CONCEPTUALIZING OPPRESSION: RESISTANCE NARRATIVES FOR SOCIAL WORK

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by

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Abstract

Using an exploratory qualitative research design, featuring semi-structured interviews with ten social work field instructors, this thesis explores three key areas related to oppression: 1) the participants' discourses, experiences, and narratives of oppression including the respondents' conceptualization processes about oppression; 2) their representational narratives and constructions about how they applied their conceptualizations of oppression to social work practice and their personal lives; and 3) their resistance efforts. Four main themes emerging from the research findings include: 1) understandings of oppression and anti-oppressive practice (AOP); 2) limited acknowledgement of privilege and entitlement; 3) a conclusion that good intentions are not enough to create social change, and 4) a lack of collectivity and social action. Based on these themes, recommendations range from the need for effective change strategies for the "low power" actor, the development of educational curriculum and field instruction skills related to AOP, to the teaching of successful resistance strategies. Suggestions for future research are outlined including exploring service users' conceptualizations of oppression, ascertaining if social workers stories about their resistance and AOP are congruent with their actual behaviours, and creating research and scholarship into how to facilitate and optimize student learning through classroom and field practicum moments of AOP transformation, identity challenge, stress, and uncertainty.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

Since the beginning of the social work profession, social workers have been concerned about making change. Change has been viewed from many dimensions including efforts directed at helping and changing individuals, families, communities, organizations, systems, policies, cultures, as well as larger harmful structural social forces such as racism, patriarchy, and classism (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Baines, 2007c; Carniol, 1992; Lundy, 2004). Whether at the personal, cultural, or structural level, social workers are involved in change efforts. Conventional approaches to social work intervention have been criticized for overemphasizing individual micro level change at the expense of mezzo and macro level change efforts (Mullaly, 2010). At cultural and structural levels, the desire to transform society is key to progressive social work approaches within the social work profession (Mullaly, 2010). Social workers promote change while simultaneously supporting social justice. The Canadian Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics (2005) states clearly:

> Social workers promote social fairness and equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons… Social workers promote individual development and pursuit of individual goals, as well as the development of a just society (pp. 5-6).

Certainly, not all social workers have the same vision of what a transformed society would look like nor would they necessarily arrive at the same destination or use the same methodology. As well, considering the non-monolithic nature of the social work profession, there are different levels of personal and professional commitment to this value of social change. Yet, I suggest most social workers share a common interest in improving the human condition. Although there are a variety of visions of what the ideal world and social

structure might look like, it seems clear there is little agreement about how to assist individuals, cultures, or societies to transform or what methods might be most effective to achieve this transformation. Of course, the challenge to social workers, field instructors, educators, and researchers has been to determine what types of change and interventions are most effective to best meet people's needs while promoting social and global justice and to make decisions about at what points or levels change efforts should be directed. Most important, it is critical for the social work profession to come to some agreement about what outcomes and visions of social and global justice are possible to achieve human liberation and domination-free realities (Agger, 1998; Gil, 2002; Mullaly, 2010).

In terms of achieving these transformational goals, social work education and field instruction can be viewed as important sites where new social workers learn about change methods and processes (Bogo & Vayda, 1998; Razack, 2002). In the classroom and field practicum experience, social work students are given opportunities to learn, develop, apply, and translate different theoretical frameworks related to change into actual practice skills (Bogo & Vayda, 1998). Indeed, field education is essential to developing critical transformative skills as "it is ideally situated for incorporating shifting changes to practice and stimulating critical thinking and dialogue about socio-political issues" (Razack, 2002, p. 10).

Research Problem and Rationale

One of the common themes in the political discourse concerning personal and social transformation in the social work feminist, structural, and critical theory, education, and field instruction literature is the concept of oppression (Agger, 1998; Baines, 2002, 2003;

Bishop, 2005; Brown, 1988; Carniol, 1992, 2005a, 2005b; Collins, 1991; Gil 1998; hooks, 1994; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007, 2010; Razack, 2002; Rossiter, 1993; Young, 1990, 1992). There are various definitions of oppression and it is not clear how social workers conceptualize, understand, define, or apply this concept in their personal lives and in their social work practice and field instruction. From the review of the literature, there has been little work related to exploring what the concept of oppression means to individual social work practitioners. Generally speaking, how social workers articulate and use their knowledge has received minimal attention in the literature. Indeed, Osmond and O'Connor (2004) found that, "largely absent from the discussion on social work knowledge is how practitioners actually express and explain what they know and use in their practice to another" (p. 678).

Barnoff and Coleman (2007) write about a variety of methods utilized by feminist practitioners to integrate anti-oppressive approaches (AOP) at the direct service level but they do not discuss social workers' individual processes of meaning-making about the concept of oppression or the impact of these understandings on their personal and professional choices and lives. The same could be said of Strega (2007) who writes about the challenges of applying anti-oppressive theory and practice in child welfare and Baines's (2007b) work on social workers' reports of their resistance and radical practices. Similar to Fook (1999), Gil (1998), Razack (2002), and Bishop (2002), Mullaly (2007) furthers the discussion by emphasizing the need for social workers to work "inside and outside" systems, connect the public and private spheres by "living our lives as structural social workers", and pay attention to "critical self-reflection; self-care; having realistic expectations; using anger in a constructive way; and making the political personal in our

own lives" (p. 332). Although I agree with Mullaly's suggestions, there has been little research about how individual social workers then apply these suggestions, in a meaningful way, to all aspects of their everyday lives. There has been even less discussion about how to apply an understanding of oppression to field instruction as field education has "remained largely on the periphery throughout such debates..."(Razack, 2002, p. 11). This is unfortunate as field instructors play a central role in, "ensuring that social work students possess the necessary practice skills to embark on independent and competent practice upon graduation" (Lavoie, 2001, p. 20) and laying the groundwork for AOP.

Kumsa (2007) comes closer to what I am attempting in this research study as she "deconstructs" her understandings of anti- oppressive theory and practice on the front-line and the implicit challenges of "taking it personally" (p.111). Her understandings and analysis of what she calls "transformative disruptions" in identity reflect deep recognition of the conflicts and tensions inherent from practicing an anti-oppressive framework but is still limited to and situated within her professional role and work (Kumsa, 2007, p.120). This private and public split in practice, field instruction, education, research, and scholarship means that processes social workers use to arrive at an understanding of oppression and how they live out their ideas, values, and beliefs about oppression outside of social work roles and agencies are rarely accessed or studied. Krauss (2007) reinforces the value of exploring both the public and private spheres stating that:

> ...dominant ideologies might separate the 'public' sphere of politics and power from the 'private sphere' of family and home... in fact the experience of everyday life in the home is fundamentally linked to politics and public policy (p.428).

This gap in the research and literature results in social workers' private behaviours and attitudes seldom being explored or documented and potentially misses significant

information about social workers' personal choices for resistance. From a feminist perspective, Krauss (2007) emphasizes the importance of this dual analysis:

> In traditional sociological analysis, this subjective dimension of protest has often been ignored or viewed as private and individualistic. Feminist theory however helps us to see its importance. For feminists, critical reflection on the everyday world of experience is an important subjective dimension of social change (p. 429).

I assert that without a clear exploration of what oppression means to individual social workers and how they choose to apply their understandings, in both public and private spheres, the social work profession is likely to fail in its efforts to advocate for change and ensure social justice. Field instruction and the role of field instructors in bridging theory and practice can also be viewed as critical to understanding oppression and "...laying the groundwork for an antiracist and anti-oppressive framework for practice" (Razack, 2002, p.17).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to use an exploratory qualitative research design to examine how social workers conceptualize and apply the concept of oppression by inviting a group of social work field instructors to think about, reflect upon, and describe their understandings of and meaning-making about the concept of oppression from the perspective of both their personal and professional lives. The research findings are intended to assist the social work profession to build a stronger conceptual framework for understanding oppression and to eventually assist social workers, students, academics and field instructors, and service users to better name, recognize, respond to, and resist systems of domination.

This research into critical self-reflection, discussion, and debate about the meanings of oppression, in our personal and professional lives, also reveals questions about how our world views, behaviors, and constructions of reality perpetuate social inequities. The findings can help us to be cognizant of how we, as social workers, knowingly or unconsciously benefit from our social locations and relative positions of power and privilege and reproduce oppression through our beliefs, practices, and complicity with the "status quo". Ellsworth (1989) cautions us that depending upon social locations, specific historical contexts, and situations, no individual or group is exempt from potentially becoming oppressive to others. Kemp, Whittaker, and Tracy (2002) likewise reinforce that relationships of power, both oppressive and empowering, take place within the particularities of specific social, economic, and political environments. As Kemp et al (2002) explain:

> The environments of daily life are themselves bearers of social messages and social scripts; they mark the bodies of those who occupy them, in particular and differential ways…Relationships of power are thus made concrete and tangible in the material world (p.17).

These environments, relationships, and behaviours are in turn governed, enhanced and/ or constrained, within patterns of social relations, both relations of ruling through ideology and discourse and the social relations of capital (Agger, 2006; Mullaly, 2010).

In terms of these social messages, scripts, and discourses, the profession of social work benefits from an analysis of the rhetoric (and its underlying assumptions) social workers use when they speak of oppression and AOP. Yee (2005) addresses this issue calling for a theoretical discussion into anti-oppressive approaches to "flesh out the foundational assumptions upon which each form of intervention is based (p. 91). Thus,

instead of assuming that social workers already understand the concept of oppression, this study attempts to "flesh out" how social workers in the field actually do conceptualize and apply their notions of oppression. In addition, the research findings are intended to assist field instructors and social work educators to better prepare students for the realities of AOP. In terms of professional standards and particularly within practicum settings, simply understanding the construction and perpetuation of social divisions and domination are not enough, social work students and field instructors must, "...demonstrate in practice how they have challenged the norms, assumptions and behaviours that lead from them" (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 284).Once we understand more about how field instructors believe, understand, know, and actually act "on the ground", so to speak, we will be better able to assist students to develop effective AOP strategies and alternative cultural discourses to resist and dismantle oppression.

To summarize, this thesis presents a study of field instructors' real lived experiences and stories of grappling with and applying the concept of oppression within social work and their personal lives. To accomplish this, research questions were designed to capture this particular group of practitioners' processes of conceptualization and how they story, meaning-make, understand, and use the concept of oppression in the social work profession as well as in their personal lives. In addition, a literature review of important research and scholarship is summarized. The research methodology and work plan are described. The data analysis and findings are reviewed and recommendations for social work practice, resistance and social change, and field instruction and education are discussed. Suggestions for future research are also highlighted.

Research Questions

As a method of inquiry into what oppression means to individual social work field instructors, this research is designed to explore the following primary research question:

1. How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression in their personal and professional lives?

In terms of related research questions, the first section of interviews and written assignments, *The Concept of Oppression* (see appendix 5), was structured to generate data regarding the individual's construction, "meaning - making", and understanding of the concept of oppression and explore the following questions:

1. What are the processes of conceptualization related to oppression identified by social work field instructors?
2. How do field instructors story, meaning-make and understand the concept of oppression?
3. How do field instructors use their understandings of the concept of oppression in both their professional and personal lives?

