

## **“Why do I have to do this?”: institutions, integrity, and citizenship**

**Edward R. Shapiro**

### **ABSTRACT**

For any individual, to identify with the needs of society is a developmental accomplishment; it is a marker of active citizenship, the capacity to lead from below. In this article, Dr Shapiro outlines a pathway to the role of citizen, focusing on the impact of social systems—families and institutions—on identity.

**Keywords:** citizenship, politics, systems psychodynamics, institutions, roles.

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself ...  
Whoever degrades another degrades me ...  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman (1855)

### **Eric Miller**

In 1985, Eric Miller published a lecture he gave on the politics of involvement (Miller, 1985). He reflected on the difficulty that the audience might have in listening to him because of what he represented in his person: a white man, a representative of a colonialist power, and a member of institutions whose work might evoke negative reactions from his audience. He recognised that those political reactions were an intrinsic part of his engagement with others, and that he would have to integrate them into his view of himself and his ideas.

Later in that same paper, he revealed that he had a hidden agenda for members who participated in group relations conferences. The staff who lead these conferences regularly assert that they have no agenda for the members beyond providing them with “opportunities for learning”. Eric, who had directed many of these conferences, revealed that his hidden wish was that members go back to their institutions and become change agents, active citizens. Given the “intractable work settings” that he recognised were part of contemporary organisational life, he was not hopeful about this outcome, recognising that he might be “selling a shirt on the foreknowledge that it will shrink the first time it is laundered”.

In this article, I want to join both of Eric’s thoughts. The problems of politically polarised thinking have only escalated since 1985; the need for applying the learning of systems psychodynamics to the development of active citizens can no longer be kept as a hidden agenda. There is too much at stake. The extraordinary opportunities in group relations conferences, where individuals can learn to manage themselves in role amidst the swirl of

irrational system dynamics begs for application to the society around us. Recognising how we are shaped by the dynamics of social systems is crucial as we consider the dilemmas that increasingly face us as citizens.

There are two questions that I'd like you to keep in mind as you read this article. The first reflects a discipline that might help you to listen better to polarised political arguments: "*How are they right?*" It is too gratifying for "us" to hear how "they" are wrong; it privileges us. It is a struggle to listen more deeply for those bits of what they are saying that fit our experience or the task that we are trying to work at together, but it is worth the effort; it privileges the task. The second question is the title of this article: "*Why do I have to do this?*" This question can come up for us when we feel pulled to act in response to social need. The instinctive answer is, "I don't need to—someone else will do it". I will indicate how, when this question comes up, it is an opportunity for learning and development. Inevitably, there is an affirmative answer; it is worth slowing down to discover it.

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A functioning democratic society needs active citizens. Without our engagement, chaos and authoritarianism take over. But discovering and claiming a citizen voice on behalf of others is a challenge. Let me tell you a brief story:

Thomas, a black British social worker from a West Indian background, is sitting on a London bus at night during a fireman's strike. Racial tensions are erupting, people are setting fires on the streets, sirens are going off, and a group of black teenage boys on the bus are beginning to threaten the white bus driver. The white passengers on the bus are motionless. Thomas says to himself, with some irritation, "Why do I have to do this?"

*Why do I have to do this?* is a question any citizen might ask when facing an impulse to act in response to society's needs. Answering that question requires attention to issues of identity: who am I, what do I stand for, and why *now* do I feel moved to act? *Who we are* is shaped by our contexts: our families, the institutions we join, and the missions they carry out on behalf of society (Bion, 1961; Erikson, 1950, 1956, 1958; Shapiro, 1982, 1992, 2020). When we take up the role of citizen, we represent those contexts and the values that have shaped who we are (Shapiro & Carr, 2017). Representation is at the core of my argument.

I'm aware, for example, that I am an older, white, privileged American man. People see me that way first. When I was growing up in a white majority society, those categories didn't seem to matter much. But these days, in my country, they do. Following George Floyd's murder, whiteness and maleness as problems have taken centre stage—and for good reason. In a recent group relations conference, a young black psychiatrist, reflecting on what I represented to her, said, "When you speak, my mind goes blank." If that has become the impact of my person, how might I speak differently to increase the possibility of being heard, and how might I better learn from and use the contexts that I represent?

All our contexts are in transition, and their links to society's needs have become unclear. Our families and institutions are central gathering places in which we can shape our engagement in the larger society. But, as we shift from an industrial to an information society, our institutions are in trouble, and we may need to help them sharpen their missions.

