

# Talking to Change: An MI Podcast

## Glenn Hinds and Sebastian Kaplan



### Episode 30: MI and Social Work, with Melinda Hohman, PhD, MSW

#### **Glenn Hinds:**

Hello everybody, and welcome back to another episode of Talking to Change- A Motivational Interviewing Podcast. My name is Glenn Hinds and I'm based in Derry in Northern Ireland, and I am joined by good friend Sebastian Kaplan in Winston-Salem. Hi Seb.

#### **Sebastian Kaplan:**

Hey Glenn. How's it going today?

#### **Glenn Hinds:**

Yeah, it's good here, man. It's a Saturday afternoon. It's a bit blustery. I'd say we have entered into phase one of five in the removal of the lockdown, here in Northern Ireland. There's a subtle change in the atmosphere around us. There's a sense of a wee bit more freedom, people starting to move about and gather together. The golf clubs are open, which is good, I enjoy golf. But even there, there's still the restrictions. The adaptation, as a consequence of COVID-19, is continuing here. What about yourself?

#### **Sebastian Kaplan:**

Well it's the 23rd of May, so as of 5 pm yesterday, North Carolina went into phase two of our reopening, or reintegration. I'm not sure exactly the term they're using. Streets are busier, the shops from my office right now, I can see a store that probably has about 30 cars in the parking lot. And it's been like this for a good week or so. But now the restaurants are allowed to be open with, I think, 50% occupancy or something like that. Yeah, there's some movements to a version of normal, I suppose, with also some considerable trepidation about what this means, and how much do we really know, and how serious people are taking the safety precautions as a whole. Interesting times, for sure.

#### **Glenn Hinds:**

And certainly given the fact that the theme of our podcast in change, I guess that people will be hearing this in a few weeks' time, what has been your journey through COVID been like? And what has been the changes, the societal changes, that many of which have been imposed upon you, what was that like for you? And, how did you respond internally? And in your relationships? And from an MI perspective, part of what we would be doing would be just being curious about, what does that mean for you and what does that tell you about yourself? By exploring that, you get an understanding of your own internal mechanics, the very thing that we as MI practitioners are endeavoring to understand. What is it that makes you tick? And if we were to be supportive, what could help you change some of what you're doing?



**Glenn Hinds:**

And that fits nicely into the conversation we're having today with Melinda Hohman, or Mindy, who is going to introduce us to a really interesting topic. Certainly, from myself, as a social worker by training, is the use of Motivational Interviewing in social work practice. So, hello Mindy.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Good morning. Well it's morning here in California, a sunny day.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Well thank you for joining us at such an early time for yourself. Like I say, we will be exploring the practice of Motivational Interviewing in social work. So perhaps you can begin by just telling a bit about who you are, and your own journey into Motivational Interviewing.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Well thank you both for inviting me to be on the podcast today. I have a bachelor's degree in social work, and my first job, when I got out of school, I was hired as a probation officer in the juvenile court system. And I did that for a few years. And during my master's degree, both degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, in social work, I interned on a program that treated adolescent substance use and was subsequently hired there. So I worked at that for a number of years, made my way west and continued to work with adolescents and their families. Mostly in residential treatment settings. So that's a bit about my background. This would have been in the late '80s, something like that. And at the time, the medical model of substance use treatment, and heavy reliance on abstinence and AA attendance, and confrontation, and all those pieces that went with that type of treatment, was what I was taught and what we were expected to use.

**Melinda Hohman:**

And that was kind of a conflict with what I was learning in social work school, in many ways. At the time, you didn't have many social workers interested in substance use treatment. Tended be more the field of people who were in recovery, themselves. So I was kind of an anomaly, sometimes, where I worked. Social work school would talk a lot about client self-determination, and respect for the client, and all the different values of social work. That type of practice was a little bit in conflict with, or a lot in conflict with I should say. As I made my way west, I went back to school and got my PhD in social work and continued to do research around substance use, more with women. I was very interested in that.

**Melinda Hohman:**

I've told this story before about how I came to MI and it's kind of an odd one, people are surprised. I eventually was hired as a faculty member at San Diego State University, at the school of social work, in '95, and was asked to teach a substance abuse course as well as some other social work type classes. And I don't know whether you'd call it serendipity, if you'd call it providence or what. I was in a bookstore and I would just kind



of cruise through the psychology and kind of look and see what's up to date, what's new in substance use treatment. And that is how I found Motivational Interviewing, walking through a bookstore.

