

## Remembrance and Gratitude to Tod “Theo” Sloan

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Tod (Theodore) Sloan, co-founder of the *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology* (JSACP) passed on Monday morning, December 17, 2018. He was surrounded by the love of his family and many friends and colleagues.

Tod's impact on critical psychology, community psychology, and counseling has been far reaching despite what his humility might have suggested. His work co-founding and then co-editing the *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology* (JSACP) for its first decade really grew from his vision for a forum that could feature and share work that addressed social inequities in an accessible format. More specifically, the Journal would provide actual examples of transformative work psychologists and counselors were doing to address systemic oppression and help to construct a more just world. His critique of academia, and counseling and psychology included, went beyond calling out their oppressive history and structures. In the first issue of the Journal, Tod summarized our perspective as I served as the Journal Co-Editor, “First, we do not believe that sustaining and expanding the business of counseling and psychology as currently constituted will play a tangible role in the achievement of social justice or the construction of peace and social justice either locally or globally. Second, we are concerned that some practices associated with counseling and psychology are worse than ineffective and are, in fact, either part of the problem or do direct harm” (Sloan & Toporek, 2007, p. 1). Nevertheless, he believed there was the potential for the disciplines to have a liberatory function. He went beyond critique to seek out liberatory approaches and alternatives to oppressive practices. This was his vision for the Journal, as well as what I observed to be guiding his work. Our collaborative article as outgoing editors of the Journal (Toporek & Sloan, 2016) autobiographically shared a bit about his journey academically and what brought him to shape *JSACP* as well as the challenges and his recommendations for scholars, counselors, and psychologists working toward social change.

Tod's path to critical psychology and social change culminated from a lifetime of engagement in diverse cultural and economic environments. His childhood was spent moving from place to place including Japan, Afghanistan, and others. He spent his later childhood immersed in his Mormon family and community members and in early adulthood began to reshape his beliefs and commitments. Tod described the shift in his perspectives that came after a missionary year in France, as "cracks" in his beliefs. He became interested in psychology, social change and qualitative research, studying with noted personality psychologists and later becoming immersed in psychoanalysis and the impact of oppression and modernity on the psyche. In a biographical interview in *The Community Psychologist* (2004), Tod noted, "I realized that individual personality was also sociological and cultural and political. Embedded in that is inequality and class, race, gender" (p. 14). In his first faculty position at the University of Tulsa, Tod became interested in how psychologists could address global social problems and he engaged in peace organizations focused on issues in Central and South America. He married and had a son, Daniel, shortly before receiving a Fulbright and moving to Venezuela, his wife's home country. There, he taught and conducted interviews about the effects of modernization on communities and individuals, culminating in his book, *Damaged Life: The Crisis of the Modern Psyche* (1996). He returned to his teaching position and, despite conflicts of priorities within the department, continued to teach and reach out to the community, facilitating actions toward peace and community capacity building. As a full professor 18 years later, Tod left the university to contribute to efforts of non-profits and community organizations seeking to engage in social change. Through serendipity, Tod began work with Psychologists for Social Responsibility on September 11, 2001. Anne Anderson, then Coordinator of the organization, described how this came about.

My dear friend and comrade, Tod Sloan, had contacted me in 2000 and offered to come do some volunteer work for PsySR when he moved to DC. So, on September 11, 2001, we planned to meet in the PsySR office on Connecticut Avenue. I arrived at the office about 8:30 and opened my email, getting organized for the day, just like all days. About 9:20 I turned on the radio just to find out what was happening in the world, so the first thing I heard was that there was a plane headed for the Pentagon. Within a couple of minutes of the newscast, I learned that the Twin Towers has been struck. Then, within a couple more minutes, Tod called to find out if I was in the office and still wanted to meet, given all the events.

I said, "Absolutely! I need some company." So, while he came on up Connecticut Avenue—walking, everyone was walking—I held on to my email connection and also was able to contact my son, who had been evacuated from the EPA building downtown and was walking home to his house on Capitol Hill. It is hard to remember how confusing and terrifying that time was, because we did not know what was going to happen next. Would the Metro be attacked? Were there more planes headed for DC? What else did we need to be concerned about? And, what was Psychologists for Social Responsibility going to do about this crisis?

