast you listened to/reviewed/watched (E.g., I read the report entitled [Love with Accountability](#))**
 - b. If you choose a report/written document:**
 - i. If what you choose is 5 pages or longer, read 3-4 pages of it, and indicate which pages you read.**
 - ii. Do NOT include one page factsheets (or several factsheets).**

For my secondary resource, I chose to watch a YouTube lecture titled "[Sujatha Baliga on 'Law's Middle Way: Mindfulness and Restorative Justice' at Berkeley Law](#)". This lecture saw the presenter, Sujatha Baliga, sharing her experiences working in Restorative Justice programs while also sharing the personal circumstances that led her to pursue such a career. Ms. Baliga opens talking about restorative justice as a paradigm shift that she defines as "A process to involve, to the extent possible, all those who have a stake in a particular offense to identify harms, needs, and obligations, and to put things as right as possible" (Baliga, 2012, 15:00-15:40). She goes on to explain that this process can include things such as face-to-face dialogue and re-entry circles. She then relates this to another paradigm shift she refers to as mindfulness. Mindfulness is "being in the here and now, fully present in a nonjudgmental mindset to assess current situations" (Baliga, 2012, 18:35-19:00). She believes that by being mindful one could be pulled to restorative justice practices. Following this, she goes on to explain the life experiences that brought her to her current position of being a restorative justice advocate. She shares that as a child she was sexually abused by her father. This

adverse childhood experience led her to become angry towards offenders and men in general. She began work as a victim's advocate but eventually found herself working in Bombay with enslaved HIV-positive sex workers and their children (Baliga, 2012, 25:25). Her anger towards the pimps and dirty cops of this area intensified. Following this, she moved on to Tibet. It is here that she learned that forgiveness is a large part of Tibetan culture and was confused by the resident's happiness despite going through traumatic events. After expressing anger with her own situation, she was directed to write a letter to the Dalai Lama and was actually able to receive an audience with him. This meeting completely changed her life as the Dalai Lama was able to get her to rethink her experiences by asking "Do you feel you have been angry long enough?" (Baliga, 2012, 33:22). This once in a lifetime discussion completely shifted Ms. Baliga's perspective and allowed her to forgive her father for his actions. Compassion and forgiveness became her primary ways of dealing with harm and those principles guided her throughout her work in the restorative justice field. Particularly, she works with juveniles in an attempt to keep them out of an overly punitive juvenile justice system. Her work is modeled after the New Zealand style family group conferencing and sees juvenile offenders held accountable for actions such as car theft, arson, burglary, and assault. These juveniles meet with those they have harmed and both parties come to a dialogue and agreement as to what would be best for all parties (Baliga, 2012, 41:00-41:30). This process is completely voluntary and depends on everyone's consent to occur. This style proved so successful that other programs were adopting the practice across the United States. Through her chance experience with the Dalai Lama, Ms. Baliga was able to turn her anger at her abuser into compassion and progress for restorative justice causes in the United States that see the needs of victims, offenders, and communities being met.

3. **Relate what you learned from the webinar, event, podcast, or resource document or report from #2 back to course material. Make 4 separate connections. Make these connections explicit, do not expect me to know what connection you're making. Write answers in four bullet points. (16 points total, 4 points per connection)**
- a. **DO NOT MAKE CONNECTIONS TO THE WEBSITE IN GENERAL. The connections you make should be based on the resource you read/watched/reviewed/listened to from #2.**

From what I reviewed for #2, I made several connections to class:

- **Connection 1:** In our most recent class, we discussed Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the effects such traumatic events can have on someone throughout the course of their lives. In her lecture, Ms. Baliga briefly shared an ACE she endured during her childhood to show how her mindset on crime and harm shifted throughout her life. Throughout her childhood and teen years, Ms. Baliga was sexually abused by her own father. As a result of this, Ms. Baliga shared several negative health/personal issues that stemmed from her experience such as migraine headaches, stomach problems, failed relationships, and an intense anger directed at abusers/criminals (Baliga, 2012, 26:24). As discussed in class, ACEs do have negative health consequences that can manifest throughout one's life. We can see here that the negative health consequences she experienced were a result of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father and they only subsided after she was able to forgive her father and move past her experiences.
- **Connection 2:** Another connection with class material that can be made in relation to Ms. Baliga's history of abuse is with the ripple effect. In class, we established that abusive actions can have a ripple effect through one's life that can affect both themselves and those around them. As mentioned in the previous connection, Ms. Baliga expressed that her ACE led to her becoming a very angry person and that this anger led her to