The next set of research questions, *Personal and Professional Identity* (see appendix 5), was used to situate the individual respondent in his or her particular social, economic, and cultural locations. To investigate the following areas, field instructors were asked about their personal and professional identities related to their understanding of the concept of oppression:

1. How do respondents' similarities and differences along gender, class, race, and cultural lines influence their perceptions, experiences, articulations, and understandings of oppression?

2. What is the role and influence of privilege and power in their social work practice, field instruction, and their personal lives?
3. How do they avoid becoming oppressors?

The final section of questions, *Social Change/ Action/ Resistance* (see appendix 5), linked the respondents' constructions, understandings, and experiences of oppression to specific local and social actions, change efforts, and resistance and examined the following areas:

1. What specific actions and change efforts do field instructors undertake and recommend in response to oppression?
2. What strategies of resistance to oppression do they employ?
3. What are the joys and challenges of resistance work?

Overview of Dissertation

In chapter two of this dissertation, the review of the literature highlights several definitions of oppression from the social work literature and explores how they have evolved over time from a binary analysis of oppressor and oppressed to a complex intersectional exploration of multiple sites of oppression, privilege, power, conformity, and resistance. In addition, it reviews significant theories which have explored or critiqued the concept of oppression within social work. Critical theory, the conflict paradigm, and four specific critical theories: 1) feminism; 2) radical/structural; 3) anti-oppressive theory, education, and practice; and 4) critical postmodernism are highlighted. In chapter three, the grounded theory, resistance, and AOP research methodology for this dissertation is discussed, the data collection and analysis processes are reviewed, and a description of me,

as situated researcher, is featured. I also present my ontological assumptions about the science of knowledge and reality.

The data findings, discussion, and analysis section, chapters four to six inclusive, outlines what those who participated in this study described in interviews and written assignments as meaningful to their understandings of the concept of oppression and its' application to the profession of social work as well as in their personal lives. Similar to Townsend Gilkes' (2007) work, I was interested in analyzing how social workers:

> observe, discover, and explore the effects of oppressive practices and structures in their own and others' lives. They are the critical connection between the abrasions of personal experience and the social and political context that shape experience (p.458).

In the findings, three key areas related to the conceptualization of oppression in social work are highlighted : a) the respondents' discourses, experiences, and narratives of oppression including definitions, their cognitive understandings of the word oppression, their conceptualization processes of subjective mean-making including the internalization of oppression and the use of metaphor (including eight major metaphor themes), and an analysis of gender, class, race, and cultural similarities and differences in the respondents' perceptions, experiences, articulations, and understandings of oppression (chapter 4); b) their representational narratives and constructions about the concept of oppression within social work practice including issues related to looking at practice with and without an understanding of oppression, decision-making, and the need for productive narratives, as well as the interconnections of participants' social and cultural locations, privileges, entitlement, and power, the process of becoming an oppressor, and participant' suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor (chapter 5); and c) the respondents' resistance

work including definitions of resistance, personal qualities, successful resistance strategies within social work practice, the challenges and barriers of working within systems, teams, and non-social work settings, if and how they identified and confronted their privilege, entitlement, and power, personal lifestyle choices for resistance, and the joys, challenges, and dilemmas of resistance practice (chapter 6).

Finally, chapter seven summarizes: a) four main themes related to oppression which emerged from the findings; b) recommendations for social practice, resistance work and social change, and education and field instruction; and c) suggestions for future research. Reflections on the challenges, limitations, and benefits of this research study are also included.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the concept of oppression highlighting several definitions of oppression from the social work literature and exploring how they have evolved over time from a binary analysis of oppressor and oppressed to a complex intersectional exploration of multiple sites of oppression, privilege, power, and resistance. Chapter two also covers a brief summary of the historical and cultural development of oppressive societies and resistance. Finally, this chapter reviews critical theory, the conflict paradigm, and highlights four significant critical theories that have either explored or critiqued the concept of oppression within social work.

Overview of Oppression

Definitions of oppression. Definitions of oppression have evolved historically from the 14th century's Latin word "oppressus" meaning "to press down" (Funk & Wagnall's, 1980, p. 457), discussing the oppressive behaviors of dominant individuals and groups, and analyzing how oppressive societies develop to identifying what Ward (2007) calls the "triad of race, class and gender oppression or 'triple jeopardy'" (p.194) and finally, to exploring the complexity of intersecting axes of multiple oppressions, privileges and entitlement, and resistance. To oppress is commonly defined as, "to burden or to keep down by harsh and unjust use of force authority", and, "to lie heavy upon physically or mentally" (Funk & Wagnall's, 1980, p. 457). Freire (1970) defined oppression simply as, "any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his (sic) pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (p. 41). Young (1992) went further explicitly

linking the concepts of oppression and justice and suggesting that people generally associate the word oppression with the exercise of tyranny by a ruling leader or group, for example, Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany during World War Two (WWII). She pointed out, however, that in the 1960s and 1970s, the new left social movements identified oppression as, "the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power intends to keep them down, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (p.175-6). This form of oppression is described as social oppression (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997).

Hardiman and Jackson (1997) identify social oppression as one of the primary features of the structural dynamics of domination and oppression. Mullaly (2010) points out that "the basis of oppression is difference" (p.35). This difference is primarily attributed to certain members of society who belong to subordinate groups (Young, 1992). These groups of individuals then become defined as "other" when compared to the dominant group (i.e., men and women, whites and people of colour, rich people and those who are poor, etc.). Indeed, Mullaly (2010) explains that, "all oppressed groups are defined in oppositional terms (i.e., as evil, ugly, subhuman, and so on) to the dominant group" (p.184).

Not only are the members of subordinate groups defined as "other", they are systematically subjected to a ruling culture and political, economic, and social domination and exploitation which favour the dominant group (Mullaly, 2010). In social oppression, "one social group dominates or exploits another social group, whether knowingly or unconsciously, with social, political, and material consequences" (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997, p.17). In this sense, oppression is viewed as systemic and structural, with patterns of disadvantage and privilege, operating through multiple axes of power (e.g., sexism, racism,

classism, ageism, and so on) for the particular benefit of specific dominant groups. Hardiman & Jackson (1997) further analyze how systems of domination and oppression work by highlighting three key factors: a) the power of dominant groups to define and name reality and impose their culture on subordinate groups ; b) the institutionalization of unequal treatment and discrimination and the unconscious acceptance of this state of affairs as "the way it is"; and c) the subordinate groups' internalization of oppression resulting in a distortion and devaluing of their own culture, language, and history. Because of these unequal social and power relations, Young (1990) and Bishop (1994) contend that members of subordinate groups are more likely than dominant groups to experience exploitation, violence, stereotyping, marginalization, separation from their children, powerlessness, negative characterization of their sexuality, oppression, and discrimination.

Dominelli (2002) points out that although oppression involves relations of domination, these relations also occur as, "interactions between people, not only at the interpersonal level but the cultural and institutional levels as well" (p.39). Mullaly (2010) concurs adding that oppression occurs at three levels: a) personal (i.e., individual thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, and negative pre-judgement of particular subordinate groups); b) cultural (i.e., values, norms, shared patterns of seeing, thinking, and acting, consensus of what is right and normal, and belief in superior culture); and c) structural (i.e., social institutions, laws, policies, processes, and practices and economic systems in favour of dominant groups at the expense of subordinate groups). Similarly, Sisneros et al (2008) identify personal, cultural, and structural levels of oppression and Thompson (1997) describes a personal, cultural, and structural (PCS) model of analysis of multidimensional oppression.

To understand the dynamic, multidimensional, and mutually reinforcing nature of the different forms, sources, and relations of oppression, one must carefully examine the roles that individuals, families, communities, cultures, and societies play in constructing and perpetuating dominant-subordinate relations. At multiple levels, over time, these relations of domination and subordination become embedded in the fabric of society so that they seem unconscious, unintentional, and invisible (Young, 1992). Mullaly (2010) argues that these internalized and invisible phenomenon are, "probably more important and effective today than visible structures in promoting conformity to a system that oppresses people on the basis of gender, race, class, sexuality, age and so on" (p. 25).

In a process Mullaly (2010) describes as "internalized domination" (p.179), members of dominant groups feel entitled to their social locations of privilege and tend to be oblivious to the impact of their oppressive behaviours on subordinate others (Johnson, 2006). Kimmel and Ferber (2003) maintain that it is easier for those in power to ignore the implications of their social locations of dominance than it is to critically think about, recognize, and dismantle their own power and privilege. Because the invisible structures and relations of domination and subordination and the dominant groups' experiences within these frames passes as normal, it is difficult to persuade or enlighten members of dominant groups about these very structures and relations. Indeed, many people from dominant groups become defensive and angry when faced with the statistical realities and consequences of their privilege (Kimmel and Ferber, 2003). This is not to say that members of dominant groups are passive participants in these social processes and relations. Indeed, Johnson (2006) concludes that members of dominant groups actively maintain and perpetuate social relations of dominance and subordination by: following the path of least

resistance; remaining silent; "othering" subordinate groups; avoiding responsibility; denying and minimizing, and blaming the victim.

Intersectionality of oppressions. Oppression is not a static concept nor is it "everything that frustrates or limits or hurts a person" (Mullaly, 2010, p. 40). Indeed, according to Frye (1983), to understand oppression, "…one has to look at the social context of a particular restriction, limit, or injury" (p.40). Oppression is also more than a simple binary division of oppressors and oppressed as individuals can simultaneously occupy positions of both privilege and oppression. Furthering this analysis, the recognition of the simultaneity and non-synchronistic nature of different forms of privilege and oppression has been a significant contribution of Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991, 2000; hooks, 1989, 1993; Smith, 2007). Collins (1991) explains that the intersectionality of oppressions "refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation" (p.18). In addition, she suggests that intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained within a matrix of domination (Collins 1991, 2000). Within this matrix or what Sisneros et al (2008) call a web of oppression and Condeluci (1995) describes as a scale of oppression, both oppression and privilege occur at multiple levels and sites and are experienced relationally and dynamically, between and amongst individuals, identities, and groups (Wineman, 1984). This analysis has often been referred to as intersectionality theory and has been adopted in much of the social work literature (Baines, 2007d; Carniol, 2005a, 2005b; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Dominelli, 2002; Gil, 1998; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009; Mullaly, 2002, 2010; Shera, 2003; Sullivan, Steinhouse, & Gefland, 2000; Thompson, 2006). Marsiglia and Kulis (2009) also use the term intersectionality to refer to, "the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the

human cultural experience and describes the place where multiple identities come together, or intersect" (p.42).

According to Collins (2000), an intersectional analysis, "reminds us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and oppressions work together in producing injustice" (p.18). By focusing primarily or exclusively on one axis of oppression such as gender, we run the risk of minimizing or not grasping service users' and social workers' lived realities. Critics also argue that this emphasis has sometimes led to the practice of counting oppressions, in effect, producing a hierarchy of oppressions (Ward, 2007). Furthermore, counting oppressions is seen as problematic as it treats all oppressions as equal thereby obscuring important contextual differences within multiple forms and experiences of oppression (Ward, 2007). King (2007) also maintains that, 'identities are not additive because oppression is about the quality and not the quantity of one's experiences" (p.194). Unfortunately, counting oppressions can also set up various marginalized groups to compete with each other for scarce resources and attention and ignores the reality that often, "oppressions are multiplicative and qualitatively experienced" (Ward, 2007, p. 206).

