

Forum Reflections

Dr. Robert L. Hampton

All of the presenters should be commended, as each addressed some of the critical needs and issues that we all deal with in the area of violence prevention. I think that we are all here because we believe that change is possible, that we can replace hopelessness and despair with hopefulness and optimism. I think that we are all warriors for change, engaged in the struggle for justice and the elimination of violence. There is an old saying that if the only tool you have is a hammer, you will treat every problem as though it were a nail. You would not see that there are other options and possibilities. Part of what we are doing at this forum is beginning to understand that if we are going to be effective, we have to broaden our horizons. We have to add different tools to our toolboxes, different strategies to our repertoire. In so doing, we must be careful not to create a false dichotomy between traditional and popular culture practices.

As we examine the life span, we can identify different challenges and different tasks, even though the common issue is violence. Some of the strategies we would use to address childhood violence are different from those we would use to address violence among adolescents, adults, and the elderly. While the various types of violence may share some things in common, there are also important differences. One of the key issues addressed during this forum is that if we're going to be effective, we have to begin with where people are. If you're trying to get people to point B, you have to have some understanding of where they are at point A. You have to develop ways of reaching them at point A in a language and style that is appropriate for them because we all learn differently. Some of us can look at concepts on a screen and make the connections. Others are hands on people that have to feel, touch, and experience things. There are even more people, as evidenced by this forum, who will learn through the arts.

Regardless of the strategy, there are both risks and opportunities—particularly when you introduce something new. The opportunities are limitless, but there are also risks involved. These risks obligate us to ensure that the work we do has a good theoretical and practical foundation so that we avoid spreading misinformation that could reaffirm or reinforce negative stereotypes. There is also a risk that we may fail to protect the people that we need to protect. So in all that we do, let us not re-victimize anyone.

Many of the Steering Committee members are academicians. We tend to think that if we reach 500 people with an article or publication, we have done a good job. Yet we see through these performances that there are ways to reach thousands. It is mind blowing that a radio program, such as the *It's Your Business* campaign presented by Ms. Kelly Mitchell-Clark, and public service announcements like those of the *Elders Deserve Honor and Respect* campaign presented by Ms. Charyn Sutton can reach a half million people each time they are aired. Hundreds more are impacted by the work of organizations like MEE Productions and the Destiny Arts Center that use entertainment-based approaches to address issues that impact younger populations. There is certainly significant potential for reaching people and making a change. Such new strategies do not negate the need for existing practices like assessment and program evaluation. But at some point, we have to know what is making a difference among the various targeted populations. We have to be able to reflect on what we do and assess its worth and effectiveness.

For those of us who believe that our life's journey involves working for freedom, social justice, and the elimination of violence, this forum has been a breath of fresh air. If we truly believe in freedom, social justice, and the dignity of the human spirit, we cannot be content with just this forum's activities. We have to look at the possibilities that traditional strategies and contemporary practices offer for us. We must continue to explore the possibilities of a variety of interventions, knowing that the hammer is not the only tool we have and that we can address problems that do not resemble nails. If we do so, perhaps we can foresee a point in our lives when

we will no longer have to attend conferences on violence. Instead, we will be celebrating the victories of the human spirit.