**Melinda Hohman:**

So, I stood there and flipped through and I thought, "Well this looks good." And then the more I read it, the more I realized it really was much more aligned with the social work values that I was trained in. Brought the book home and began teaching out of it. I don't know if you remember, but I believe, it's been so long now, that the first edition had exercises that you could train reflective listening and some of those skills. And I started to integrate it into the class without really telling them what it was. Like, we're going to work on reflective listening. And that led me then to eventually apply to go to the training for trainers or T&T. I did that in 1999. But at some point in teaching, I thought, "You know what? I'm going to have to tell my students this is something called Motivational Interviewing, because nobody had ever heard of it." And as then, I was getting a job in the community as a trainer, and I started off with training child welfare social workers quite a bit.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Some of them were skeptical and some of them said, "Well we already do this", and it was kind of an interesting response. But eventually we were able to adopt MI as a course. So, we went from teaching a little bit of the skills to teaching this is the model, over a couple weeks, just to a 15 week in Motivational Interviewing. And that's how I finished out my career. For the last 10, 12 years, I taught maybe about 100 students over several sections of classes, full semester MI classes. And then we hired another instructor who's in MINT, guy named Rich Broadway. And he's been teaching those classes as well, because then I became the director of the school of social work. So I was teaching quite as much. And I retired two years ago, and have been mostly spending my time with help with grandchildren.

**Melinda Hohman:**

But also, with, I had written a book on Motivational Interviewing and social work practice. And the publisher, Guilford, approached me about updating it. So that's what I've been doing and it's finished, and it's in the books now and we'll wait for it to come out. So that's a very long answer to your question.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Wow, yeah. Congratulations for the accomplishments with your books and for sharing your story with us. Quite a professional journey, spanning clinical work, higher education, teaching, administration and active retirement, I suppose, as a way to put it.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Grandma hood.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**



Grandma hood, right. A lot of personal and professional activities still very much present in your life. One thing that I was thinking about in that story of yours, was what you discovered, or what you were experiencing probably as a discrepancy of sorts between your education as a social and some of those professional values that you held close to you, and what seemed like, or what were the sort of care as usual principles of substance abuse treatment. And that discrepancy was large enough that it was hard to figure out, how do I be a social worker and work in this field, and not faithful in a negative sense but like you said, the universe intervened that day in the bookstore and you discovered a way to reconcile that discrepancy and find a path forward, with both your training and field that you were in.

**Glenn Hinds:**

When you began to read the book, you mentioned that it was something that resonated with your social work values. For the audience members who perhaps not trained in social work, what are they for you? What was it that was in the book, that was in your social work practice, that was causing the itch when you working in the addictions work?

**Melinda Hohman:**

Well in addictions work, you were told that people were in denial and that you had to confront them to get them out of their denial. And only when they stopped quote, unquote, lying, and faced the truth, then they could get better. And I did see adolescents get better, and their families. And there was a lot in there too about family disease, and those were all very popular co-dependency concepts during that era. In social work we have a code of ethics, The National Association of Social Workers, that talks again about client's self-determination, respect for the client and those kinds of things. And I almost have to go back and look at the first edition to see exactly what was in there, as compared to the third edition. I feel like I have the third edition, so in my head it's hard to tease it out.

**Melinda Hohman:**

But Miller talked a lot about listening instead of telling, and about ambivalence and not denial. I should say Miller and Rollnick, and started me thinking in some different directions from what I had been trained in.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Working in that pretty challenging setting, I imagine, with juvenile probation, working with those families. And how, as you started to incorporate the MI principles, and spirit, and skills and that sort of thing, how did you find the work for you, as well as for your client?

**Melinda Hohman:**

Actually, I was already teaching. So I wasn't working with clients when I started using MI, or teaching MI. And I was more I incorporated it into the classroom, and very much integrated that into my teaching style. And it was very consistent fairly with what I did already. And Miller and Rollnick talk about that a lot, that a lot of people come to MI because it fits for them, with how they're already approaching clients. To focus on evoking the knowledge that students already had, and how they understood their world, and



learning about that. As well as there would be times when, as an educator, you have to address certain kind of issues too. You had students fooling around in class, particularly when I'd have undergraduates, or not coming to class, or just having all kind of struggles. And how do you talk to them about those kinds of things as well?

**Melinda Hohman:**

So, MI was very helpful with me in that. So I think it really changed my teaching style, and I do a lot of reflections in class. And sometimes the students would say, "Aha, she's doing it. She's doing it now. We're doing reflection." But it was also a window because I would say, particularly in classes were about 2/3rds of more minority, diverse students. And to really recognize the knowledge that they had coming from their communities, and their families, and their backgrounds, and to how this fit for them and how these practices worked for them. So I would say it was more of the way how I used it.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Right. So in many ways you were modeling the approach as you taught the approach, and it allowed students to experience being listened to, being understood. To be invited to think for themselves, to decide how to move things forward for themselves. And given the width of the experience within the training groups, they also would have witnessed themselves being valued for their own life journey and exploring how does that inform you becoming a good social worker. Your hope was then that having experience, they could then take it away. But it also sounds like they picked it up quite quickly because they were able to identify the methods you were using. So they had to internalize it in some way that they recognized what you were doing. But it sounds like they also valued it.