After reviewing our current social turmoil and its impact on us, I will illustrate a developmental pathway to active citizenship focusing on the ways that social systems impact who we are—and who we might become.

## The United States

When I was growing up after World War II, white Americans had an idealised version of American democracy. It was represented by Norman Rockwell images of loving families and shared values, and it helped many of us white folks feel like we belonged to something larger than ourselves that was good. Sadly, that idealised view was enabled by a shared denial: of racism (both structured and unstructured), misogyny, homophobia—and all of the *othering* that has so damaged our collective capacity to test reality (Shapiro, 2003).

For example, in the context of the pandemic and the racial protests of 2020, many white Americans learned for the first time that in 1921, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, hundreds of white Americans with machine guns, planes, and bombs massacred hundreds of black Americans, burning houses and looting, leaving up to 10,000 people homeless and destroying an affluent black community. We learned that black Americans have their own national anthem—evidence of our failure as Americans to live out our professed values.

I had the best education that my country had to offer—and I knew none of this.

We have increasingly witnessed, through mobile phone videos, how black Americans are being killed on the streets by police. And, during the heightened polarisation of the Trump era, we have had to ask ourselves whether we had lost our capacity to connect with each other as citizens. When George Floyd was choked to death by a white policeman, hundreds of thousands of people around the world and across many differences took to the streets in protest. What mobilised them and what were they joining?

As the pandemic struck, millions of us remained in our homes, facing the potential virus attack on our lungs, knowing that there were no treatments available and not enough ventilators. We recognised our relative helplessness and had to spend time imagining the possibility that we would die—by suffocation. And then, four months into the pandemic, we watched on television as an indifferent white policeman pressed his knee on the neck of George Floyd, as George cried out over and over, “I can’t breathe!” It was too close, and we—almost consciously—had to identify with him, thinking, “That could be me!”

Many of us responded by taking to the streets. Shaken by the power of the image and horrified by our developing recognition that we could find

ourselves both in George Floyd and in the policeman, we suddenly discovered shared values and ideals: racial bias is arbitrary and hideous; no one should be executed without due process; authority must be held to account. Once we were on the streets, our differences disappeared: we were all members of humanity, we were all potentially attacked by the same virus, we all lived on the same threatened planet, and we all faced systems of authority that could too easily become arbitrary, coercive, and punitive.

While street protests are powerful efforts to awaken and move the larger society, they are not enough. A more focused engagement in response to society's needs requires a range of institutions, where clearly articulated missions can mobilise effective action.

But rapid social change has derailed our institutions. The population has grown; climate change, immigration, and globalisation have shattered the boundaries that used to hold national identities; technology is on an exponential curve; and the range of family structures has broadened, leaving democracy and its institutions under stress. That stress—and the resultant institutional corruption—have been visible to all of us. Long before the pandemic, religious institutions exploited children; educational institutions underpaid and bureaucratised teachers; healthcare institutions managed more paperwork than patients; politicians supported the needs of companies not citizens; and commercial institutions, inevitably, focused on money, not meaning. It has become increasingly difficult to connect the missions of our institutions with the needs of society.

Our basic human drive to join with others, to connect beyond ourselves and beyond our differences to some larger purpose, is in danger of being lost. Though the pandemic and climate change have demonstrated our global interdependency, we live in a society that is despairing of a sense of community (Shapiro, 2003). The American Constitution begins with three words: “We, the people ...”. Those words suggested that Americans might find ways to speak with one voice about shared ideals and values. But that hope has been splintered by social change, racial tension, and political chaos, leaving each of us isolated, apathetic, or lost in partisan tribalism. Even the word “citizen” feels a bit abstract, with its definition limited to concrete legal formulas of “rights and privileges”.

In the United States, we no longer effectively teach our children how our government works: who is responsible for what and why our country's founders structured our democracy with checks and balances to sustain central values. We have opened ourselves to autocrats who tell us what to believe. Is the truth of our society to be asserted by them? Or might we, as citizens, discover who we are, once we face the ways we have exploited the differences that have separated us? And, given how complicated our world is, how can any individual make sense of it without intermediate spaces where we might collectively develop a shared understanding of the world around us?

