

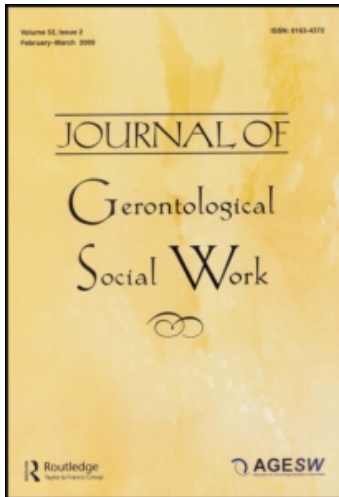
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### Ruminating on Art and Science

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## EDITORIAL

# Ruminating on Art and Science

In February 2011, Utah's poet laureate, Katharine Coles, gave a reading of poems about Antarctica.<sup>1</sup> They were sublime. One of her final comments at the reading challenged the notion that art and science are fundamentally different. Coles said, "Poets look for mystery and search from there, then find another mystery, and search from there." This sounds a lot like what social scientists do—only we don't call it "mystery." We use more ponderous terms, like "research question" or "hypothesis."

We've all enjoyed the solace that comes with contemplation of great art. But, as Susanne Langer argues, art is not just about solace or comfort. It's not "a luxury product of civilization, a cultural frill, a piece of social veneer" (1966, p. 5). For Langer, art is "the practice of creating perceptible forms" that express the human experience (p. 6). Perhaps self-expression is a fundamental need, but art does more than that. It refines our emotional sensibilities and strengthens our capacity for empathy. Art delivers experiences beyond what life would otherwise serve up and in the process we become more—more aware, more human, more alert, more complex.

Like science, art may also contribute to the pursuit of truth. In their look at "Art in Science," Eisner and Powell (2002) suggest that "artistic modes of thought and aesthetic forms of experience perform an important function in doing scientific research" (p. 134). These Stanford educators interviewed 30 fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences about the role of artistry in the practice of science. Respondents used imagery and musical analogies to describe the development of research ideas, and suggested that writing up research called for a dramatic structure and involved a certain amount of improvisation. Several referred to an article's "story." Eisner and Powell emphasized the role of imagination and visualization, somatic knowledge, and empathy in the scientific process, suggesting that these represent artistic modes of thought. They described an aesthetic in scientists' descriptions of the places where they worked and the people who influenced them. In essence, these authors concluded that scientists behave artistically. In a similar vein, Chris Rust (2007) and others have noted that art can inspire science.

But Coles suggested a deeper connection between art and science. Her description of the poetic process implied that the creation of art is itself a

process of inquiry. She moves from mystery to mystery, surfacing at times to offer gathered insights to her audience. Consider Linden Reilly's (2002) description of the artistic practitioner:

Think of that famous footage of Jackson Pollock painting in his studio, dripping paint over the canvas on the floor, his concentration on the canvas, though he is physically more active than is conveyed by "standing." The practitioner may go through successive stages of planning, acting, reflecting, revising the plan, then acting again ... The work does not merely emerge in the world, it simultaneously emerges in the practitioner who may see that which has been dimly felt as the work, may see clearly what they have been feeling, only at that point where it "feels right," only as it emerges as a physical form. The making process can be a search. A very careful search. And it can reveal unexpected things, more or other than was searched for.

By these accounts, the essential congruence between art and science lies in that "very careful search." The methods and language may differ, but the endeavors themselves are very much alike.

Social scientists have a lot to learn from the artists in our midst. At times we wish that research articles could be as evocative as works of art, or that we could generate understanding to match our knowledge. We might envy artists for their dramatic epiphanies. Still, we are more like the artists than we might imagine. So let's pay attention to the art in our science as we go from mystery to mystery.

#### IN MEMORY OF JOANNA MELLOR

Dr. Joanna Mellor, co-editor of JGSW from 2002 to 2009, passed away on February 6, 2011 following a lengthy illness. Joanna grew up in England, graduating from London University in 1963 with a B.Sc. in Sociology. She emigrated to the United States the following year, and completed her MS in Social Welfare at Columbia University in 1977 and her DSW at City University of New York in 1994. Joanna had a distinguished career in administrative posts at Mount Sinai and Lighthouse International before joining the faculty of the Würzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University. After stepping down as co-editor for the Journal, she edited a special issue titled "Social Work with Older Immigrants and Their Families." Joanna was active as a reviewer for JGSW up until her death, and is remembered as a generous colleague and an insightful teacher.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

In this issue Fran Wilby reports on a study of community-based elders that suggests that social isolation may not always be a hallmark of depression. Scott Wilks and his colleagues alert practitioners to the deleterious effects of aggressive behavior on informal caregivers of Alzheimer's patients. Maria Claver looks in depth at veterans' decisions to seek care in emergency rooms, arguing that social workers might help reduce inappropriate use of the ER. Susan Enguidanos and Alexis Kogan and their colleagues examine the problems identified by older primary care patients in Problem Solving Therapy, noting that problems identified by patients were considerably more likely to be solved than those identified by professionals. This issue includes two articles from the Policy Forum. In the first, Joan Davitt and Zvi Gellis discuss barriers within the Medicare home health benefit that impede access to mental health treatment and offer specific recommendations for medical social workers to improve detection and treatment of mental illness among homebound elders. Then Michelle Putnam considers perceived differences between older adults and younger people with disabilities in relation to federal long-term care rebalancing initiatives. In this issue's book review Sharon Bowland offers an intriguing look at *Elderburbia*, in which Philip Stafford describes the AdvantAge Initiative to promote age-friendly communities. The book touches on elders' need for what Bowman calls "sweet little places that bring people together socially." It also notes the role of place in collective memory.

*Amanda S. Barusch*  
*Editor, JGSW*

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