**Glenn Hinds:**

When I'm thinking about myself as a trainer, I know that one of the things that often comes up when I am working with social workers, particularly family/childcare social workers. They would often say to me, "The child is my client, not the parent." The idea of having a conversation with all parties, using Motivational Interviewing and exploring it from an MI spirit can be quite a shift for a lot of social workers who have been, in some ways, taught a bit like what you were describing there in the addiction field. Is that you've got to get these parents to change, and you've got to protect this child. And sometimes you've got to stand between the parents and the child, and that can come across as quite aggressive. I wonder, how do you help people with that discrepancy in their relationship with the child and with the parents, in situations like that?

**Melinda Hohman:**

You're right. That would come up in the community based trainings I would do, particularly around child welfare social workers. Just as a side note though, child welfare work is very much, at least in the United States, seen as kind of the embodiment of social work. But social workers work in so many different fields, that that's just one segment of what social work is. And those are the different things I try to explore in my book, to have social workers from all different career paths contribute a little bit about how they use MI in their work. But it's definitely, when you have people in involuntary or mandate situations, and



it's not really that much different from working probation, working the criminal justice system.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Though, I've had child welfare social workers tell me they tend to be more accountable to the judges. It's the judges that are yelling at them and telling them, "Why hasn't this, and this, and this, and this happened?" Part of it is to understand the process of child welfare. Most people, when they're working with families, they're under a time clock and have to have things accomplished very quickly, particularly if a child is removed and they have to have them back. They have 12 months, if they're going to get them back to the parents. Part of its understanding that. So they're under pressure from the judicial system as well as their own internal system. And then there's a pressure to be efficient because of that. So that would be part of the problem too, is that social workers in training might say...

**Melinda Hohman:**

Initially, when people still didn't know much about MI, it's very different now. There's hardly anybody that's not heard of it or not had some sort of training that they got in the community. But initially they'd say, "Oh well this very nice, and it's very lovely. And it's nice how you treat the client. But I need to get all this paperwork, I need to get all these questions answered and I'm kind the question answer trap." Part of it is we would talk about, more maybe even show a video of an MI session, or model something, and time it. Like, how long was that? That was four minutes. Okay, what did you learn? What happened in that? And, what skills did you see? But also with the focus on the time.

**Melinda Hohman:**

So, there is that idea that MI looks like it's slow, but it's really not. And I would think, and that's what I've been told, that social workers and trainees would see that they can accomplish a lot. That they learn more about their clients through reflective listening and through using some of the different skills, than if they had just gone in and fired a question at them. Interesting study that came out of the UK, and I don't have the authors' names at my fingertips. But I found it last year and included in the book, which is the researcher's followed social workers, or tape them, I'm not exactly sure. They noticed that they could be very, very good in MI in one situation, and then in another situation they'd just start firing questions at the parents and be pretty, if not assertive, pretty aggressive. Not MI, we would say.

**Melinda Hohman:**

And when they asked them about it afterwards, like, "Why are you choosing to communicate in different way?" They said there was too much risk. So it goes back to what you were saying, Glenn, about this concern about the child and the risk for the child. So that when it felt like it was a much more dangerous situation or, not dangerous in like immediate danger, but risky over the length of time that they working with them. That they felt that they needed to be much more confrontational. Part of training is just to be able to discuss all these different issues. They have to weigh out the benefits and maybe the





downside of using MI for themselves, to really understand it in the context where they were.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

So a number of barriers in social work practice. Which, I imagine, we can draw in other fields and draw parallels to these barriers, and have their own version of those barriers. Things like a superior of some sort, whether it's a judge, or a boss, or a principle in a school, or somebody like that who might have certain expectations of what a probation officer of social worker's job is, and what the outcome should be. The seemingly never ending pressure of paperwork and documentation. And that it seems to naturally fit with questions and answers, as opposed to the reflective listening process. Of course, if there's a lot of fields, and check boxes, and things on a form, well one might naturally think that the way to get that information, that I have to put down because it's part of my job, is to ask a bunch of questions. Certainly that social work is not unique in the concern around time and the lack of time. Or the perception that if one is doing MI then you don't have enough time to do that, or you will run out of time, however that might look.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

And then there's a fourth thing that you brought up, is as a situation, the severity, I suppose, of the situation increases, this is probably more of an internal pressure on the part of the social worker to get more directive, in terms of their approach. And that directiveness might become more aggression, confrontation. But there's perhaps a, even for somebody who really connects with MI and is something that they're wanting to apply in their work. If it feels to them that the person is more at risk or doing something more harmful to themselves, or others, that it can be really quite easy to set MI aside, so to speak, and now get into a really directive mode. And so I wonder, in your role as an educator primarily through the last part of your career, through much of your career. So you mentioned showing videos of MI sessions, and timing them, and having conversations around. How much time was that, actually? And let's think about the time issue in a more sort of concrete, literal sense.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

What are some of the other strategies that you've used that adjust some of those other barriers? Like perhaps in that sort of increased severity and the tendency to become more directive.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Well you're framing a question the way I haven't thought of it. I'm always very interested in how MI fits into the context of where people work. And so understanding that, and I think and having discussions about that, we would do mostly real plays. Which is where you use your own material, talk about yourself, so people can experience it for themselves. And then sometimes we would do role plays. And sometimes there's a whole another issue that would come up, that is always the elephant in the room, that is very important in child welfare work, is the racial disparities. And that many times you have a white social worker dealing with a person of color, who is the client. And there's been a



long history within that community of poor social work practice or suspension of social workers.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Again, it gets back to the context to be able to discuss those things and process those things. But I always use the room in the training, whether it's students or whether it's community based social workers or others, to really think out loud about all these different types of issues and how it might impact maybe the skill that we're learning. Or talking about the spirit of MI, it's a constant process of having people think out loud and think it through, as well as seeing examples or experiencing an example.