The spaces available for this purpose are those bounded human systems we call *institutions*. When we join an institution, we take up a role and become

part of a mission that addresses a need of the outside world. *Role* is the framework where the person and the context meet. Each role is a function of a mission. So, for example, the *father role* derives from the family's developmental mission; the *nursing role* is a function of the hospital's treatment mission. Though similar roles can be occupied by different people who may experience them differently, it is through these roles and their related missions that we can begin, with others, to sort out our relationship to society.

Families and institutions are the contexts that shape us. Given the necessary tools, which I'm going to try to offer you, we can develop our capacities to shape our institutions in order to enhance our participation in the outside world.

### **Developing active citizenship**

In what follows, I will outline a developmental progression towards active citizenship, focusing on ways we might make better use of our roles in institutions.

#### ***Step 1: Learning to use our family role as a lens***

Let me start with our families. We (most of us) are *born as members* of a family group. Knowing how to be a member is our birthright. One way to think about families is to consider them as social *institutions* that respond to society's needs. From society's perspective, the family's mission is to facilitate the development of mature adults (Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro & Carr, 1991). A range of roles (parent, child, sibling, grandparent) are functions of that mission. Each one takes up an aspect of the developmental task in a unique way, and all of these roles relate to each other. When people in roles relate to each other in the service of a shared mission, we can call that *role-relatedness*. It is different from *relationships*, which are not necessarily mission related. I will have more to say about this distinction—a centrally important one—a bit later.

*Developing mature adults*, as a family mission, does not simply apply to children. As adults, our developing capacities for intimacy, generativity, and integrity are all supported by engagement in family life; our children contribute to our development as parents (Erikson, 1950). Whether we consciously grasp the family's social mission or not, we are all mobilised by it, and we learn in the family setting about institutional life, mission, membership, and roles (Shapiro & Carr, 1991).

As I've indicated, we are defined by our contexts (Erikson, 1950, 1956, 1958, 1968). Our families shape us, and we shape them. When we leave the family, we carry aspects of them with us. We emerge with values and ideals that are shaped by, and transmitted through, family interaction and development. Though we may not be aware of it, we become *representatives*: of the family, of our ethnicity, and of our multigenerational history. Other people recognise this, and they respond to us in ways we may not see; they shape us further as representatives of our family's missions. Over time, we increasingly

perceive the world through those lenses. And, inevitably, we bring our family role into our institutions, as the following story will illustrate.

In a study group focusing on problems at work, a young woman presents a dilemma. She is involved in several institutions, each of which engages her interest. She can't seem to bring her ideas together within any one institution, though they do fit together in her own mind. Within her main workplace, a large hospital, she finds that the small programme she manages, which carries many of her ideas, cannot effectively grow and develop. There are too many competing approaches to similar problems carried by other programmes, and no clear decision from the leadership about how to integrate them. Her other institutions, each of which has its own mission, seem disconnected from each other. People in different roles, in her experience, seem unable to collaborate. She struggles with her inability to bring all of herself or her ideas into one place, and she is irritated at her colleagues for making it so difficult.

The group leader invites her to present her family experience. She reports that she grew up in her grandfather's home with her older siblings while her parents saved money for their own home. Her grandfather brought in refugees to live in the basement. The home was filled with curiously connected relatives, friends and strangers, tensions about who was in charge, questions about the appropriate boundaries of the family, and passionate arguments about almost everything. She was the youngest child, left largely alone to watch the chaos. None of it ever made sense to her, though she spent a lot of time trying to figure it out. Why did her family have no home of their own, who were all these damn people, and how were they connected to her?

In college, she had majored in social science and spent time wandering through foreign lands, trying to understand strange customs. As she reported this developmental story, her dilemma of heading a tiny programme in a larger institution surrounded by competing "sibling" programmes began to seem recognisable. With the group's help, she began to see that others could not be held responsible for creating such a similar role in her work life to that in her family life; she had done it.

Once she recognised these connections, she found herself less conflicted. No longer did she feel in a work trap from which she could not emerge. She began to see the ways she was using her family experience to understand something about the world. It was a perspective she had, a lens that was uniquely hers and that enabled a way of connecting. She was joining institutions that related to her childhood questions and her family role, using her unique lens to develop a further integration of herself and deepen her engagement in the world.

### ***Step 2: Representing an institution's mission in role***

So, if the first step is recognising the way we carry our family role into our institutions, the second is recognising that once we join an institution, we also become *representatives* of that institution's mission. How does that happen?