To resolve this singularity of thinking, often called identity politics, Young (1994) introduces the notion of "seriality". In terms of women's differing identities and locations, she advocates seriality as, "a way of thinking about women as a social collective without requiring that all women have common attributes or a common situation" (p.723). From this serial perspective, although women may not share the same experiences, social locations, or identities, they can at least attempt to find some common ground in terms of understanding, "...the social production and meaning of membership in the collective" (Young , 1994, p. 723). Furthermore, Irvine (2007) connects the idea of serial identities and

multiple subject positions with acts of daily living. Day to day issues of identity and culture, power and difference, and oppression, conformity, and resistance and their meanings are continually, "constituted through fluid negotiations of race, gender, sexual identity and other social categories" (Irvine, 2007, p.422). Thus, Irvine (2007) advocates for theory that deepens our understanding of multiple subject positions and intersectional identities and opens up the possibility for collective action, "rather than forcing people to choose one standpoint, such as race, over another, such as sexual identity or gender (p.422). As a result, temporary coalitions and critical consciousness about multiple oppressions, locations, and identities with the goal of uniting variously positioned groups on common issues, "has been posited as the corrective to single-identity movements and the problematic practice of counting or ranking oppressions" (Ward, 2007, p.195).

However, these suggestions are not seen as a panacea for social problems related to all forms of oppression. Ward (2007) maintains it may be beneficial, even necessary at times, for specific groups to prioritize certain oppressions over others. For instance, the women's movement may need to emphasize gender oppression. Ward (2007) concludes:

> it is difficult for organizational actors not to count, emphasize and prioritize particular oppressions for the very reason that the histories and meanings of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression are personally, politically, and organizationally distinct (p.206).

Brief Summary of the Historical and Cultural Development of Oppressive Societies

From this understanding of the definitions of oppression and the dynamic intersectional nature of multiple oppressions and privileges, it is important to consider how societies become oppressive over time, that is, how oppressive behaviours, attitudes, and practices are produced, reproduced, and institutionalized in society. Gil (2002) provides a

description of how particular societies evolve into oppressive systems of domination. He suggests that:

> The story of social evolution reveals that oppression and injustice did not become institutionalized until the spread of agriculture and crafts, about 10,000 years ago. These major changes in ways of life resulted gradually in a stable economic surplus, which was conducive to the emergence of occupational and social classes, differentiation into rural and urban settlements, and centralized forms of governance… (2002, p.38).

Gil makes the case that these social changes, which produced an economic surplus perhaps for the first time in history, created the conditions for and emergence of oppression and domination. These conditions permitted wealthy communities to have power over other communities and populations. As groups gained power by taking control over valuable resources, they were able to produce and maintain dominant-subordinate oppressive relations (McMullin, 2004). In addition, they were able to transform social values from cooperation, communitarianism, and equality to competition, inequality, and the exploitation of citizens and the colonization of other peoples. In addition, McMullin (2004) concludes:

> Oppression occurs if 1) the welfare of one group of people depends upon the deprivation of another; and 2) the deprivation of the oppressed group depends upon the exclusion of the oppressed group from access to resources, rewards and privileges (p.129).

Tilly (1998) furthers this analysis by explaining how oppressive relations are produced within social groups. First, exploitation produces oppressive relations when dominant individuals and groups control resources and hoard opportunity and use these to their advantage by mobilizing the efforts of subordinate others for their own gain. Second, the

group ensures, through its actions, social processes, and laws, that they maintain their monopoly over those resources and opportunities.

Missing from this analysis is an explanation of how the white bourgeois heterosexual Christian male became socially constructed as superior in modern Western society. Haney (1989) and Weedon (1997) make the case that this phenomenon evolved from 14th century to early 20th century political, economic, and scientific schools of thought, production of knowledge, and discourse which legitimated and supported: a) the idea of man in charge of and controlling nature; b) colonialization; c) the commodification of land (i.e., the enclosure movement) and subordinate peoples (i.e., the slave trade); and d) the entrenchment of modern man as "king of his castle" and family (i.e., patriarchy). This thinking and these formative events can be viewed as establishing normative standards of the white Western Christian male as superior to all others and therefore, entitled to his dominant place and privilege in society.

Power and Oppression

How the operation of power interconnects with and is implicated in the development of oppression and oppressive societies has been explored by several authors (Samuelson & Antony, 2007; Bishop, 2005; Fook & Morley, 2005; Greene & Lee, 2002; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009; Mullaly,2007, 2010; Rebick, 2009; Starhawk, 2002; Strega, 2007). Simplistically, power has often been viewed in binary terms- either one has power or one does not. Indeed, Darlington and Mulvaney (2003) view popular definitions of power as differing, "little from social science definitions and conceptions (and sic) are based on wealth, resources, influence, control, and physical strength" (p.6). In addition,

social theorists have traditionally viewed power as residing in large social institutions and powerful individuals (Mullaly, 2010). The power of the individual to act alone or to make change was seen as minimal and insufficient. Instead, large scale movements and collectivism were advocated to transform these power structures and influence individuals.

Gil (1998), hooks (1994), and Bishop (2002, 2005) claim that this traditional thinking is simplistic, problematic, and minimizes human agency as it ignores the reality that individuals have differential accesses to different types of power. In a complex dialectical interaction between free will, agency, and determinism, it seems evident that "human beings are not mere products of their environs, but neither are those environs sheer clay for their arbitrary self-fashioning' (Eagleton, 2000, p.5). At the same time, it is essential that we recognize that not everyone can act to win within oppressive societies. Carniol (2005b) cautions that:

> we must squarely face the dichotomy of winners and losers from oppressive realities…For example, the dichotomous positioning of master-slave where masters coercively extracted free labour from their slaves. These binary opposites were so structured by the very institution of slavery. How can emancipation activists have succeeded in their struggle to dismantle this example of slavery if this vicious dichotomy had been downplayed or ignored? (p.156).

Starhawk's (1987) work is important as it moves us away from a simplistic categorizing of people into either "powerful" or "powerless" and deepens our understanding of power types. She defines power as:

1. 'Power-over' is domination or force… 'Power-over' also includes its flip side-rebellion…If rebellion succeeds, the roles simply reverse and the situation of 'power- over' continues.

2. 'Power-within'…This refers to one's own centredness, one's grounding in one's own beliefs, wisdom, knowledge, skills, culture, and community.
3. 'Power-with', or power exercised cooperatively among equals.
4. 'Authority', that is, the wisdom, creativity, or expression of a group's energy by an individual that is recognized and agreed to by others as right at a certain time (pp.8-20).

Similarly, Darlington and Mulvaney (2003) further the definition of power by defining it not merely as object but as process, commenting that power is not a commodity available only to the elite, but "rather a process we all engage in" (p. 7).As well, postmodernists view power as existing, "in different localities, context, and social situations" (Mullaly, 2010, p. 27). Thus, ongoing analysis and assessment is required to understand how power operates, constrains, or enables differently located individuals and groups. Healy and Leonard (2000) add that one must always consider, "who is exercising the power, in whose interest, and who had defined the interest" (p.27).

How power operates in modern society also has implications for the social work profession and field instruction. The individuals, groups, organizations, agencies, universities, communities, and systems we work with are implicated in how power is constructed, produced, and maintained in our society. Social work strategies to address oppressive power relations include: examining how power operates within organizational contexts; resisting sources of power that limit worker and service user empowerment; confronting power imbalances in therapeutic relationships; refusing to use forms of power that reproduce oppressive relations; informing service users of their rights; and linking

people with support outside of our agencies (Cohen, 2002). Much of the social work and AOP literature also recommends empowerment practice as a way of minimizing power imbalances and assisting service users to resist oppression. However, according to Hick and Pozzuto (2005), too often, the literature has treated empowerment as a commodity that can be a passed on or "a process of the powerful giving power to the less powerful or powerless" (p.xiii). In contrast, in anti-oppressive theory and practice (AOP), empowerment is viewed as a, "process through which oppressed people reduce their alienation and sense of powerlessness and gain greater control over all aspects of their lives and their social environment" (Mullaly, 2010, p. 237). When power is viewed as something that is assembled and coordinated socially, rather than a commodity to be possessed, empowerment becomes an exercise in deconstructing how power is acted out in people's lives and within the worker- service user relationship (Healy, 2005).

Resistance to Oppression

Gil (2002) notes that not all wealthy communities with material and economic surpluses developed into oppressive societies nor do all privileged individuals socialized into dominant groups become oppressors. Some communities and individuals make different choices, for instance:

> Rather than developing patterns of oppression and injustice, they used the economic surplus from their increased productivity toward enhancing the quality of life for all their members…Illustrations of this tendency have been identified among native peoples in the Americas, Africa and elsewhere (Gil, 2002, p.40).

This point is significant as it illustrates the human capacity to make decisions that are life enhancing and geared to the fulfillment of universal human needs. As well, along with the coercion and domination required to institutionalize oppressive values, attitudes, and

deprivations, a history of resistance or what Khan (1999) calls "habits of resistance" also emerged (p. 369). Gil (2002) explains:

> However, the emerging tendency to legitimate, institutionalize, and increase minimal inequalities did require coercion. This resulted usually in resistance from victimized groups, to which privileged groups reacted with intensified coercion. The vicious circle of oppression, resistance, and reactive repression intensified with time (p.42).

Thus, parallel processes of oppression and resistance emerged from particular social, economic, and political constellations and dominant-subordinate group relations. Wade (1997) supports this conclusion, stating that, "along-side each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative, and determined resistance" (p.23).

In this study, I was interested in exploring resistance as resilience, as political protest, and as deliberate acts to make political, economic, and social change. Resistance is the first step towards change after the recognition of oppression. Resistance is the desire to change what we do not like when we say to ourselves- "I will not participate in this any longer". From this perspective, social work practice at all levels, social work education, and field instruction are viewed as political acts of social and cultural resistance (Fook, 2002; Ife, 1997; Mullaly, 2010; Razack, 2002; Sisneros et al, 2008; Weedon, 1997). From an anti-oppressive perspective, Benjamin (2007) defines resistance as, "all those acts or actions in which an individual or individuals take a stand in opposition to a belief, an idea, an ideology, a climate, a practice, or an action that is oppressive and damaging to an individual and social well-being" (p.196). Leonard (1997) wrote that, "resistance is also a form of power, which may be manifest in the everyday ways that oppressed groups and individuals struggle against domination" (p.245). In terms of potential for resistance,

Kumsa (2007) reminds us that we need to consider that "power is not just the top down force that oppresses. It is also the bottom up and sideways resistance that liberates. More importantly, power and resistance are not mutually exclusive but interwoven and embedded in each other..." (p.124). A notion that individuals, groups, and social structures can each exercise power is significant because it debunks the view that, "individuals or subordinate groups are helpless to do anything about the dominant discursive practices that subjugate and oppress them" (Mullaly, 2010, p.27).

Moreover, these dominant discourses and discursive practices reside within culture as they represent, "particular ways of life of specific societies or groups, systems of meaning which give form and order to individual existence" (Leonard, 1997, p. 61). Consequently, resistance at the cultural level is particularly important as culture operates to communicate and reproduce dominant – subordinate relations and discourses. Along with major social institutions such as families, schools, churches, and government, one the most powerful cultural tools is the media. Kellner (2009) explains that media culture teaches individuals how to fit into society and "…how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire…" (p. 6). These messages in turn affect identity – how we feel about ourselves and who we think we are- and our sense of belonging (Weedon, 1999).