Tod came into the tiny 2nd-floor walk-up office while I was on the phone with someone who had called in to see if I was okay. We certainly did not know each other well then at all. I had seen him around, been in various meetings with him, had chatted at the PsySR Hospitality Suite at APA. So, I actually had no idea what he could do, or how he thought, but he was a PsySR member and was offering to volunteer at the national office, so I said, "Hi, please sit down at that other computer and draft a statement for the PsySR Steering Committee to review about what is happening today." He said, "Okay," and sat down and proceeded to write the statement in about half an hour. The Steering Committee adopted it on September 11<sup>th</sup>, changing not more than three words in the review process.

We spent the rest of the day fielding frantic calls from people all over the country, talking with Steering

Committee members about the PsySR statement and how to distribute it, and doing regular office chores like opening the mail and answering letters, while the day of 9/11 unfolded. Needless to say, I recommended to the Steering Committee that they hire Tod as Co-Coordinator and he served with me for the next four years. His coolness under fire, ability to keep thinking in stressful situations, his clarity on ways forward that would preserve PsySR's commitment to building peace with social justice—all those qualities came to the fore on our first day of working closely together and lasted throughout. He was lovely to work with, a dear friend, and I will miss him forever. (Anderson, personal communication, December, 25, 2018).

Tod continued with PsySR as Co-Coordinator for four years before taking a faculty position at Lewis and Clark University in Portland, Oregon, teaching in the Counseling Department. In Portland he continued to mentor students, new professionals, and community members interested in social change. He continued to expand his relationships internationally with peace activists and scholars, teaching and speaking in Guatemala, Chile, Iceland, and numerous other places. His reflections on activism and the challenges of community organizing led him to consider the importance of facilitating the sustainability of groups and individuals engaged in activism. In an effort to develop some of these supports, Tod and local colleagues established the Cascadia Center for Social Ecology and the new Social Justice Action Center in Portland. Although Tod spent much of his time traveling, even joking that he was nomadic, when he and his son Daniel purchased and began sharing a house in Portland in March 2018, Tod described that as one of the highlights of his life. More complete stories of his path can be found in Levin's (2004) interview of Tod as well as his autobiographical reflections in Toporek and Sloan (2016). As Tod described in the 2016 reflection, around the time he transitioned from PsySR co-coordinator to full time faculty member, he became interested in the role PsySR could play collaborating with counseling professionals engaged in social justice and alternative venues for scholarship devoted to social justice in action. This was the impetus for the *Journal for Social Action*.

### **Insights and Memories**

In the weeks since Tod passed away, myriad people have shared how his work and his personhood impacted them. The lessons and insights I gained from working with, and talking with, Tod are too numerous to count. I wish to share two conversations in particular that shifted my thinking so much that they have become mantras of hope and guidance for me. As with the theme shared by many people, Tod was so humble and curious that wisdom seemed to evolve from questions and ponderings rather than be pronounced. One of these came after a talk he gave in San Francisco to a group of students in the Anthropology and Social Change Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies a couple of years ago. A student raised a question about why Tod had shifted from his early work in community organizing in Latin America to return to the U.S. on a more permanent basis. Tod responded by describing a pivotal conversation he had with a colleague in Latin America in which Tod had asked what role or work would be most helpful in advancing the cause they were working toward. His colleague responded that U.S. policy was a large part of the problem and so it would be most helpful if Tod would actually work in the U.S. to try to promote change from there. Further, Tod shared that he was aware that, as a white American citizen, there were arenas and conversations that he could access differently than his Latin American colleague. After the session, Tod and I walked and debriefed the student event. I reflected the tension I, and many liberal white people, often feel that I should be off somewhere doing something really big. We talked about how the more appropriate place for us is less glamorous and adventuresome, even mundane. We discussed how U.S. policy has shaped so much injustice and that this may be the core of where change needs to happen even though that work is often less satisfying and more frustrating.

Over our ten-year editing collaboration, familiar patterns emerged seasonally in our monthly phone calls. Every August, I lamented that, here we were, trying to prepare a new journal issue that emphasized

systems level change and the limitations of individually focused interventions while at the same time I prepared my syllabi for the upcoming fall semester, training a new generation of counselors in the art of individual counseling. Although I attempt to integrate systems level change, the heart of counseling is individual and group relationships. Counseling seeks to help the many people who are hurting and benefit from the human connection and interventions but historically does not seek to remove the cause of the harm at a systems level. As I explained my discomfort and apparent hypocrisy of advocating for systems level change in the journal but then training students in individual counseling, Tod listened and validated my feelings. He then pondered that sometimes people may be in a place of pain and trauma that makes it difficult for them to fully participate in liberatory action. Perhaps the value of individual and group counseling is to help people heal so that they are better able to maintain their health and impact their world. Thus, our role as counselor educators may be to facilitate counselors in developing the skill to help heal while understanding the larger harmful systems at play, facilitating liberatory potential, and simultaneously working to dismantle the oppressive systems. He also talked in depth about the importance of connecting with communities so that what we were teaching was consistent with the wisdom and needs of the communities of our clients and students.