As an individual, when I meet a new person, the experience is of meeting an *other*, someone somewhat strange to me. Once I join an institution as

a member, I undergo a psychological shift and I can begin to see other members not as an *other* but as *one of us*. That internal shift, when linked to a mission, can cut across the otherwise distancing differences of age, race, gender, and sexual identity. In the context of a mission, these differences, rather than being *other*—or toxic—can become generative and useful, once integrated within the framework of a mutual commitment to a mission that is larger than the self.

Coming out of our families, our representative roles inevitably influence our choice of institutions. And, when our institutional mission is clear, with embedded ideals and values that matter to us, we join it more deeply than we join leaders. Through this process, we can begin to represent the mission to others. This insight has freed whistleblowers, for instance, to take the risk to speak up about leaders and organisations that have lost sight of the mission. We saw this kind of courage during Donald Trump's presidency.

Work life is stressful. Bion (1961) recognised that a group's capacity to focus on the work task helps to dispel irrationality. Much of the irrationality at work stems from a loss of *role-relatedness* and a reactive focus on problematic *relationships*. That focus, and the consequent loss of attention to the task, can lead to feelings of exploitation, injuries to self-esteem, and contempt for others. When under stress at work, it is difficult to sort out which of our emotional reactions belongs to our own vulnerabilities, from reactions to our colleagues' behaviour, or from the need to clarify the task, the mission.

We are sensitive to others' reactions based on our life's experience and the authority dynamics of our family life. But human beings are infinitely complex and other people are, by definition, difficult to understand. Trusting our sensitivities, though, we can find ourselves believing—without evidence—that we *know* why others behave as they do, and we can then blame them for our feelings. I've called this response *pathological certainty* (Shapiro, 1982); it inevitably leads to increased irrationality. Shifting from a focus on personal relationships to role-relatedness can help.

As I've indicated, each institutional role is a function of a mission. In our working roles, then, we *represent* the mission, and our behaviour and our experience-in-role in relation to others-in-different-roles illustrates how the system is working. In an effort to sort this out, the first step is to orient ourselves to the mission: what task are we actually working on and how do our roles relate to that? The second requires taking the listening position that I've recommended to you, "*How are they right?*", that is, "What aspect of what others are saying fits with my experience and with the mission that we are working at?" (Shapiro, 2020; Shapiro & Carr, 1991). Margaret Rioch, the founder of group relations work in the United States, once told me, "If you tie yourself to the institutional mission like to the mast of a ship in a storm, you can ride out the storms of irrationality" (1978).

Let me illustrate what I mean.

A psychiatric clinic appointed a young woman to introduce a new programme in child psychotherapy. About the same time, a new senior doctor was appointed.

In public, he supported her approach, but she suspected that in truth he was ambivalent about it. Her anxieties began to focus around one small piece of repeated behaviour. The doctor would come into her office, furnished with her desk and some small chairs for the kids. While talking with her, he would sit on the desk and rest his feet on the chairs.

This bothered her, but aware of her junior position, she felt she could not talk to him about it. She held the experience within herself and reported it to her psychoanalyst. The analyst suggested that she might be re-experiencing in this interaction with the doctor a familiar family role, namely her early angry reaction to her father who she felt “stepped on the child” in her without loving it or respecting its value. She felt, but could not articulate to herself or her analyst, a vague sense that something was being lost. Though his interpretation resonated with part of her experience, it did not connect with other parts, chiefly those aspects that involved her role in the clinic.

Her difficulty was that the more she attempted to figure out what was happening in terms of her own personal history (or, in terms of her fantasies about the personality of her supervisor), the more problematic the experience became. How could she use the sensitivity she had, based on her childhood experience, in her work setting? She needed a way to gain perspective both on herself as an individual and on herself-in-role, some other viewpoint that might bring her role and the system into focus as an alternative source of understanding about her discomfort.

So, for example, might this working pair consider, in their roles as representatives of the mission, that through their role-relatedness they might be enacting something on its behalf? Remember, behaviour in role illustrates how the system is working. Could they find a way to listen to how each of them is “right”? Could the supervisor’s actions and the young psychologist’s sensitivity, for example, represent ambivalence in the system about developing this new clinic, providing data necessary for the institution’s evolution of its mission? If both used this perspective, it might bypass interpretations of each other’s personality, accusations and withdrawal, defensive reactions, and mutual blame. That discovery would represent a work-related, internal collaboration between staff members, a shaping of the institution-in-the-mind, and a potential renegotiation of the mission.