**Glenn Hinds:**

And again, it just strikes me just how much your approach is about modeling and mirroring the experiences that you want the students to understand, when they go to work with their clients or their patients. That they will have gone through a similar journey, in learning of Motivational Interviewing with you, in that you're being curious, you're going, look, this isn't one size fit all. How does this work for you? What's this like for you? How does this, in your life experience, what does this idea mean for you, and how might that then be translated into your practice when you go to work with your clients?

**Glenn Hinds:**

So much of what you're describing sounds like it's really about allowing people to experience the spirit of Motivational Interviewing. Steve recently has started to describe the attitude that the practitioner takes. And so it's a lot of attitudinal work, when you're teaching that early part of the social work training. Is, why are we doing what we're doing? Why are we doing it this way? What is it we're hoping to achieve? And then very important, what's it like for this family of color have a white person come into their family home? Just stop there and think what's that like for them. And what, then knowing that, does that help to do prepare, to recognize the challenges or the difficulties and expectations that this family might be having about you? Not knowing who you are, but who you represent, and how you can then start to engage them in that process, starting there.

**Glenn Hinds:**

About relationship development, I really resonated with you. I also came from an addictions background in my social work, and there was that clash between the Minnesota Model and Person-Centred approach, and MI was the bridge. So much of it is about that relationship development, and how in the relationship change may happen. Thinking about the audience today that aren't just social workers, and as Seb has already said, a lot of what we're already talking about, we could translate into other realms and other disciplines. And I suppose in your experience and in your research, what is it you're discovering that helps people make that transition in their ability to develop deeper, more meaningful relationships with the people they come into contact with as a helper?

**Melinda Hohman:**





People come to MI with all sorts of backgrounds, and some may just click and they love it. And others struggle with it a little bit. What really helped me in my teaching, and it kind is a circular way to get back to your question. Is I started adding in the social psychological theories, which you don't tend to study much in social work school. So a lot of that time it would be, you know, you would study client centered and Carl Rogers. But even starting with that question, how do you view your clients? And having a discussion about that starts to again to, what you were saying there Glenn, about putting themselves maybe in their shoes. In social work at least, we teach from the micro, meso, macro practice. So we're always looking at the whole context that our clients are in. So it's bringing it back to that. Like, what's going on in that community?

**Melinda Hohman:**

And here you are as white social worker going in. Also, what's some of the factors that the family might struggle with, and what happens? And we teach about Reactance Theory and Self-Determination Theory, that you just had a wonderful podcast about. I think that kind of basis for kind of understanding where do we go from here in our work? Again, it's more reflection on a lot of that, and again, experiencing empathic conversations with their classmates and real plays. And being listened to and then being assigned to go out and to do it with a client, and then to analyze that and to think about that. And encourage that about, how did that work for you?

**Glenn Hinds:**

We've heard other guests say that this is not a straight line, and it's not XYZ. It's quite a fluid way of understanding things. And what you're describing is the importance of the individual practitioner, taking time to understand themselves as a way of helping them to understand other people. How did you get to where you are? What was that like for you? What were the consequences of that? What helped? What didn't? What if you superimposed that curiosity now on this client, and the opportunity then is to ask, if someone has lived a life like that in these circumstances, what would they find helpful? And again it's just an invitation to the audience to consider who are your clients, what journeys have they lived. Not the journey that you think they should of lived, but the journey that they have lived.

**Glenn Hinds:**

And if you are wanting to be helpful to them, what is it they would find helpful? Not is it what you think they will find helpful. So again it's about that ability to be empathetic and to understand things from the other person's perspective. Not for you to judge what they need, but to be curious, what do you need?

**Melinda Hohman:**

What they know they need.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Right.



**Melinda Hohman:**

And the other piece of that, again studying self-determination theory and reactance theory, is to understand behavior when you see it. It could be a personal attack on you, but to really understand where might this be coming from. And, how it's a normal type of behavior to be, particularly if you're working with somebody that you don't really want to work with. So whether it's a child welfare social worker, or it could be all varieties. So when people are angry, upset, et cetera, where does that come from? And try to understand that as well.

**Melinda Hohman:**

The other piece of that is how do you deal with sustain talk? Or how do you deal discord in a practice ways to do that, as well?