Thus, trying to survive and maintain a unique and positive sense of identity within the dominant culture creates difficulty for many people. Burstow (1992) insists that for women and all oppressed peoples, there develops a, "dual vision because all must keep moving between their own nascent understanding and the 'oppressors' if they are to survive" (p.17). Similarly, Whitaker (2007) suggest that groups that are traditionally seen as marginalized or subordinate, "have a specialized knowledge and specific methods of

resistance" (p.140). Furthermore, Martinez (2007) asserts, "groups who endure subjugation will develop strategies to resist domination that draw on their cultural resources" (p.71).

One way of building a knowledge base about resistance may be to pay closer attention to subordinate cultures and peoples, and cultural, gendered, and racialized ways of being and knowing. As well, Mullaly (2010) emphasizes the necessity of challenging stereotypes, media messages, and dominant structures, refusing to accept that which is considered normal and taken for granted, developing alternative discourses, and using, "... countervailing power to undermine the ideas, assumptions, paradigms, and discourses that constitute the dominant discursive practices" (p.27). Benjamin (2007) also recommends the development of alternative organizations, empowerment, community autonomy, critical social policy practice, and coalition building.

However, it is inaccurate to assume that each person belonging to a subordinate group is equally oppressed, recognizes oppression, or experiences oppression in the same way as other members of the group. There is also danger in assuming that all subordinate individuals and groups have equal power, opportunity, or capacity to resist oppression. Indeed, Mullaly (2010) warns:

> Power may be dispersed through society, but is not dispersed equally. I agree with Baines (2003) who argues that power is possessive as much as it is relational, which means that people can have power as well as exercise it. It also means that in relative terms, some people are more powerful than others, no matter how confident, talented, expressive, or assertive the latter may be (p.27).

Similarly, not all individuals and groups resist oppression in exactly the same way. People choose differential responses to oppression, at different points and times in their lives, depending on a variety of complex reasons. McMullin (2004) explains the interconnected parallel processes of conformity and resistance:

> Conformation refers to the processes through which individuals comply with and accept the various schemas and resources that structure society. Alternatively, resistance is the processes through which individuals reject and act against established social structures. Although conformation and resistance are set up here as the antithesis of each other, no one ever completely conforms or resists. Rather, a complexity of resistance and conformation emerges as individuals negotiate their interests within the various domains of social life. The choice to conform or resist as well as the specific strategies one uses in these processes are influenced by the structured sets of social relationships described above. Furthermore, tensions, contradictions and paradoxes result from the complexities of resistance and conformation. Individuals then act to negotiate the ambivalence created by these tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes in everyday life (p.131).

Historically, whether it is resistance and/or conformity, people have done what they needed to survive. As Starhawk (2002) poetically explains:

> We rebel to save our lives, rebellion is the desperate assertion of our value in the face of all that attacks it, the cry of refusal in the face of control…when we rebel without challenging the framework of reality the system has constructed, we remain trapped, our choices are pre-determined for us (p.51).

Unfortunately, whatever their social locations, identities, power, actions, and choices, the acts of resistance by oppressed peoples have often been ignored or dismissed (Hillock & Profitt, 2007). Indeed, this social denial is a primary feature of oppression (Hillock & Profitt, 2007). As a way of acknowledging people's daily struggle with relations of oppression, power, conformity, autonomy, and resistance, it becomes essential for social workers to uncover and value everyday acts of coping and survival and reframe these behaviours and choices as resistance.

Summary

This section offered an overview of oppression highlighting several definitions of oppression from the social work literature and exploring how they have evolved over time from a binary analysis of oppressor and oppressed to a complex intersectional exploration

of multiple sites of oppression, privilege, power, conformity, and resistance. As well, the historical and cultural development of oppressive societies, the operations of power in society, and the development and importance of resistance were discussed.

Critical Social Work Theories Related to Oppression

In this section, critical theory and the conflict paradigm are reviewed. Four critical theories: a) feminism; b) radical/ structural; c) anti-oppressive practice (AOP); and d) critical postmodernism and their views about the concept of oppression are summarized. The rationale for choosing these theories is that they have explicitly attempted to define, debate, explore, and critique the idea that structural forces (e.g., oppression) may influence, motivate, and/or constrain individual subjects by affecting their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and constructions of reality. In this study, field instructors' recognition of these structural forces and the related theoretical assumptions that supplement their understandings of practice are crucial to understanding how they meaning-make about the concept of oppression in their lives.

Critical theory. DePoy, Hartman, and Haslett (1989) define critical theory as, "a response to post-enlightenment philosophies, positivism in particular, which 'deconstructs' the notion of a unitary truth that can be known by one way or method" (p.560). According to Ife (1997), critical theory specifically rejects positivism and "makes that link, between personal suffering and wider political and social structures or discourses" (p.5). Critical theory is also concerned with uncovering missing voices from dominant discourses and knowledge production. Critical theorists use deconstruction to tear a text apart, reveal its

contradictions and assumptions (Dean & Fenby, 1989), and ask us to consider the limitations of any theoretical position. Irvine (2007) adds that:

> critical theories challenge the idea of fixed or essential social identities and raise a persistent question about the historical and political circumstances under which subjectivities are continually recreated. Identities and social categories are recognized as fluid and unstable, but also as multiple and internally contradictory. Narratives of social location therefore must account for the intersectionality of identities (p.419).

Critical theory also attempts to move practice beyond the simple inclusion of missing voices. DePoy, Hartman, and Haslett (1989) argue that critical theory "is not a unitary approach but rather a complex set of strategies that are united by the commonality of sociopolitical purpose" (p.561). Critical theory "involves a recognition that domination is both personally experienced and structurally created" (Fook, 2004, p. 20). This sociopolitical agenda demands action built on a dialectical process and insists upon a movement from thought or analysis, culminating in a conscious awareness of oppression(s), that both emerges from and fuels action towards change.

With the goals of liberation for oppressed peoples and increasing consciousness about oppression, critical theory critiques domination, attempts to dismantle oppression, and advocates the development of oppressive-free societies (Agger, 1998; Fook, 2002; Ife, 1997; Kellner, 1989). To achieve these transformational goals, critical theorists are concerned with:

1. Locating the sources of domination in actual practices (Leonard, 1990) and linking structural oppression and the internalization of dominant-subordinate relationships to the activities of daily living (Agger, 1998).

2. Emphasizing dialogical relationships which are ones, "wherein all participants in the dialogue are equals, each learning from the other and each teaching the other" (Mullaly, 1997, p.180) and implies egalitarian non-oppressive therapeutic, teaching, field instruction, and research relationships.

3. Developing conscientization which Friere (1970) defines as, "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p.20). However, achieving consciousness of oppression and oppressive structures is only one step of a much more complex process. Deciding to recognize oppression or not and deciding to act or not is often limited by the criteria the individual social worker decides is important to him or her. Believing in social change, seeing oppression, and feeling strong enough to act and resist are vital. Thus, empowerment becomes a central concern in critical social work practice.

4. Supporting empowerment which is defined as "the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations" (Gutierrez, 1995, p. 229).

5. Holding people responsible for their own liberation (Mullaly, 2010) by emphasizing personal and collective agency to achieve social change (Agger, 1998).

6. Presenting alternative visions of oppressive-free society (Leonard, 1990).

These key concepts highlight the importance of praxis, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p.38) or "philosophy becoming practical" (Lather, 1991, p.11). Praxis then, becomes a way of doing social work and of dismantling oppression that involves thinking, feeling, and reflecting in action, where learning and doing or theory and practice become the same process. Indeed, Sanbonmatsu (2005) in reviewing critical theorist Antonio Gramsci's work concludes that:

> the role of the 'critical intellectual'- the revolutionary- is primarily to discern patterns of significance in history and culture in order to identify more or less promising lines of action…It is not a question of our being able to predict the future 'scientifically', but understanding as accurately and fully as we are able, the subtle combination of forces that structure the field of meaning in which therefore are likely to give rise to one or another phenomenon ...What differentiates the critical theorist from other theorists or intellectuals is, first, her or his belief that society – the ensemble of social relations- can be changed, and second, the moral conviction that it ought to be changed (p.218).

Therefore, within a critical paradigm, a theory is not successful if it merely enables people to articulate their needs. People must also act in order to have them met (Ife, 1997).

Conflict paradigm. Critical theories including feminism, radical/structural, AOP, and critical postmodernism are based on a conflict paradigm. It can be argued that Karl Marx was the originator of this paradigm (Mullaly, 1997). Marx was interested in analyzing how the modes of production and reproduction in a capitalist system alienated and oppressed particular groups in society and privileged others (Rojek, Peacock, & Collins, 1988). Marx concluded that societies were organized through and by intersecting conflicting class interests, not ruled by consensus or order (Mullaly, 2002). Thus, from a Marxist perspective, the sources, forms, and causes of oppression such as classism were viewed as structural.

Feminism, radical/structural, AOP, and critical postmodernism. Although feminism, radical/structural, AOP, and critical postmodernism may differ in terms of their emphasis on the causes, forms, or types (i.e., singular, plural, or intersecting) of oppression, what differentiates these conflict and critical theories from other theories is their focus on the concept of oppression, their criticism of traditional theory and philosophy, and their exploration of social and theoretical alternatives (Rubin & Babbie, 1997; Mullaly, 2010). In addition, the concept of transformation and acting to make social, economic, and political change is what differentiates critical theories from traditional paradigms (Ife, 1997). These theories share an ontological assumption or realist modernist view that reality, although elusive, can be experienced, identified, and described and is therefore, "out there" and knowable. For example, oppression, patriarchy, and capitalism are seen as objective external historical realities. McMullin (2004) explains further by saying that, "realism is the idea that abstract ideas are real in their consequences" (p.118). Although it seems evident that some social structures are visible, such as discriminatory social institutions, laws, and processes, for the most part, "social structures tend not to be directly observable, but their social influence is real" (McMullin, 2004, p.118).

Reamer (1993) discusses epistemology as a theory of knowledge. Every theory assumes a specific lens in terms of investigating the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. Feminist, structural, AOP, and critical postmodernist theories share an epistemological assumption which includes a subjectivist and transactional lens, that is, an understanding that the world can be known through the subjective experiences of people and that this knowledge can be used to act to transform society. As Burstow (1992) states:

> Our human existence is predicated on our ability to project meaning, to embark on projects, to create world. As subjects we are forever creating and re-creating world by making new choices and by ordering what is around us…Every such change is a re-creation involving reflection, naming, and acting (pp.1-2).

Although a variety of mixed research methods are advocated, all four theories support a methodology which emphasizes multiple ways of knowing, self-conscious criticism, transformation of social structures, reflexivity, and value-mediated findings (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Fook, 2004; Leonard, 1997). Moreover, each theory attempts to reconcile the dialectic between critical theory's emancipatory vision and postmodernism's emphasis on difference and multiplicity, recognizing that, "both difference and collective solidarity are necessary" (Davies & Leonard, 2004, p.xii). These values, beliefs, and methods are also consistent with resistance, anti-oppressive (AOP), and grounded theory research. Furthermore, these theories share a common purpose, "…not only to produce knowledge but also to examine, unsettle and shift power relations" (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 255). The following section briefly describes each theory:

Feminism. Over the last century, an analytical and conceptual framework has emerged that can be labelled as distinctly feminist. Van Den Bergh (1995) defines feminism as a:

> conceptual framework and mode of analysis that has analyzed the status of women (and other disempowered groups) cross-culturally and historically to explain dynamics and conditions undergirding disparities in sociocultural status and power between majority and minority populations (p.xii).