### ***Step 3: Learning across institutions***

Here is the third step. Once we learn to use our experience-in-role to better understand and shape the mission, we can begin to consider learning across institutions. That requires a focus on *open systems*.

The individual and the institution are both open systems. Each has an internal world, an external world, and a boundary function that manages the interchanges across the boundary that constitute meaningful learning (Miller, 1979, 1985; Miller & Rice, 1967; Modell, 1976, 1984; Rice, 1969). *For the individual*, the boundary function is that part of our mind (the ego) that helps us sort out who we are, mediating between the self that we think we are and the self that others perceive (Erikson, 1956). *For the institution*, the mission is the boundary function, mediating between the internal identity and capacities of



the institution and the needs of the outside world. The mission gets refined and reshaped as the institution matures (Shapiro, 2013). And when the mission is lost and irrationality takes over, individuals can get mobilised in their roles to do something about it.

My next story focuses on the experience and behaviour of people who are attempting to collaborate across different institutions. The story illustrates how individuals, out of their awareness, can end up "speaking" as representatives of their institutional missions. The boy who opens this story is speaking for his family, though he doesn't know it.

An eight-year-old boy was admitted to a child inpatient unit because of what was called "unmanageable aggression". He was the youngest of six children from different fathers to an unmarried mother. The boy's father was currently in jail, and the boy was causing trouble at home. One day the mother was out shopping at a supermarket with all the kids. When the older ones began to cause trouble, the eight-year-old went over to one of the shelves, pulled out a can of *Raid* (a powerful insect killer) and began spraying all his siblings. Terrified, the mother called the police who brought the boy to the hospital.

The psychiatric resident, who admitted the boy, was unclear as to why he was in the hospital. She felt irritated at the task of writing up a patient who did not seem to need her attention when she had so much else to manage. When she interviewed the boy, she found him to be lively, engaging, and not terribly disturbed. She thought, "How can I get this kid out of the hospital and mobilise social services to take care of him and the family?"

She brought this case to a seminar focusing on systems issues and talked about how overwhelmed she was. As the discussion unfolded, it became clear that all the trainees in the group felt overwhelmed by clinical pressures; this was a shared aspect of the institutional culture. They could recognise that these feelings were expectable in this intense and busy clinical system, and they were beginning to see that articulating these feelings in relation to the task might be useful. The system pressures were contributing to the resident's wish to get this child to another caregiver.

Because the resident felt that a "good" doctor should want to take care of her patient and not get rid of him, she felt guilty about her irritation and could not fully acknowledge it. When we turned our attention to the boy's family, the resident could begin to see that her irritated feelings mirrored that of the harried mother who had too many children to manage by herself.

This recognition generated a discussion about unacknowledged anger. When it is unbearable and uncontained, what happens to it? Where does it go? Does it get spread around the family and, if so, how? Was it possible, for example, that this child—the youngest member of the family—had empathised with the mother's distress? With great amusement, the group suddenly recognised that the child's attempt to spray his siblings with *Raid* could be understood as an effort—on his mother's behalf and on his own—to "get rid of these pests!"

That idea made everybody laugh—and relax. The resident began to think about her case in a new way. She had found a way to listen to how the child's behaviour made sense, how it was "right". It allowed her to go back to the

mother (who ultimately came in to talk with her) and help her to gradually shift from horror at her child's behaviour to recognising that the behaviour was an understandable communication about family stress. The relaxed and supportive interpretation from the resident about the kid's wish to "get rid of those pests" evoked surprised laughter from the mother who began experiencing the doctor as an empathic ally. This helped her to tolerate her own anger and to recognise that she was taking on more than she could manage. It allowed her to not be so frightened by her son and helped her to maximise her family's capacities and resources.

When a representative from a family who carries bits of the system's irrationality bursts out into another system, some of us call those representatives *patients*. But they are citizens of the family—whistleblowers—representing an institution that has lost sight of its developmental mission and is in trouble (Shapiro, 1992; Shapiro et al., 1975). Active citizenship is an interactive process. Spraying *Raid* is a form of interaction but it's in a language that is hard to translate. If an outside system can listen and translate such behaviour into language, social development is possible. That outcome requires taking feelings and behaviour seriously and discovering their communicative value.

When people are too marginalised to speak, their essential communications often burst out through unmanaged behaviour. An over-reactive society can lose important data that might help the community develop (Elmendorf & Parish, 2007). Society needs institutions that are capable of translating such behavioural communications. We are beginning to recognise this need, as evidenced by the protesters' cry after George Floyd's murder to "defund the police". What the protesters are actually asking is to shift funds from the police' task of *containing* behaviour to the social service task of *understanding* it, in the service of helping the community develop its own capacities.