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Overall, you're describing a pretty broad spectrum of not just teaching strategies, but sources of information that can help in the development of the social work student, or like we've said, a student in some other field. So, drawing on the use of social psychological theories, like Self-Determination Theory, Reactance Theory, things of that nature. Provide both a foundation, but also maybe a bit of an understanding of why a social worker might do the things that they do in practice. The focus on self-determination theory, for instance, comes from not just really well articulated theory but also decades of empirical evidence that suggests, when human beings have these three basic needs met, or met as much as can be met. The needs of acceptance, relatedness, and competence, the change that they are faced with tend to be, they tend to be more successful with those changes over a longer period of time.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

The mistake might be to say, okay here is everything that you, as a student, need to know to then go out and do something like Motivational Interviewing. We have this great theory and all these wonderful, clever little exercises. Now just go do that. But then you're also bringing up some of these other important elements of the education process. Which is having peer learners really processing what this information is like for them, and how that fits, like what you were saying Glenn, with their own lived experience. How have they experienced their own ambivalence with change? And how have they experienced helpers, or people in authority, or parents, or whoever it might be, interact with them in certain ways? And now that's the shared conversational and emotional of learning something with someone else, that that becomes a really rich area and really critical area, in addition to that more kind of factual, informational, and theoretical process. Combining all of these things together and over the course of one's development as a student, as a professional, people begin to really adopt a method like MI and start to really fine tune the craft.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Definitely a process to learn it, as well as to be able to model and teach it. That's for sure. It takes a while. When I was writing the book, I came across, I can't remember her first name. Her last name is Myrick, has written a lot about Reactance Theory, and she's even



coined the term Social Worker Reactance. Talked about that in the book, which is when social workers have their confidence questioned, or their autonomy questioned, it's easy to react in a negative fashion as well. So it's not just maybe that client is reacting to you, but you're reacting to the client. I found that so helpful to think about that process too, and think about for people to identify for themselves about what helps them cope with their own reactance in a professional setting.

**Glenn Hinds:**

So much of what you're describing is about the reflective experience of the practitioner, their willingness to look at themselves, their willingness to try something and to notice what happens. And then to meet that response with curiosity. Seb described that fine tuning of the craft, that the process that we're on is that we're on a journey that you're not going to go to a two day workshop in Motivational Interviewing and you're going to have come out and it to have clicked. But like what happened for you in the bookshop, hopefully that when you meet MI, that there's something about it that sings that song for you. And then you enter into the journey of your own continuing development. And part of that is recognizing that that journey that I am on, as a practitioner, in some way mirrors the journey that the client's on.

**Glenn Hinds:**

We're trying to get to the same place, which is the best version of ourselves. But we've started in different places. And by having that willingness to reflect on my own journey, my own experiences and my own current practice. That it gives me a better understanding of, as Seb was describing there, what was it, I as a human being, needed to flourish? And now, how can I bring those experiences, or that awareness, to this client encounter that they might flourish too? And it sounds like that what's exciting about the introduction of MI into social work practice is that it can be very quickly seen that the MI spirit, and the philosophy behind MI, really resonates with social work values and the person centered approach. And it offers practitioners the opportunity to see that with a bit of time, and with a bit of practice, that what it is they're doing in trying to help other people can become more efficient, and indeed more effective.

**Glenn Hinds:**

And it's in that moment that it becomes even more attractive, as with any behavior change, if we can see it working or we can see how it can benefit me in what I'm trying to achieve. Then I'm more willing to put the effort and to develop the understanding and the learning that's going to be necessary for me to become proficient and an expert at it.

**Melinda Hohman:**

One aspect of that, that I researched, included in the book, was about the role of MI in burnout. Burnout in high demand professions, where you're working with people with just so many different kinds of concerns. Burnout is a real problem. There's not a lot of research, but there is some support for how people who utilize MI, just like what you were saying, and do it in a self-reflective way, see that their practice is perhaps more efficient and effective. And it's almost like the opposite of social work reactance. The idea of the



seeing how clients react to you, in MI, reinforces it and makes it more comfortable, and also challenging in a good way. That, people talk about or look forward to going to work, and how can I use this model in my work? So it goes in the opposite direction as well, and the clients respond positively.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

I'm glad you brought up burnout. It's something we've mentioned a lot today, already, that an experience that any professional can have. And it's something you hear a lot of MI practitioners say that MI, for themselves or for their trainees, has been a bit of the antidote to burnout, or at least a pretty important preventative, protective factor. I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on why that might be. Just in thinking about for myself, if I do a lot of work with teenagers as well, and many of whom are really struggling around issues related to their families but that have brought them to a point of considering to harm themselves, or to perhaps even take their life. And I'm asked every now and then like, boy, how do you not burnout? Or, how do you do that?

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

And my first thought, really, is connected to Motivational Interviewing. And if it's someone who knows about MI, I'll talk about MI as a way it prevents that. If we're talking about MI necessarily, but just some of the things that MI encourages in us. It's much harder to get burned out on the kind of tragedy, or the trauma, or the challenges in another person if you're seeing them through a hopeful lens. Or seeing them as someone full of strength, and that you're actively seeking those strengths. Not that it's impossible to be burned out. Of course it's not. But it's so much healthier, I think, from a practitioner standpoint to view the other person from that hopeful place. Than from the place of focusing on the symptomatology, or the disorders they might have, or the despair that they've genuinely experienced. What are some of your thoughts on that?