Correspondingly, Briskin (1992) proposes that feminism is the "basis of a coherent analytical and strategic approach to women's oppression" (p.266). Reinforcing this definition, Nash (1989) states that "feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of

approaching life and politics" (p.10). Central to these three definitions is an understanding of the concept of oppression. Van Den Bergh (1995) believes that:

> Both social work and the women's movement have historically sought to remediate oppressive conditions for marginalized groups [and share a philosophical base which values] client self-determination, affirmation, empowerment, and validation of client individuality and uniqueness (p.xxviii).

Consequently, Nash (1989) and Brisken (1992) suggest that feminist theory and principles are complementary to social work values and offer strategies to help women challenge oppression, patriarchy, and handle everyday life and politics. Many authors have written about the fit between feminism, social work, and AOP (Barnoff & Coleman, 2006; Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; Brown, 2007; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009; Osmond & O'Connor, 2003).

Both Van Den Bergh (1995) and Nash (1989) emphasize the importance of using feminist theory in social work to explain how social, political, and economic factors influence people's lives. Thus, analyzing the person-in-environment and linking private troubles with public issues tend to be the primary focus of feminist analysis, along with consciousness-raising and intervention. To accomplish this, feminist theorists critique the way societies choose to organize and distribute power, status, privilege, and wealth (i.e., patriarchy and capitalism) and analyze how these choices privilege dominant groups and oppress marginalized groups.

Additionally, feminist theory seeks to "decode patriarchy" (Mullaly, 1993, p.148) and capitalism and assesses how these forces or what hooks (1989) calls a "politic of domination" oppress marginalized groups. Similar to critical theory, Lorber (2005) states that, "Feminism argues that our social location shapes our view of the world, but the

viewpoints of marginalized 'others'...do not enter the production of most knowledge" (p.183).

Feminists also analyze how various oppressions are connected, multiplicative, and interrelated. Ellsworth (1989) calls for the explicit identification and awareness that people simultaneously inhabit sites of both oppression and privilege. Furthermore, the feminist linking of the personal to the political and addressing the private and public split in people's lives changes the emphasis in social work from intra-psychic blaming of the victim to externalizing the problem to identify and decode how a matrix of oppression (i.e., race, class, gender and so on) oppresses women and other marginal groups.

Radical/structural social work. DeMaria (1992) defined radical social work as a theoretical and practice framework which emphasizes a fundamental interest in the roots and causes of social and personal problems. Radical social work, as well as Marxism, can be critiqued for initially focusing solely on class for its role in creating and maintaining conditions of oppression (Mullaly, 2002, 2007, 2010). Structural social work was first introduced in Canada by Moreau (1979) and went beyond class oppression in its analysis and theory. Today, the terms radical and structural social work (Ward and Middleman, 1974) are often used interchangeably, as they both describe a theory and model of assessment and intervention in which the social environment is considered the primary target of change

Carniol (1987, 1992, 2005a), Ife (1997) and Mullaly (1993, 1997, 2002, 2007) later explored and further developed the major values, concepts, and assumptions underlying the structural/radical social work paradigm including:1) the feminist slogan that the "personal is political"(Mullaly,1993,1997, 2002, 2007); 2) Friere's critical consciousness (1970); 3)

collectivism, communitarianism, cooperation, duties, and altruism (George & Wilding, 1985); 4) participatory decision-making (Mullaly, 1997); and 5) the concept of the transformation of society into various forms of socialism. In addition, structural social work bases its analysis and practice on structural oppression, arising from capitalism, particularly in the areas of gender, class and race (Lundy, 2004; Moreau, 1979; Mullaly, 2007).

According to Mullaly (2007), a structural/radical social worker's first goal is to identify the primary or structural causes (racism, sexism, classism, and so on) of a service user's presenting problem. Once identified, a structural/radical social worker works at opening people's eyes through consciousness-raising to achieve "conscientization" (Freire, 1970) so that people can perceive and act to resist the now visible oppressive structures. Structural social work is concerned with assisting service users to see how structures in society create and perpetuate inequality, oppression, and personal problems and to act on this knowledge and awareness. An underlying assumption is that once oppressed people become conscious of their internalized oppression and politically aware about the structural causes of their oppression, there is an increased possibility that they will unite around common experiences of oppression and work collectively to achieve domination-free societies.

Structural social work, like critical theory and feminism, views social work as a political activity with the goal of dismantling oppressive social conditions. In other words, the goal is not just to critique existing structures but to develop alternatives-what Moreau (1979) describes as "social praxis" - the ability of people to critically reflect on their personal and political situations and develop consequent personal and political plans of action. With this in mind, radical/structural social workers work with service users,

colleagues, organizations, and communities to unite people, connect with like-minded progressive organizations, encourage collectivization, develop alternative counter-power bases and systems for social change, and advocate socialism (Galper, 1980).

Anti-oppressive theory and practice (AOP). Not only do feminist and radical/ structural theories share an understanding of key concepts, similar views of social work practice and social justice, analysis of structural oppression, goals to dismantle oppressive structures, and a call for social change and action, they are also closely aligned with a broader framework known as AOP. Baines (2007d) supports this explaining that:

> AOP is an umbrella term for a number of social justice oriented approaches to social work, including feminist, Marxist, post-modernist, indigenous, post-structuralist, critical constructionist, anti-colonial and anti-racist. These approaches draw on social activism and collective organizing as well as the sense that social services can and should be provided in ways that integrate liberatory understandings of social problems and human behaviour (p.4).

The 1980's and 1990's saw a proliferation of articles and books written from critical , structural, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-discriminatory perspectives which can be seen as giving birth to AOP (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Bishop, 1994; Brake and Bailey,1980; Carniol, 1987; Dalrymple and Burke, 1995; Dominelli, 1988; Levine, 1989; Mullaly, 1993; Thompson, 1993,1998). Based on a review of the literature, one could argue that anti-oppressive approaches have become the dominant social work practice model (Wilson and Beresford, 2000).

Principles of AOP practice. AOP theorists do not support one simplistic formula or a specific set of social work skills as this "one size fits all" approach has the potential of minimizing or denying individual differences. Instead, with an appreciation of diversity and multiple subjectivity, identity, and location, AOP practitioners "borrow bits and

pieces" from other critical theories (Baines, 2007a, p.19). Baines (2007a) posits that AOP approaches share ten common principles related to the concept of oppression:

1. Macro- and micro- level social relations generate oppression.
2. Our everyday experience is shaped by multiple oppressions.
3. Social work is a contested site.
4. Social work is not a neutral, technical profession, but an active political process.
5. Social justice oriented social work assists individuals while simultaneously seeking to transform the forces that generate and benefit from inequity and oppression.
6. Social work needs to build allies and workers, social causes and movements.
7. Social work's theoretical and practical development must be based on the struggles and needs of those who are oppressed and marginalized.
8. Participatory action approaches between practitioners and clients are necessary.
9. Self-reflexive practice and ongoing social analysis are essential components of social justice oriented social work practice.
10. A blended, heterodox social justice perspective provides the best potential for politicized transformative social practice (pp.20-22).

In terms of social work practice, Mullaly (2010) recommends specific AOP activities including: exploring identity issues; linking the personal with the political; building strengths; understanding oppression; naming agents of oppression; developing political awareness of the structural causes of oppression; and consciousness-raising in groups. Fook (2004) also highlights the need for AOP social workers to reflect on and be aware of our own privilege, social and therapeutic locations of dominance and power, and how we

reproduce inequality. Similarly, AOP research methods are seen as needing to be congruent with the above mentioned themes. Potts & Brown (2005) state that:

> Being an anti-oppressive researcher means that there is political purpose and action to your research work. Whether that purpose is on a broad societal level or about personal growth, by choosing to be an anti-oppressive researcher, one is making an explicit, personal commitment to social justice (p.255).

AOP theory, social work education, and field instruction. In this next section, I use AOP as an umbrella term (Baines, 2007d) to discuss the application of feminist, structural/radical, and critical postmodernist analyses and approaches to social work education. From these theoretical perspectives, traditional social work education and conventional teaching and learning theories, methods, and models, and field instruction have been criticized for maintaining the "status quo" (Dominelli, 2002; Razack 2002). Indeed, Whitaker (2007) warns that education in Western society has been used as a means of acquiring privilege, power, and control rather than freedom. Additionally, Jeffery (2007) believes that conventional social work educational practices have led to a, "perception that the best and valid form of social work education is that which leads to definite techniques ….a 'toolbox' approach' …(and sic) the creation of the 'enlightened helper'" (p.130). In contrast, Monture- Agnus (1995) challenges us to collectively transform current educational systems by exposing and denouncing relations and systems of domination and subordination.

Key to teaching the concept of oppression in social work education is this notion of "transformation". Massaquoi (2007) explains that the goals of a transformational agenda of social and political liberation include disrupting, overturning, and reconstructing "oppressive values, definitions and policies, institutions and relationships…at three levels:

knowledge and theory; education; and practice" (p.176). Mathieson (2002) also emphasizes the importance of recognizing, identifying, and teaching about oppression:

> If we can't recognize it in our everyday lives, we won't be able to recognize it when it emerges in the classroom, in the conversations of our students, in the films we view and in the textbooks we use. If we can't identify it, then we can't confront it, and it will continue to perpetuate in our classrooms. Not only do we, as teachers, need to decolonize our thinking, we need to teach our students to decolonize theirs (p.166).

In addition, Canadian Schools of Social Work Education (CASWE) have recognized the significance of anti-oppressive social work and have adopted AOP language and practices. Carniol (2005b) agrees explaining that the CASWE accreditation standards:

> state that the curriculum shall ensure that students achieve transferable analysis and practice skills pertaining to the origins and manifestations of social injustice in Canada, and the multiple and intersecting pieces of oppression, domination and exploitation (section 6.7 (c)) (p.153).

Thus, it seems clear that social work educators and field instructors have a responsibility to assist students to develop and strengthen their AOP analytical and practice skills. For many social workers, these understandings and abilities start in the social work classroom and field practicum.

However, like many other social work theories, how AOP looks or should be practiced in the field and in education has not always been clearly articulated or demonstrated. More recently, several books, articles, and dissertations have remedied this problem by emphasizing AOP theory and practice applications within social work theory and practice (Baines, 2002, 2003, 2007a, b, & c; Barnoff & Coleman, 2006, 2007; Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; Dominelli, 2002; Dumbrill, 2003; Fook, 1993; Gil, 1998, 2002; Lundy, 2004; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009; McLaughlin, 2005; Mullaly, 2002, 2007; Preston-Shoot,

1995; Thompson, 2006; Weaver, 2009). There has also been much work done in the adult education and social work education literature on the teaching of oppression and AOP. These works include but are not limited to: Friere's (1970) classic work linking the concepts of the processes of oppression, "conscientization", and "praxis"; Mezirow and Associates'(1990) ideas on "fostering critical reflection", Brown's (1988) exploration of "preradicalized" students; Ellsworth's (1989) study into the "myths of critical pedagogoy"; Briskin's (1990) analysis of feminist pedagogy; Lewis's (1990) exploration of the feminist classroom, Rossiter's (1993) view of empowerment in social work education; Bishop's (1994) "action-reflection model"; hooks' (1994) focus on "teaching to transgress"; Van Soest's (1996) study on the impact of "anti-oppressive" social work education on students; Van Voorhis's (1998) article on " cultural relevance and teaching the psychosocial dynamics of oppression"; Campbell's (1999, 2002) strategies for empowering and AOP pedagogy; and Razack's (2002) application of anti-oppressive perspectives to the human services practicum.