If we were to simply focus on the child in my story, we might consider his behaviour as a symptom of his immature psychology. Broadening our view, however, allows us to recognise the system he is embedded in and the role he is taking up. This child was voicing through communicative behaviour his experience-in-role in a failing family system to an external context that might be able to listen. The story is about two institutions in interaction and the affectively charged communication between them. The two systems have different missions: for the hospital, *treatment*, for the family, *development*. People in their various roles are guided and shaped by those missions. Both systems are having trouble, but the interaction between them constitutes an opportunity for learning.

#### **Step 4: Integration, integrity, and citizenship**

I've addressed the first three steps of our development as representatives of society: family role, institutional role, and representing institutions. My final story incorporates all of this and leads to taking up the role of citizen.

Adulthood inevitably involves membership in many groups and institutions, some consciously and some out of our awareness. These multiple

memberships are aspects of our identities as individuals. They represent the learning we have done to internalise the values of the institutions we have joined and to develop the perspectives on society represented by their missions. When we are faced with polarisation, disconnection, and social trouble, we can use the learning that comes out of our institutional memberships to discover our roles as citizens (Shapiro, 2020; Shapiro & Carr, 2017).

Since institutions are fragments of society, they are also elements of our functioning as citizens. Their tasks and values are in our minds, if we search for them. Facing social conflict, we might allow ourselves to wonder which groups—in our minds—might link the issues we are feeling. And we might consider, as citizens, negotiating a shared membership with others to discover a way out of disconnection, polarisation, and impasse and into engagement.

Once an individual feels drawn to act in the face of social need, the question arises, "Why me?" This is a question every citizen must face. Social engagement includes risk. "Why me?" signals a recognition that "something about my identity is at stake here". What forces would make individuals risk themselves on behalf of others? What allows any of us to identify with the whole group so that we know if the group is at risk we are as well? What forces might move us to lead from below as an active citizen? All of these questions deserve answers.

I began this article with the story of Thomas, the black British social worker on the bus, who was mobilised to act during the fireman's strike after watching a group of black adolescent boys challenge the white bus driver. Thomas thought to himself, "Why do I have to do this?"

He was feeling irritated at the white passengers for sitting still and at the black adolescents for hassling the driver. He thought, "Why do I, a black man, have to stand up for a country that treats its black citizens badly?" Unable in the moment to answer these questions, he made a decision, stood up and asked the kids to calm down, which they did.

How can we unpack what happened? Who is this man—and what does he represent? *Representation* is at the core of my argument. Thomas is not just Thomas, the person; he also represents a range of commitments and internalisations. As Walt Whitman noted in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), "Whoever degrades another degrades me ... (I contain multitudes)".

Thomas was a member of multiple groups and institutions: his West Indian identity group, his family, his Anglican church, his social work organisation, and his British citizenship. These multiple memberships are aspects of his identity—and elements of his functioning as a citizen. Each institution has a mission—and each mission matters to Thomas. Though he may not have been conscious of it in the moment, he is a representative of these missions.

As a black man, though he was irritated at the boys' anger for casting an unfavourable image of black people, he was not afraid of it. He understood their anger and may even have moved toward an empathic identification with them against the (white) authority of the bus driver. He could convey all of this to the

young people without endorsing their behaviour. In his role as a social worker, he had joined the mission of improving social problems. Through that lens, he could understand the reluctance of white passengers to potentially increase racial tensions. As a member of the Anglican Church, he was identified with the transcendent interdependency that belief in God entails and he could understand the vulnerability of the larger society during the firemen's strike. And, finally, as a father, he could understand the adolescents' developmental need for a limiting context—a paternal presence—at the moment of their rebellion against authority.

Sorting this out might have clarified for Thomas that only he, on the bus, could face the adolescents' aggression and help them recognise the social consequences of acting it out. "Why do I have to do this?" has an answer. Feeling part of a social whole, Thomas was able to offer the adolescents the possibility of identifying with his integration of roles so they could place their reactions in perspective.

Here is my argument: these notions—*joining*, *membership*, *mission*, and *role*—represent some of the steps an individual takes toward social understanding within the self. Integration of these memberships and roles into a coherent identity allows identification with the larger social context and the beginnings of a perspective as citizen. Thomas's question, "Why do I have to do this?" can be understood as a question about his identity—and about his integrity.