**Melinda Hohman:**

Well that'd definitely be something we'd talk about in the classroom too. I've taught both undergraduate and graduate levels. But it was mainly undergrad. So it was a lot of young, new to social work students. And to talk to them about, how do you hear people in your internship talk about the clients? And then take it back to Client Centered Theory, do they have strengths? Do they move towards health, however we define that? Or are they talking about their clients as if they're hopeless? And just all those things you're saying Seb, about hope and focusing on strengths, for me, in the classroom we'd go back to having that conversation.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Thinking about the work that we do and the audience and the work that they do. That idea of being able to look through a strengths based lens and what that looks like. How do you look at a situation where a father is beating his child? Or how do you look at a situation where a woman has been living a domestic abuse situation for many years and continues to stay there? Looking in from the outside, they do look desperate. And again, many of us will recognize the righting reflex which is, I see someone in desperate pain, and I need



to do something about it. The easiest way is just to tell them what to do, just pack your bag and leave. But from an MI perspective, the invitation is, can you see the strengths, the talents, the abilities, the gifts, and resources that are sustaining this individual in this dreadful situation? Keeping them alive, essentially. And work from there to identify the resilience, the creativity, the courage that it takes for a woman who's been living with domestic abuse to stay.

**Glenn Hinds:**

And understand, a bit like what we were describing earlier on, a discrepancy professor Ryan invited us again to think about maybe the resistance that we're hearing is really important for us to pay attention to. Because that might give insight to some of the challenges that changing this behavior will represent. I can't leave because I have no money. I can't leave because he'll come after me. And it's about rather than just trying to solve those for the client, it's paying attention to them and being curious. So, you've thought about this and at the minute you're weighing things up while it's not ideal, this is still the safest place for you. Because that's what's important, safety is important for you. So if there was to be a change, safety has to be included. So what ideas have you got about can make this safe, or how you could do things differently so that it would be safe for you to leave?

**Glenn Hinds:**

For a lot of people, that is the transition about I see a problem and I also see the strengths that this individual's using to sustain themselves in the midst of this problem.

**Melinda Hohman:**

I would still want to add in the context and understand what's the context, how does this happen. And somebody just can't leave or else they're putting their life at risk, usually. And having that discussion also in the classroom, your target behavior, the goal in your MI interview would be a safety plan, like you said. Because you can't put somebody at risk by encouraging them to leave, because you don't understand. You don't know exactly what it is that they're dealing with. So interesting about particularly the college students today and the ones that I work with, was that they're coming from all different backgrounds. But there's a lot of research on this now about how back in the old days, like when I was in school, you could work a part-time job and put yourself through school. And those days are just long gone. Students are taking on enormous debt, and chances are it's much more expensive and they're still working a 40 hour week.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Maybe taking care of younger siblings, or just having so many different boatload of problems. And it's easy for a professor to get in the situation and say, "Well you need to buy this textbook and you need to turn your homework in time." And all those kinds of things that we would expect, but it just might not happen. At the beginning of the semester I had students write about themselves, just like a little introduction to me. And then say, tell me about a time when you accomplished something. And that's a way to get at strengths, already. Like, when was a time you did something well or you accomplished



something? And then at some point to talk about that and look, how do you use that with a client? Perhaps you are working with somebody that's in an intimate partner violence situation. But you kind of put that all aside and ask them to tell you about themselves, and as well as when, you know, tell me about a time when you really accomplished something.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Things that I hear from the students, talking about learning how to salsa dance, or learning how to... But then that opens the door for a conversation of, what did you learn about yourself? How would you describe that about yourself? We would also do characteristics of successful changers, a handout that it's Miller and Rollnick's book. Do that as an exercise and get people to look at strengths based behaviors and how does that describe them. As you were saying there Glenn, you're focusing on the positive aspects of the strengths, not just talking about all the problem.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Things like good strategies or useful educational exercises to teach both the concept and the practice of giving affirmation. Just sort of naturally see the evolution of that into like, okay, what are the specific characteristics then that you're noticing about yourself? But then if you have that in conversation with someone else, that rise to the surface, that you'd shed some light on and name in conversation. Also Mindy, your description of this generation of college student does seem to also reflect a bit of modeling also. In that it's so easy for a current generation to look down on the generation that's coming up. Glenn and I were just joking earlier this week about a quote from, was it Socrates or Plato? I can't-

**Glenn Hinds:**

Yeah. Socrates.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Yeah. Socrates, who is bemoaning the use of the day. And it's just a tradition unlike few others, that us old timers, however old we might be, will look down on a younger generation. The fact that you see that generation, the current college population, through this lens of understanding and appreciation for the challenges that they have that we didn't have. I imagine that comes through in your teaching, in a way that they very much appreciate, feel heard and understood by you. Which likely just opens the door for all of the other creative exercises that you do. That I imagine it, all of that grows out of that level of acceptance and understanding that you have for them.