Tod's insight, scholarship, personal warmth and connection reached far beyond me. Many, many people have expressed the significant impact his work and his humanity has had on their lives, their work and their growth. I include just a couple of contributions here.

Edil Torres Rivera (past President of Counselors for Social Justice [CSJ], Professor and Editor of the *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*) shared the following memory.

I first met Tod at one of the American Counseling Association (ACA) conferences and during one of the receptions I had just learned that I was elected president-elect for CSJ. As someone that always like to move toward change and given the nature of the genesis of CSJ, I commented to him that I want to make major changes to the organization to redirect the purpose of the organization. Tod in his ultimate calm, collected and wise manner told me "Edil, always listen to the need of the people and not to the need of the leader..." Now many years later I understand that he was talking about "Inedito viável expressões" meaning that concepts are action-words. If I listen to what might not be expressed in words but in actions, I will understand the liberating effects of one's consciousness liberated by what hasn't been expressed yet. (Edil Torres Rivera, personal communication, December 23, 2018).

Deanne Bell, Senior Lecturer at East London University, and a close colleague and friend of Tod's wrote,

In grieving the loss of Tod, I'm reminded of the many gifts of his life... of his precise mind, uncommon intellect and encyclopaedic knowledge of critical social theory, critical psychology and insights from psychoanalytic theory...of his vision for psychology becoming a socially meaningful and transformative body of understandings and practices... of his unwavering commitment to the possibilities to be realized through genuine dialogue, and for the way his gentle soul prized human connection. (Deanne Bell, personal communication, December 22, 2018).

Michael Hutchins (past President of Counselors for Social Justice) shared,

I believe that lasting social justice advocacy and change is grounded in love and respect. I first met Tod at a conference in Portland in 2005. Since that time, I got to know him as a committed and creative advocate whose work has always been grounded in love and respect. He brilliantly articulated a world view that encouraged me to examine my own views, take action, and become a more compassionate member of this world community. Tod was a man of humble courage and integrity who had the wonderful capacity

to see the “big picture” and translate that picture into meaningful social action. In the past year, we had all-too-infrequent discussions about the nature of mentoring and ways to lovingly encourage the next generations to live lives of authenticity and inclusion. We acknowledged that our time was limited and, yet, we behaved as if we would be here for many more years. Tod, I already miss you and know that the lessons I learned from you will continue to be woven into the fabric of my life. With much love, Michael Hutchins (Michael Hutchins, personal communication, December 20, 2018).

Anthony J. Marsella (Professor Emeritus, University of Hawaii, Honolulu) described how he first met Tod at an American Psychological Association Convention and was able to share how pivotal and beautiful his book, *Damaged Life*: (1996), was in examining power distribution and how society impacts people’s well-being. He described Tod as a “transcendent person who could get things done without drawing attention to himself.”

Tod’s thinking in critical psychology and his values can be seen in much of my writing. He brought people together and his work opened us up to power and the meanings of power distribution. He was a friend, colleague and mentor.

Bradley Olson, PsySR colleague and community psychologist, summarized it well. “Tod has influenced so many of us, multiple generations, and has always had the most kind, fun and loving heart.”

### **Closing Thoughts**

Over the ten years that Tod and I shared the work of editing this Journal, we traversed the trials of trying to maintain the ideals we started with, the ups and downs of our personal lives, and the inevitable cycles of discouragement and hope that come from wanting to work toward positive change. Although we were from slightly different generations, we shared our attempts to develop consciousness about our positions of privilege as white, middle income academics. He gently challenged constraints of academia, traditional psychology and counseling training. He brought me along, virtually, in his global adventures through his stories and phone calls whether from Iceland, Guatemala, Chile or other destination. His ability to connect with people, maintain curiosity and respect, and strive toward greater understanding provided me with a model to aspire to while always communicating affirmation and appreciation for my work, my commitments and my choices; a beautiful balance of challenge and support. I am forever changed and grateful for his caring gifts and persistence toward illuminating and questioning power. He was a visionary whose humility, constant awareness of action and building community, remains a model for reflexivity and social action.

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