Several articles have focused on the challenges of applying anti-oppressive theory and teaching methods to "liberal" classrooms and institutions and in the field (Campbell, 2002; Jeffery, 2005; Razack, 1999, 2002; O'Brien, 2007). Significant works also include several Canadian dissertations: Lavoie's (2001) analysis of "Anti- racism and anti-oppression training for social work field instructors"; Rottmann's (2002) study on "Student response to equity issues"; Leighteizer's (2002) work on "Theorizing a social justice pedagogy"; and Comeau's (2005) exploration into the "Genealogy of critical consciousness".

These authors have all added to the knowledge base, dialogue, and scholarship about teaching the concept of oppression and helped frame this research study. Their work emphasizes four significant areas: What is the content of oppression that we are and should be teaching? What are the best methods for teaching these AOP concepts? How do we handle the intensity of "liberal" students' reaction to AOP transformational learning methods and content? And finally, how do we ensure that our teaching methods, social work educators' identities, the processes in the classroom, the students' experiences within the university and in the field are congruent with AOP values and beliefs? Exploring these important questions contributes to building the social work AOP knowledge base.

Postmodernism. Some of the main criticisms of critical, feminist, radical/structural, and AOP theories come from postmodern thinkers. Postmodernism can be defined as a "challenge to the tenets of modernism" (Brotman & Pollack, 1997, p.10) or skeptism about metanarratives (Leonard, 1997; Nicholson, 1989). This intellectual movement emerged after WWII and then became more fully developed with post-positivists and poststructuralists in the 1960's and 1970's. Key postmodern theorists include Foucault (1972, 1973, 1975, 1980, 1991), Derrida (1978), Lyotard (1984), and Leonard (1995, 1996, 1997). Postmodernism is presented as a challenge to the modernist idea that one can know, measure, define, or operationalize any concept including oppression, conscientization, or empowerment. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) suggest that postmodernism produces an awareness of the complexity, contingency, and fragility of historical and structural forms and events. Most postmodernists share an antirealist, relativist, ontological, and epistemological approach which rejects rationalist Western thought (Howe, 1987; Nicholson, 1989; Payne, 1997). Many postmodernists also reject the

idea of a fixed reality, deny the existence of a stable and centered subject, and refute the notion of universal truths, theories, and concepts. Post- structuralism sees meaning as multiple, unstable, and open to interpretation. Postmodernists emphasize multiple ways of knowing, the deconstruction of texts, and call for theoretical inconsistency (Mullaly, 1997; Payne, 1997).

Although there are multiple and often contradictory perspectives within postmodernism, there are two predominant schools of thought. The first are the ludic or skeptic postmodernists who approve of no particular values, beliefs, or methods, advocate for a proliferation of inconsistent theories, and who have been criticized for their nihilistic relativism (Mullaly, 1997). Many postmodernists have also been critical of what is seen as modernist assumptions underlining critical AOP, feminist, and structural traditions. Thus, ludic postmodernists deny the existence of oppression as an external object and assume an ontological stance that there is no external or internal reality. They do not see oppression as a concept that exists "out there". Instead, they adopt a position of uncertainty (Leonard, 1996). Moreover, some postmodernists proclaim the death of the subject/self/individual, thus denying the subject's real ontological status, agency, or existence. Foucault believed that the subject was continually reconstituting, evolving, changing, in the moment based on the discourses the person was adopting or to which he or she was responding (Leonard, 1996). In other words, an individual's idea of reality is always dependent on and constituted by the particular theory, language or discourse the individual is adopting or responding to in any particular place and time. Therefore, postmodernists highlight the importance of deconstructing narratives. Hick, Fook, and Pozzuto (2005) explain:

> Foucault suggests that the narrative may hide as much as it reveals, that there are many possible narratives, and it is the power relations that advance one or another narrative. The examination of the narrative is as important as an examination of the world the narrative attempts to define as natural, or objectify (p.xi).

Those with power control the language of the discourse and therefore, influence the reality of how the world is seen and what it means. Thus, ludic postmodernists do not support conclusions from any theory or paradigm about what the best world order might be nor would they agree that anyone could decide for or with others what best or truth might look like. Therefore, it can be argued that ludic postmodernists reject the AOP analysis of social inequality, oppression, and the structural call for transformation to socialism.

Critical postmodernism. The second main group of postmodern thinkers, and the one seen as most useful in terms of the purposes of this research study, are the critical or resistance postmodernists who attempt to bridge the dialectic between modernism's humanistic emancipatory vision and postmodernism's concern with multiplicity, difference, and power (Mullaly, 1997). To this latter group, oppression and resistance can only be understood from within an appreciation, analysis, and deconstruction of the social and cultural backdrop of multiple, differentially located, subjective, and concrete historical experiences and identities. Although critical postmodernists never assume commonality or universality, they are interested in exploring the richness of individually situated experiences, identities, and subjectivities to ground them in, "human narratives of emancipation and social justice" (Freire, 1993, p.x.)

Within the social work literature, authors including Nicholson (1989), Lewis (1990), Sands and Nuccio (1992), Leonard (1995, 1996, 1997), Ife (1997), Fook (2004), Parton and O'Bryne (2000), Pease and Fook (1999), Weedon (1997), and Mullaly (1993,

1997, 2002, 2007, 2010) have written extensively in this area and have explored the application of postmodern thinking to social work theory, administration, practice, education, and field instruction. They have also investigated avenues of agreement in terms of a broad vision of human liberation and searched for "points of affinity" as potential sites to build temporarily united coalitions for the purpose of social change (Ellsworth, 1993).

Strengths of the Four Critical Theories

A benefit of using feminist, structural/radical, and AOP frameworks in social work practice is that they are: critical of existing oppressive structures, policies, and practices; identify and name the sources, causes, and effects of oppression and dominant-subordinate relations; and place the blame related to personal issues and private troubles outside of the individual and thus, have the capacity to decrease self-blame and pathologizing stances. They encourage making change at all social levels including personal, cultural, and structural interventions. Thus, they represent a thorough, holistic approach to social work research, practice, education, and field instruction. These frameworks also support mixed methods or an acceptance of many ways of knowing. They also encourage social work practitioners, researchers, educators, and field instructors to explicitly acknowledge their situated locations of privilege and power and the implications of these in their social work relationships, classrooms, field practicums, and research as well as in their personal lives.

As well, "postmodernism has been especially important in acknowledging the multiple forms of 'otherness' as they emerge from differences and subjectivity, gender, class, race, and the like" (Mullaly, 2010, p.31). In addition, Davies & Leonard (2004) suggest that critical postmodernists have attempted to reconcile:

> the relationship between a social work politics of resistance based primarily on the recognition of difference and a politics which places emphasis on the interdependence of human subjects and the need for solidarity amongst oppressed populations" (Davies & Leonard, 2004, p.xii).

Critical postmodernists in particular have attempted to bridge progressive social work's modernist vision of domination-free societies, solidarity, and human liberation with the recognition of difference and multiple consciousness related to subjectivity and identity. Generally, postmodernism's emphasis on the richness of local experience and subjective identity is consistent with social work's emphasis on being "where the service user is at". When compared to other schools of thought within postmodernism, critical postmodernism seems to have more utility in social work because it attempts to address practical concerns about what the implications are for actual social work practice. Finally, postmodern thought has also provided social work theorists, academics, practitioners, field instructors, and activists with fresh ideas and concepts which are particularly useful when looking at processes of identity formation, subjectivity, and individual meaning-making related to the concept of oppression.

Limitations of the Four Critical Theories

In the past, postmodernists have criticized critical theories for failing, "… to discuss overlapping oppressions, difference, diversity or identity" (Baines, 2007a, p.18). Postmodern analysis has also concluded that feminists have over-generalized about women's oppression and have not considered minority and/ or diverse voices (Brotman & Pollack, 1997; Nicholson, 1989). Critical and structural theorists have also been criticized for overemphasizing the role of class and the nature of production in their Marxist analyses.

In addition, feminists of colour have argued that this emphasis on patriarchy and class is incomplete and lacks wholeness as it comes mostly from White middle-class theorists (Wane, Deliovsky, & Lawson, 2002).

The current literature has attempted to respond to these criticisms by reflecting upon and identifying the existence, nature, and effects of multiple and intersecting oppressions, power, and resistance and engaging in analyses of how these intersections play out in social work theory, practice, and education (Barnoff et al, 2006). However, Yee (2005) insists that these intersectional approaches still fail to:

> ...articulate a clearly defined theoretical framework from which analyses emerge, and more problematically, these approaches have become co-opted into mainstream practices that reinforce the current status quo of focusing on the 'other' as opposed to truly challenging the power of the dominant and/or majority group (p.91).

With intersectional analyses, it also becomes impossible to clearly define oppression in a way that fits all social, cultural, and historical identities and locations. Moreover, feminism, structural, and AOP approaches presuppose an external reality (i.e., oppression and capitalism) which ludic postmodernists argue may not be accurate (Payne, 1997). Critical theories have also been criticized for reifying and emphasizing the power of external forces without fully accounting for the concept of free will and individual agency. Other limitations include: 1) a lack of clarity about what social workers do; 2) the working class' suspicion of social work; 3) the debate whether there are truly universal needs; and 4) a lack of agreement on methods (Rojek, Peacock, and Collins, 1988).

Critical theories also assume that social workers should be or are able to educate others about oppression and that once people are aware and politically empowered, they will be more likely to act together to make change. This may not be true. There is evidence

from Eastern Europe or in Russia (after the fall of the iron curtain) that this does not always happen and not at the level that is perhaps required to achieve transformation (Ellsworth, 1989). This may be so but it also seems unlikely that social change is possible without awareness, collectivization, and political empowerment, as evidenced in the historic albeit, limited gains of the women's, civil rights, environmental, and labour movements. Thus, awareness and empowerment may be necessary but insufficient to create the conditions for social change and the achievement of social justice. One could also argue that critical theories have not developed sufficiently effective mobilization tools or that, even if the "right" tools exist, the greater populace is unwilling to dismantle the systems of privilege from which they benefit.

However, even if individuals act to make change, Rojek et al (1988) note that local action may not be effective unless on an international scale and that sectional interests sometimes prevail over the greater good. They warn that, even with radical intentions, social workers actually have limited power and freedom to transform the state. Indeed, Barnoff et al (2006) conclude that it is very difficult for social workers to engage in broad mezzo and macro level social justice work as many agencies are operating solely in "survival mode". As well, the reality is that most social workers are often required to work in traditional, bureaucratic organizations within a capitalistic society which many people seem to value and support. The structure of these systems and organizations are seen as limiting the potential for social change and resistance. Hartmann (1981) claims that:

> Structure produces action, but the particular action that is produced lies within the realms of structure itself. Only under exceptional circumstances does human agency push structural barriers to the extent that structure itself is changed. Yet agents have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently, even though they operate within structurally determined limits (p.112).