**Melinda Hohman:**

I enjoyed being in the classroom, that's for sure. Got a lot of energy from it. Just look at the rise of food banks on college campuses now. It's wonderful that the campuses are addressing it, but it's too bad that the need is there. I kind of go back to understanding people's contexts. And like I had a colleague complaining about a student arguing about a grade. That happens. It might be worth checking out, that if the person doesn't get a certain grade, do they lose their student loan? So it's not just about pleasing mom and





dad, or whatever we would think it was. It could have financial consequences. That doesn't mean you change their grade, if that's truly what they earned. But to understand, where does that intensity come from for being so distraught? And it's because maybe you're looking at being saddled with a big amount of debt, on top of what they already have.

**Glenn Hinds:**

It's all been driven by a desire to understand. Not necessarily to do anything differently, but to practice understanding why is this happening the way this is happening, and don't just take the presentation of aggression on the surface as meaning that this is an aggressive person. There's something going on in the background, take a few months to see if you can see what the background is for them. And even just noticing that to them, while it may not mean that you change the grade, they will again left having felt understood. And in that moment of being able to understand, they may also have been helped think about what they now need to do next, given the fact they didn't get the grade. And yes, it's going to affect their student loan next year.

**Glenn Hinds:**

They still need to make a decision about what they're going to do next. But if the professor or the lecturer takes that context into place, then they can help them navigate wherever they go next. Rather than just leave them frustrated and angry with the lecturer, but also with the system and feeling very isolated in what they're going to do next. It's all about the relationship we have with each person we come into contact with. And more particularly it's about the social worker, in this instance, being conscious of what's happening for them and being able to see the big picture and the individual in that big picture. And to just notice it to that person, but also again, to trust this individual, to value this individual. To recognize, how did they get this far without me? They are coming up against challenges. Now how might they navigate these themselves? Rather than, I'm a social worker, I'm the expert. Brace yourself, I'm going to fix you and you're just going to do what I tell you, only to be frustrated back.

**Glenn Hinds:**

So, it's very subtle, but again, the metaphor we very often use in Motivational Interviewing is a dance. What needs to happen for someone to be willing to dance with us? Particularly if they're mandated. And what is our attitude towards the person we're dancing with? And it sounds like that's so important to what it is you've been teaching the social workers over all those years.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Yeah, you really summed it up well. Great summary.

**Glenn Hinds:**

You mentioned your new book. What have you added to the new book that wasn't in the first book? What have listeners got to look forward when they buy your new book?



**Melinda Hohman:**

Well when the first book came out in 2012, and not even a year later, Miller and Melnick published their new book with the four processes. And at the time I thought, oh no. So I did add in the four processes, I have a chapter on each of that. About, I already had a lot on engaging. But about focusing and setting an agenda, and about evoking, and then planning. And they were, in the former book, things on that. But updating the research that, as well as our completely new client vignettes. And tried to set them in context to where social workers are. Like in the engaging one, I decided that I wanted my client, quote, unquote, in my vignette to be someone who was experiencing homelessness. And how does the social worker engage that person?

**Melinda Hohman:**

I decided to set it in the context of a library, because that's become a new practice setting for some social workers, is to work in public libraries. Because used by some of the people who are experiencing homelessness. And it was fairly nice to be, you know, part of this whole process, when I would think about what would be the different contexts that social workers in. I would reach out to people from the MINT organization, like Ken Kraybill who works with those who are homeless. And would give me some of the context and the background, and some of the understanding on that.

**Melinda Hohman:**

So, I added in all new vignettes. Some that are more cutting edge social work practice. Where social workers are such as in the library, around integrated healthcare, around student, college student's who's are a veteran. And I added one in on, and it's an area I've gotten more interested in on. Is, how do you use MI to screen for food insecurity? And that's not typically something a social worker would do, but it's become so prevalent. That I used a vignette, where the social worker was working at mental health setting, at a child guidance clinic. Used that as an opportunity to screen for food insecurity.

**Melinda Hohman:**

The other piece I added in was looking at some of the new applications of MI. I did have a section on food insecurity, a section on ecological social work. Got some consultation from another MINT member, Vince Schutt, trauma inform care. And I included something called the grand challenges of social work, which were released, I don't know how long ago. Five, six, seven, eight years ago, in social work that are the 12 challenges of where the social work field should be heading. One is like 'smart decarceration' around social isolation around homelessness. So looked at how does MI fit in with that? Now that I've taught MI for almost 20 years, I tracked down some former students and asked them to submit pieces that I call voices from the field. Or I asked some MINT members to talk about their work, specifically their career and how MI fits into that.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Like somebody who works with work college students, but she does a lot of work with the trans community. What does that mean to use MI with somebody who is trans and thinking about whether to transition or not? I had somebody write about school bullying. Hospice



social work, from a woman who's a Native American, from her perspective. And I have a chapter I put in around Critical Race Theory and MI, and how do we address the issue of race using MI. And I had two different social workers, one from a white perspective and one from an African-American perspective, to talk about race in their work. That was just so fun to see what different students, former students and colleagues were doing. And to really apply MI in those different kinds of settings. That's mainly it. Two MINT members, I had updated the chapter on implementation and talked about coaching, and what you look for in a coach.