Erik Erikson (1954) defined integrity as our obligation to the most mature meaning available to us, adding:

... even if this [risky commitment] should bring discomfort to ourselves, deprivation to our mates and offspring, and the loss of friends, all of which must be imagined and endured in order not to be exposed to a final sense of Disgust and Despair. (p. 51)

In Erikson's view, integrity requires the discovery of social tasks to which the individual can become committed (Shapiro & Fromm, 1999), that is to say, *active citizenship*.

Thomas found himself in a role; it evoked an internal conflict. His integrity, however, required him to integrate the various institutional missions that were aspects of his identity, allowing him to recognise what he *represented* to others. Through that process, he could identify with all of the riders on the bus and discover the immediate social need as a mission that extended beyond his own needs. Thomas's risky decision to take up the role of citizen marks his recognition: "If society is at stake, I am at stake."

## Discussion

So now, as we come to the end of my argument, let me briefly review where we have been. Much of our family, institutional, and political life is so full of the affective intensity of relationships that it runs the risk of obscuring the power of joining a mission that is larger than ourselves (Shapiro, 1992, 2020;

Shapiro & Carr, 1991). Our families, as social institutions, are the places where we begin to learn about membership, mission, and roles. We emerge from our families as representatives, and we bring those perspectives into the institutions that we join. We link with other members through each institution's mission to develop a shared view of society's needs. As mature adults, we then have the opportunity to integrate those diverse links to society as we reach for our own integrity to discover the role of active citizen.

To increase this possibility and address our increasingly threatened social cohesion, institutions may need to clarify their connections to society's needs. Steve Job's original mission for Apple was: "*to create tools for the mind that advance humankind*". The Austen Riggs Center, a psychiatric system of care, where I developed many of these ideas, had a mission to *help people who are labelled "treatment resistant patients" to become people taking charge of their lives* (Plakun, 2011; Shapiro, 2020). Steve Jobs' mission was about human development; Riggs' mission is about resisting other people's labels in order to take up authority for yourself. The vitality of both missions is that they have clear links to the needs of society.

Those institutions that discover the connection between what they do, and society's needs, can more readily articulate the values and beliefs that we all need in order to sustain, reassure, and transcend ourselves. When a mission is clearly linked to a social need, and when the values embedded in that mission represent issues that we believe in, we can bring all of ourselves into work. For example, if I make landing gears for airplanes and the company's mission is simply to *make the best landing gears*, I come to work as a technician. If the mission is to *defend my nation* and that mission matters to me, I can come to work as a whole person; I can bring all of myself (Selznick, 1957). Taking up an institutional role as a function of a mission that matters adds to our self-definition, offering a perspective for examining and then competently assuming the range of roles within society.

Recognising that, as individuals, we cannot grasp the complexity of our global society, I am arguing for our deeper involvement in institutions which we can use as intermediate spaces to negotiate the vast distance between ourselves and the rest of the world. The problems of "othering" and political polarisation are not easily solved. But when we can shift from using relationships to export blame and responsibility, to using our experience-in-role to address shared problems, we can begin to shape our institutional missions to more clearly link to the needs of society. That will embed us in human systems that can begin to transform the "other" into "one of us". And when, like Thomas, we begin to see ourselves in our roles as representatives of our institutional missions, we can discover a heightened clarity about the world around us. And all of that can increase the possibility that we might risk taking up the role of active citizen.

So, in closing, let me remind you of the two questions I'd like you to keep in mind. "*How are they right?*" is an approach to listening that increases the odds that you won't get lost in polarised thinking. And "*Why do I have to do this?*" is a question that has an answer, and the answer is not, "Someone else

will do it". When that question comes up for you, I recommend that you give yourself some reflective time to find the answer; you will learn from it. These two questions, in the context of becoming part of an institution, might help you to find your way.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Edward R. Shapiro** is a former medical director/CEO of the Austen Riggs Center. A psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, family researcher, and organisational consultant, he was clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale. Author of *Finding a Place to Stand*, co-author of *Lost in Familiar Places*, and editor of *The Inner World in the Outer World*, Dr Shapiro is Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, Fellow of the A. K. Rice Institute and the American College of Psychoanalysis, and Principal in The Boswell Group of New York. He is on the boards of the International Dialogue Initiative and Partners Confronting Collective Atrocities.