In terms of AOP approaches, some postmodernists have also argued that, "AOP dilutes components of their critiques by moving quickly to concrete, collective programs and practices" (Baines, 2007a, p. 19). AOP approaches are founded on the notions of the collective, solidarity, and on the need to mobilize masses of people to make social change. In contrast, many postmodernists challenge the assumptions that humans have common needs or desires and that the physical and social world can be changed through rational human intervention. Foucault (1980) instead emphasized the conditional changeable character of human interaction and meaning, reinforced the notion of cultural and social diversity, and viewed the social system as metaphor.

Although there have been some efforts, as mentioned earlier, to apply critical postmodernism to social work practice, much of postmodernism deliberately invites ambiguity and confusion and offers no clear direction for social workers to carry out daily practices. Additionally, the postmodern literature itself is difficult to read and understand. Front-line social workers and field instructors may struggle with understanding and applying its key concepts. Indeed, Davies & Leonard (2004) conclude that while, "the importance of both difference and collective solidarity is necessary, in practice this is not so easy to achieve" (p.xii).This poses ethical and moral dilemmas for social workers who, because of their functions, roles, and responsibilities, must make decisions about external material realities (Gambrill, 2005). Furthermore, the relativist aspects of ludic postmodernism seem to reflect a conservative bias that supports the "status quo" and denies and/or minimizes the need for resistance and social change. Although as a social work profession, we support generalist practice, we are not relativists. We are committed through

our Code of Ethics (2005) and the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (Accreditation Standards, 2000) to support marginalized groups, fight inequality, and ensure social justice.

In addition, ludic postmodernists may be incorrect in their assumptions about the non-existence of oppression. Indeed, feminists have questioned why this particular school of thought, written predominantly by white upper class male academics in obtuse language, has emerged at a point of time in history when oppressed groups finally have incredible opportunities through worldwide communications to act globally to make change (Brotman & Pollack, 1997; Nicholson, 1989). As such, one could argue that certain postmodernists provide privileged groups with an intellectual rationalization to deny and ignore the existence of oppression, as well as evade accountability for the oppressive systems, structures, laws, policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviours from which they benefit. An uncritical acceptance of postmodern thinking also leads to a denial or minimization of how oppressive social structures harm specific groups while benefiting others. In reviewing Noam Chomsky's work on power, Eagleton (2005) comments:

> the conception of an intellectual as one who speaks truth to power is mistaken on two counts. For one thing, power knows the truth already; and for another thing, it is not power but its victims who need the truth most urgently. It comes as no surprise that most of those who are cavalier about the idea of truth these days have no pressing political need for it (p.277).

Consequently, it is clear that postmodernism has a dangerous potential to divide rather than unite. An uncritical acceptance of the postmodern notion of multiplicity and diversity may lead to an over-reliance upon notions of difference and may threaten our ability to resist oppression and to create alliances based upon commonality (Brotman &

Pollack, 1997). Critical social work theorists continue to struggle with the implications of postmodern analysis. If reality is individually constructed and meaning is situated in specific local, cultural, social, and historical contexts, how does one do social work practice and mobilize groups to transform society without basing these efforts on some type of unifying or universal themes?

Summary

Since the turn of the 20th century, critical, feminist, and radical/structural social workers have attempted to critique traditional ways of thinking and doing social work. Relying on a Marxist analysis of class conflict and the theme of social pathology, they have attempted to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism, encouraged class solidarity, fought oppression, suggested collective social and power alternatives, and worked towards the transformation of society to one more consistent with socialist and Marxist principles. These views, values, analyses, and actions within social work have been described as anti-oppressive practice.

Both postmodern and feminist thinkers have challenged some of the key assumptions, concepts, and tenets of AOP approaches. From certain postmodern views, there is doubt about whether concepts such as patriarchy, racism, classism, and oppression, which form the foundations of anti-oppressive social work theory and practice and much of the social justice aims of our profession, actually exist (Bannerji, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Lewis, 1990). If ludic postmodernists are correct in rejecting all universal theories and concepts, it could mean that social workers could be paying attention to, observing, deciding, acting, and doing the wrong things. Furthermore, how can we resist oppressive

forces and support AOP social work practice if oppression does not exist, outside of the minds and reality constructions of specific individuals? In addition, what happens if social workers, as a profession, cannot agree on what oppression is or what it looks like?

In contrast, if ludic postmodernists are wrong about the existence of oppression, it becomes imperative for the social work profession to produce research and scholarship to refute postmodern claims and effectively consider their criticisms, questions, issues, and concerns, particularly in terms of points of affinity related to the concept of oppression and the need for social change and resistance. Feminists recommend that social workers, as potential cultural agents of social change, work to uncover points of affinity in, "people's stories, and what stories we choose to tell, and the way we decided to tell them..."(Freire, 1993, p.xii). Thus, exploring and deconstructing participants' stories or what could be called narratives of oppression and resistance are central to investigating the research questions in this study.

Conclusion

Chapter two has highlighted an overview of oppression, a brief summary of the historical and cultural development of oppressive societies, the intersections of power and oppression, and the development and importance of resistance. Critical theory, the conflict paradigm, and four major critical theories and their strengths and limitations were reviewed. Given this theoretical framework and its significance in terms of an understanding and analysis of the concept of oppression, I believe that the social work profession benefits from an interactive dialogue and research on how social work field instructors actually conceptualize oppression, what meaning the concept of oppression has

in their personal and professional lives, and what actions they have taken in response to their understandings of oppression.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of this doctoral research is the question: "How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression in their personal and professional lives?" To explore this question and related research questions outlined in chapter one, ten social work field instructors were asked in semi-structured interviews to respond to a series of questions about their conceptualizations of oppression. They were also asked to provide personal and professional demographic information and a written description of an experience they had had with oppression. This study provides a unique opportunity for these particular social work practitioners to share their understanding of oppression in social work and from the perspective of their personal lives.

Research Design

This is an exploratory qualitative study, emphasizing grounded theory data collection and analysis methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and informed by a constructivist paradigm (Rodwell, 1998) and the principles of resistance and AOP research (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006; McNicoll 1999; Potts & Brown, 2005; Ristock & Pennell, 1996). In resistance and AOP research, it is assumed that both researchers and participants mutually and interactively dialogue to co-produce meanings and knowledge. The assumption is that this approach leads to benefits for all involved parties and action towards social change. Lorber (2005) outlines the advantages to activist research as providing, "insightful understanding of the perspectives, experiences, and meaning of others, and a basis for action that will make a difference in their lives" (p. 314). Thus, research goals, consistent with the principles of resistance and AOP research, are not

so much about finding one truth as they are about empowering oppressed people (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). According to McNicoll (1999), this type of in-depth detailed research, similar to this study's exploration of field instructors' experiences, narratives, and understandings of oppression, motivates those deeply involved to act which may set in motion a cycle of permanent reflection and continuous action.

Justification for Research Design

An exploratory design was selected as it seemed to best match the criteria as described by Yegidis and Weinbach (2002). They suggest the use of an exploratory design when one has:

1. a phenomenon or problem area in which clear knowledge or usable ideas are scarce,
2. problems have been identified but our understanding of them is quite limited,
3. the goal is to lay the groundwork for other knowledge building that will follow,
4. an assumption we need to know more about something before we can begin to understand it (p. 106).

The basis of this research study and design supports an ontological, ethical, and philosophical approach which is consistent with some of the critical social work theories outlined previously. For researchers, using this theoretical framework, one comes to know the world through discussing and attempting to understand the experiences of people and then uses this knowledge to promote social change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Although there is an ontological assumption that reality is out there, that oppression actually exists outside of the subject and knower and as an object fixed in our social structures, this

research study was not about discovering, measuring, or proving that oppression exists. Instead, I was interested in how the individual field instructor- based on his or her own social, cultural, and geographical locations and identities- constructs, defines, interprets, makes sense of, stories, understands, and acts based on the concept of oppression in his or her personal and professional life. This necessitated a more relativist and constructivist epistemological stance which assumes that oppression exists as an external object but recognizes that it can only truly be known or understood through the process, discussion, and shared exploration of individual localized subjective meaning -making.

Qualitative methods. Tutty, Rothery, and Grinnell Jr. (1996) propose that qualitative methods and analysis are best used if the goals of the research are:

1. to understand the personal and professional realities of research participants in-depth, including aspects of their experience that may be unique to them,
2. to understand human experience in as much complexity as possible. This means aiming for a deep understanding of the experience and the meanings attached to it, but also ...includes the research study itself- for example, your relationship with the research participants is part of what needs to be understood when your findings are analyzed (p. 91).

Qualitative researchers believe that truth is socially constructed and assume that subjectivity and complexity are inherent in any type of human interaction. Qualitative researchers cite a preference for unobtrusive data collection methods, acceptance of variable complexity, consideration of multiple purposes and conflicts, use of inductive approaches to theory construction, and most importantly, demonstration of empathy- the

attempt to understand the depths, richness, and detail of another's experience (i.e., meaning -making) (Smith, 1998; Tutty et al, 1996). Furthermore, Smith (1998) argues that qualitative methods are a good fit for social work research because social workers are already familiar with the tools of qualitative research including process recordings, methodological notes, journalling, interviewing, drawing, observational notes, audio and visual recording, genograms, social maps, and peer consultation. Qualitative researchers would propose that these methods encourage participants to participate as active subjects contributing in shared meaning-making and the understanding of the social world rather than as passive objects being measured, predicted, or controlled (Smith, 1998; Tutty et al, 1996).

Obviously, it is difficult to measure complex social phenomena. Instead of measurement, a qualitative approach, "generates a more holistic understanding of issues" (Tutty et al, 1996, p.11). Rather than predetermine what concepts and variables need to be explored, qualitative researchers suggest that, "clarity about important concepts and variables emerges in response to what the participants have to say, not in response to preordained theory and beliefs" (Tutty et al, 1996, p. 12). Rather than asking participants to list their experiences of oppression or define oppression and then possibly study how gender, age, or race as variables correlate with the results, I asked participants, "to describe their situation, their experiences, and what it all means to them". To accurately represent the field instructors' responses, leading questions were avoided. This approach was meant to "yield information that is richer and more attuned to the complexities of context and individual differences than the quantitative approach could ever produce" (Tutty et al, 1996, p. 11).

There are three major issues related to using qualitative methods: a) objectivity, b) generalization, and c) reductionism. In contrast to quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers do not attempt to control for objectivity. Instead, the researcher is viewed:

> as a situated knower and discoverer. It views the cover of neutrality as an inappropriate measure of validity. The myth of scientific neutrality justifies the status quo as inevitable and knowledge of it as universal truths (Hick, 2005, p. 42).

Moreover, qualitative researchers accept, even encourage, close relationships between themselves and the research participants. It is understood that there is a reciprocal influence between researcher and participants and that the experiences, world views, and particular locations of everyone involved in the research process will influence the meaning-making process, thus, resulting in subjective data collection and analysis. However, it is still essential that:

> The scholar has to maintain some distance, has to closely examine the contradictions in the data because they are likely to be crucially informative, and has to be able to challenge respondents' voices with voices from other worlds (Lorber, 2005, p. 315).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers attempt to understand each person's experiences in depth, are concerned with richness of detail, and accept that the results may only be representative of the specific sample. Although this creates limits in terms of generalizing findings, the emphasis is on transferability of findings as it is possible that future researchers may build upon the current research findings, by repeating this particular research design with similar samples and groups of social workers to determine patterns, similarities, and differences, and this will, in turn, increase the social work knowledge base For future research suggestions, please see chapter seven.