**Melinda Hohman:**

And then as I had in the last book too, MINT members, Fredrik Eliasson and Cristine Erkleheart submitted sections about their feet on the ground practice of implementing MI in large organizations. So I think there's a little something for everyone.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Certainly, very comprehensive.

**Melinda Hohman:**

I hope so. Just in terms of practice areas, the people would get some ideas. So have a general overview of MI, but also within the social work context as well as from different areas of practice.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Right. Surely a great resource with a breadth of topics, certainly with a lot of depth to them as well. Nicely timed with the four processes and a lot of, more of the current MI concept and structure, I suppose. As we're coming to a close, we often ask our guests what they have on the horizon or what's a project or something that's interesting them. Whether it's related to MI or not. Maybe now that you've just completed the second edition of the book, you're just wanting to take a breath, see what's next. Or maybe you have something else a little more concrete in mind. What are your thoughts on that?

**Melinda Hohman:**

I do have something concrete. This just kind of sprang up, but it seemed like a good opportunity, which was a call for papers. And I have a couple colleagues, one in MINT named Fiona McMaster. We're writing a piece on MI and contact tracing for COVID. It's been interesting, the amount of research that's come out already about COVID, about COVID and mental health problems. That's difficult to read for a variety of reasons. We're all kind of suffering this together. Because the Center for Disease Control recommends MI as the communication method for contact tracers. So we want to look at what does that mean and what does that look like? The idea for social workers to be involved in something that's normally public health is because the research is telling us there's going to be a wave of mental health problems. So if you're doing contact tracing, you also have the opportunity to ask about mental health issues, or to ask about food insecurity issues or other case management types of needs.



**Melinda Hohman:**

So, we're working on that now, and its due next month. So hopefully that will come out. Otherwise, just trying to be a good self-isolator.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Very interesting to hear about the relationship with MI and the recommendation for the use of MI as the communication style, in the context of COVID-19 and contact tracing. And again, it just reinforces the significant influence that Motivational Interviewing now has across so many realms. And the value that's been attached to the spirit and the skills that an individual uses when they are practicing Motivational Interviewing. I suppose what's also quite significant is what you're describing as the second wave of COVID, is not necessarily going to be a physical condition. It may be a mental condition, that we as a society are going to have to respond to. Which is the impact of rules, loss of jobs, isolation for such a long time, the loss of loved ones to the actual condition.

**Glenn Hinds:**

And again, the impact that that may have on us as the helpers. We mentioned there on about the burnout and it's just about the context, and what an individual's practicing. What are their dilemmas? What are the challenges? What are the emotional realities that you're working with each day? And what impact does that have on you? It sounds like if you're reinforcing and reiterating, that what this second wave of COVID, which is the emotional wave, that we as practitioners and the audience may need to preparing themselves now for what it is they're going to be facing in the future. Which is a lot of people struggling, emotionally and psychologically with whatever the new world looks like. And what it is we can be doing now to prepare ourselves for that, in a way that's consistent with MI and is consistent with what we know is good help.

**Glenn Hinds:**

So, we really appreciate what you're doing. I look forward to the publication of that paper. And on publication, when does your second book come out?

**Melinda Hohman:**

Probably around the end of the year.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Right.

**Melinda Hohman:**

So it seems to be. Or early 2021. So, Motivational Interviewing in Social Work Practice.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Fantastic. And certainly what we would be happy to do, is when that comes out, we will push that out on an episode but also on our social media. And just on the communication, we also ask our guests that if people who have listened to you are curious about anything



that you've talked about, or to speak directly to you. Mindy, would you be happy for them to contact you? And if you are, what's the best means for them to do that?

**Melinda Hohman:**

Well my email is mhohman, h-o-h-m-a-n, @sdsu.edu, San Diego State University. Or I'm on Twitter @MelindaHohman. It's been a very interesting discussion. You guys asked some great questions.

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

We appreciate it Mindy. Thank you so much. Glenn, as we're getting ready to sign off, you want to give people oriented to social media platforms and ways to contact us?

**Glenn Hinds:**

Of course. Our Twitter account is @ChangeTalking. Our Facebook page is Talking to Change. Our Instagram account is Talking to Change Podcast. As always, if you want to send a message directly to myself or Seb, it's [podcast@glennhinds.com](mailto:podcast@glennhinds.com).

**Sebastian Kaplan:**

Well Mindy, thank you so much for joining us and helping us better understand the work that you do, and the role that MI plays. Not just social work practice, but in the education of social work students.

**Melinda Hohman:**

Thank you.

**Glenn Hinds:**

Thank you Mindy.