becoming very angry and hateful of those deemed as abusive or criminal and also men in general. While in Bombay, she had distinct anger towards the pimps and dirty cops who participated in the sex trade there (Baliga, 2012, 25:57). This anger also manifested itself in her desire to become a prosecutor so she could severely punish these types of individuals. However, after her encounter with the Dalai Lama her perspective changed. We can see the ripple effect that the ACE had in her own life as her health and anger issues were very present. However, this ripple effect could have extended even further if she had become a prosecutor as she originally intended. Her anger could have manifested itself in harsh sentences for the accused and, in turn, a continuation of punitive practices in her community. Her encounter with the Dalai Lama had a positive ripple effect as it allowed her to change her perspective, find inner peace, and bring restorative justice practices and forgiveness to her community.

- **Connection 3:** We discussed the distinction between what is a crime and what is harm in class. As discussed, a crime is defined by the state and is socially constructed over time while harm refers to the practices that lead to one being hurt whether it be physically, emotionally, psychologically, etc. Harm can include actions within the law and actions committed by the state unlike crime in some cases. Ms. Baliga touches on this in her lecture when she discusses Howard Zehr's three questions. Crime and restorative justice ask three different questions respectively. Crime asks "What law was broken?, Who broke it? and How do we punish them?" while restorative justice asks "What harm was done? What needs have arisen? and Whose obligation is it to meet those needs?" (Baliga, 2012, 14:00-14:30). We can see from these questions the differences in the thoughts and goals that crime and restorative justice have. Crime is concerned with punitiveness and

punishment while restorative justice is concerned with harm reduction, reconciliation, and accountability.

- **Connection 4:** The final connection I am able to make with the course material and this lecture would be the use of a toolkit. Throughout this first part of the semester, we as a class have begun building a toolkit which we are using to analyze crime, punishment, and restorative/transformational justice practices. Our toolkit includes things such as metaphors, the four I's of oppression, Critical Race Theory, and the triangle of violence. Much like how we have our toolkit, the Dalai Lama was able to pass on a "toolkit of forgiveness" to Ms. Baliga that she was able to use in her restorative justice practices. This toolkit includes meditation and finding a way to align one's self with their enemies (Baliga, 2012, 33:50). It is through these two practices that Ms. Baliga was able to change her perspective and begin her work in restorative justice. Having this toolkit allowed Ms. Baliga to be a proper restorative advocate in her community much like our toolkit allows us to critically engage with material both inside and outside of the classroom.

4. Indicate what you thought about the webinar/podcast/resource document. Tell me what you liked, what you think could be improved, and provide some suggestions on how they could have improved it. Your suggestions could be based on the content itself, delivery or presentation. (1 paragraph) (5 points)

Personally, I found Ms. Baliga's talk to be very powerful and real. I really enjoyed her intro explaining what Restorative Justice is, especially her framing of crime versus harm. It was a very effective opening that laid the foundation for the rest of the lecture. I was moved by her story of meeting the Dalai Lama and being able to forgive her father for the abuse she endured. I myself am not a Buddhist. I was raised Catholic. But I understand how big of a deal it is to meet someone like the Dalai Lama. Meeting such an esteemed member of any faith or practice is a great honor especially when they are giving you their undivided

attention and quality advice. I have had trouble in the past forgiving particular people for their actions so hearing the advice of the Dalai Lama in that regard was impactful. I also enjoyed when she would speak of how her practice embodied the ideals of forgiveness and healing she learned. However, I wish she was able to provide some more specific cases but understand that time/confidentiality were at play here. Other than this one criticism, I was overall moved and satisfied by the lecture.

5. Based on what you read about the organization and the resource you reviewed, how does this institute/organization frame the issue of restorative and/or transformative justice? If it is not explicitly framed, how does this organization and resource you reviewed embody RJ and/or TJ principles? (1 paragraph) (5 points)

This organization frames the issue of restorative justice as a process of reconciliation, accountability, and community healing. They have an entire page on their website dedicated to defining restorative justice as these definitions inform their entire practice and mission. This page provides several tenets of restorative justice that are in line with what we have discussed in class. Firstly, restorative justice invites everyone who has been impacted by harm to have an understanding of both the causes and the effects of the harm in their lives (RJIB, 2021). Having a deep understanding of harm and its effects is a key part of restorative justice. Secondly, restorative justice “addresses the needs of those who have been harmed, while encouraging those who have caused harm to take responsibility” (RJIB, 2021). Responsibility and accountability are subjects that were touched upon in Ms. Baliga’s lecture when she mentioned the responsibility juveniles would have to take in her restorative practices. Lastly, restorative justice recognizes that all people have the ability to change, heal, and grow through various restorative practices (RJIB, 2021). Recognizing this final tenet embodies the safe, inclusive, and mindful nature that restorative justice is meant to represent.

- 6. Based on what you read about the organization and the resource you reviewed, did they frame the issues of interpersonal, state violence, harm, etc. in line with the critical criminology approach we've discussed in class (e.g., power over, crimes of the powerful, global elite, etc)? If yes, how? If not, how do you know? (1 paragraph) (5 points)**

From what I have read and listened to regarding this organization, I do not believe that the overall message and mission of the Restorative Justice Initiative framed the issues at hand in the lens of critical criminology. Critical criminology primarily concerns itself with being critical of how crime has been studied historically and focusing on crimes committed by powerful individuals against those without power. This organization and the talk by Sujatha Baliga are both critical of the punitive system we currently find ourselves in and they both believe that harsh punishments doled out by the state are not the answer. However, I have observed that they are much more concerned with reaching out to individuals who have hurt one another instead of going after those in positions of power. Sujatha Baliga spoke of her work bringing together juveniles and the ones these juveniles have harmed in an attempt to reconcile differences and come to an appropriate solution. This is a much more micro-focused approach to harm that focuses on interpersonal harms rather than the more macro-focused approaches of Critical Criminology we discussed in class such as the crimes of the powerful and global elite. The Restorative Justice Initiative website echoes this more community-level approach when it says they are committed to bringing together victims, offenders, and community members “to strengthen community by fostering communication and empathy” (RJIB, 2021). Neither source mentions any particular people or organizations they would take issue with other than the overall punitive justice system. The more community-level approach of healing harm and resolving conflict presented by both of these

sources is different than the broader, power-focused looks at oppression provided by critical criminological thought.

7. Reflect on this assignment. Some questions to consider: Did you like learning about what this organization is doing? This assignment is also meant to show you that there are tons of think tanks, institutes, non-profit, activist, and academic organizations that are out there. Does it give you any desire to search for additional organizations for your own career interests? What was the most difficult part of this assignment and why? Do you have any suggestions on how I can improve this assignment in the future? Any other comments? (1 paragraph) (8 points)

Overall, I enjoyed learning about this organization and its mission/goals and I particularly enjoyed the lecture they provided on their page. I would say that after reading about what is being done for restorative justice practices in my own state I would be interested in learning about more organizations throughout the country and throughout the world. The lecture mentioned practices in New Zealand that I would like to look into further. Seeing how similar practices can work in different environments would be valuable in my understanding of how restorative justice practices can become more widespread. For me, the most difficult part of this assignment was connecting the concepts from the resource to class. It wasn't difficult per se more so just the most time consuming out of all the questions. A lot of our discussion has been focused on systemic issues and dynamics of powerful/powerless while this organization and resource were much more concerned with more personal levels of harm. Once I was able to connect with the concepts that more closely related to this mindset, I was able to complete the question with no issues. I found this assignment to be fair and informative so I do not have any suggestions for improvement.

References

- Baliga, S. (2012, November 15). *Sujatha Baliga on "Law's Middle Way: Mindfulness and Restorative Justice" at Berkeley Law - youtube*. YouTube. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3epEK9wBNv0>
- RJIa. (2021, May 6). *Our Mission and Vision*. Restorative Justice Initiative. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://restorativejustice.nyc/about/>
- RJIb. (2021, June 3). *What is Restorative Justice?* Restorative Justice Initiative. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://restorativejustice.nyc/what-is-restorative-justice/>
- RJIc. (2021, November 8). *What We Do*. Restorative Justice Initiative. Retrieved March 27, 2022, from <https://restorativejustice.nyc/about/what-we-do/>