Grounded theory. Because this research involves asking field instructors to describe and discuss their meaning-making in terms of oppression and to apply their understandings of the concept to their personal lives, social work practice, and field instruction, it seemed appropriate to rely on qualitative grounded theory methods. Based on Glaser and Strauss's original work (1967), grounded theory consists of logical guidelines and analytic inductive strategies and procedures for collecting and analyzing data, studying social and psychological processes, and developing theory (Pidgeon, 1996; Charmaz, 2003; Padgett, 2008). Grounded theory attempts to locate participants' stories within social processes and asks the basic research question-"what is happening here" (Charmaz, 2003, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Constructivist approach. Consistent with AOP, resistance, and grounded theory approaches, constructivists study how people construct meanings and actions and emphasize that both data and analysis are created from the shared experiences of researcher and participants throughout the research process (Charmaz, 2003). A constructivist approach also supports the notion that social reality can only be known through the sharing and discussing of multiple individual realities, experiences, world views, and voices, mediated and/or interpreted through the knower's particular cultural, geographical, and social situation or lens (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodwell, 1998).Thus, research knowers are expected to, "cleave to the truth of their own experiences" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 110).

In terms of the production of knowledge, there is also a recognition that what we know, perceive, and even identify is socially constructed and depends upon the social, cultural, and geographical locations of the knower (Mullaly, 1997). For this reason, this

study focuses on the subjective conceptualizations field instructors utilize to understand and apply their own, service users', and students' experiences. This study's focus on reconstituting subject -who the respondents are, their social and cultural locations, their subjectivities and processes of conceptualization, understandings, and meaning-making through the use of narrative and metaphor, and their decision-making processes- was deemed as important to building the social work knowledge base about the concept of oppression. Social workers' abilities to think about and act in response to oppression reflect a recognition and understanding of the complexity of multiplicative and intersecting oppressions. The identification of a matrix of systems of domination and oppression (Collins, 1991, 2000) help us, as social workers, to deepen our comprehension of how diverse groups of people recognize, conceptualize, and experience oppression. In addition, without explicit recognition and understanding of our own privilege and oppressive behaviors, we also run the risk, contrary to the Social Work Code of Ethics (2005), of continuing to perpetuate inequality and oppression.

Furthermore, the participants' identification, awareness, and understanding of their individual social and cultural identities, locations, or lenses are critical in terms of the research design of this study. To this end, how the participants storied their experiences and the narratives they produced needed to be closely examined. Pozzuto, Angell, and Dezenorf (2005) emphasize this point:

> narratives are an essential part of understanding individuals and societies. At the individual level, there are narratives that provide coherence to our self-understanding. These narratives, like discursive practices, focus on some elements, while excluding others, then weave the included into a meaningful whole…These individual narratives are not held in a vacuum. They continually interact with various discursive practices and other narratives (p. 34).

This analysis of narratives necessitated an exploration of both the respondents' public identities and roles and their personal private experiences. As Smith (1990) advocates, the researcher needs to view the, "everyday world...as problematic, where the everyday world is taken to be various and differentiated matrices of experience- the place from which the consciousness of the knower begins" (p. 173).

Although it is acknowledged that any constructed truth and knowledge discovered and uncovered by this research process is by its very nature, transitory, fluid, short-term, and can not be easily generalized to other groups, there is an assumption through discussion and exploration that "points of affinity" will be discovered among the research participants (Ellsworth, 1989). Patterns (i.e., interesting similarities and differences in participant interpretation, construction, experience, and meaning - making) that emerge from the data analysis can be used to better understand the construction of the concept of oppression in social work. In addition, this inductive approach to developing theory based on emerging data and patterns is consistent with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pidgeon, 1996; Charmaz, 2003; Padgett, 2008).

The Participants

Field instructors. Because my future research goals ultimately lie in informing social work educational theory and methods, I chose to interview social work field instructors as they play a crucial but sometimes undervalued role in the construction of AOP knowledge and the development of new AOP social workers. Field instructors are responsible for guiding social work students through field placements. Field instructors also represented what I saw as an "insider" point of view and, "must be able to examine their

own practice and articulate the thoughts, attitudes, values, and feelings that affect the actions they take" (Bogo & Vayda, 1998, p, 3).

Smith (2007) speaks about, "the research described here is the kind that works with ideas from those of us who are 'insiders'- caught up in the middle and deeply implicated" (p.147). As I was interested in what was happening in the field in terms of understanding the concept of oppression, I agreed with Razack (2002) that field instructors were uniquely positioned for, "...unravelling the interplay of power and practice and incorporating a socio-political and historical context in their work" (p. 83). I also believed that field instructors best represented a bridge between current social work theory and education about oppression and the realities of front-line practice

In addition, I defined field instructors as social workers with five or more years of practice, who have a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and/or a Masters of Social Work (MSW), and who were actively working in a field instruction role. I determined that this amount of work and educational experience would have afforded these social workers an opportunity to learn their specific jobs, become familiar with social work roles, work with a variety of service user populations and situations within multiple settings, and reflect on and integrate social work knowledge, theory, and skills, and practice, in a larger range of work settings.

Because of this experience, I assumed that these field instructors, as social workers and educators, would demonstrate a wide range of experience, knowledge, and theoretical constructions about social work in general. My belief was that this range of professional experiences would result in richer discussions, self- reflection and analysis, and results, compared to interviewing relatively inexperienced social workers.

Sample

Sample size. In terms of sample size, Charmaz (2003) links qualitative grounded theory methods to limited sample research studies. In addition, Kirby et al (2006) conclude:

> In qualitative work, sufficient sample size is usually determined by the volume and consistency of the data gathered. Five to 10 participants may be all that is necessary in an emergent qualitative piece of work… (p.184).

Congruent with this generally acceptable standard, the size of sample in this study was viewed as sufficient as qualitative grounded theory methods can generate voluminous data as demonstrated in table 2**.** In view of this amount of date collection and analysis work, a group of ten interviews seemed most convenient and manageable, based on my time line, work plan, the field instructors' availability, and the use of grounded theory and qualitative methods of data collection and data analysis.

Snowball convenience sampling. Using a purposive snowball convenience sampling method, I interviewed ten social work field instructors working in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. Unlike many Canadian provinces, social workers in British Columbia do not have to belong to or register with a provincial association of social workers to practice social work. Therefore, it would have been extremely difficult to determine the whole population of social workers or to ensure a random sample of all social workers in any particular area. In addition, I am presently working as an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of British Columbia- Okanagan. The use of snowball sampling allowed me to use UBC-O's formal community networks to contact field instructors for this research project.

As a matter of logistical convenience, in terms of travel time and expenses, I chose to limit the sample to those local social workers who live and work in or near the following

geographic locations: Vernon, Kelowna, and Penticton- the main residential and employment centers of the Okanagan Valley. To recruit participants, I sent a letter to all of UBC-O's social work field instructors. In this letter, I explained the research project, invited them to participate, and also asked them to forward names and telephone numbers of colleagues who they thought might be interested in participating. I also contacted, by telephone, all of the social work field instructors who I personally knew in the area to ask them to participate and to forward names of possible interested parties.

Sample Selection. In the end, fifteen field instructors volunteered for this research study. Due to the anticipated volume of data collection and analysis, I chose to limit the sample size to ten interviews. Given the cultural, race, and economic background of most social workers in this geographical region, I expected that the majority of my volunteers would identify as Caucasian. I was pleased that two of the volunteers, who happened to be women, identified themselves as belonging to diverse populations. To increase the possibility that these interviews and findings would reflect some diversity, I chose to assign two interview spots for these women. I also chose (in terms of gender at least) to randomly assign five men and three women for the remaining interviews. I then asked participants to fill out a demographic form (see appendix 4).

Respondents' characteristics. See table 1 below for a detailed account of the respondents' characteristics. For this research study, five women and five men were interviewed. The numbers in the table below are reduced to nine as one female participant chose not to complete the demographic form. Seven of the nine field instructors who filled out demographic forms identified as Caucasian. In addition, eight of the nine respondents came from what I would describe as middle class families of origin (earning $21,000-

$40,000 annually). Seven out of the nine field instructors were over the age of 40. Four respondents had over 20 years of social work experience, one field instructor had between 11- 19 years of experience, and the remaining four respondents had less than ten years experience. Seven of the field instructors have a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). One field instructor also has a Bachelor of Arts (BA). Two respondents have a BSW and a Masters of Social Work (MSW) and one field instructor has a BA and a MSW. In terms of social work positions, four of the field instructors identified themselves as clinical workers, one as a manager, and four others had combined clinical and management responsibilities. Although not listed in table 1, all of the field instructors identified as heterosexual and able-bodied.

Table 1

Respondents' Characteristics

DEMOGRAPHICS	*GENDER*	
Age Range	**Female**	**Male**
26- 30	**0**	**1**
31- 40	**0**	**0**
41- 50	**3**	**3**
51- 60	**1**	**1**
Race	**Female**	**Male**
Caucasian	**3**	**4**
Latin/Central/ South American	**1**	**0**
British Isles and Metis	**0**	**1**
Years of Experience	**Female**	**Male**
5-10 years	**3**	**1**
11-19 years	**0**	**1**
20+ years	**1**	**3**
Education	**Female**	**Male**
Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)	**4**	**3**
Master of Social Work (MSW)	**0**	**3**
Bachelor of Arts	**1**	**1**
Social Work Position	**Female**	**Male**
Clinical	**1**	**3**
Management	**0**	**1**
Both Clinical and Management	**3**	**1**

**One participant chose not to complete the demographic form and written assignment.*

Sample Limitations

In terms of defining what social work practice is, I interviewed only those social workers who were experienced field instructors and defined themselves as currently working in a social work role. Because my research project depended on recruiting volunteers, I also thought that a snowball sample would attract participants who were interested, motivated, available, and willing to take the time to explore the concept of oppression in their personal and professional lives. The disadvantage to this sampling method, in contrast to a random sample from a complete social worker registration list, is

that I may have missed valuable input and data from people I was unable to reach. As well, I am not sure how the results were influenced by only interviewing candidates who expressed an interest in this subject or who may have felt compelled to participate because they knew me. Another potential limitation of this study is that the respondents' perspectives on oppression reflect their consciousness and are therefore influenced (perhaps even limited) by their accumulated life experiences and life-long socialization from within their particular culture and social locations and identities. In addition, because UBC-Okanagan field placements tend to primarily represent micro level clinical practice settings, mezzo and macro levels of social work practice were underrepresented in this sample. This may have had an impact on the research findings.

Data Collection

Interview. Interviewing was the primary data collection method for this dissertation. The interview, defined by Lofland and Lofland (1984), is "a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" (p. 12) and is a traditional tool in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Smith, 1998). In terms of sample selection, Atherton and Klemmack (1982) suggest interviewing "people who one thinks are knowledgeable about the problem area" (p. 82). In this case, as discussed previously, field instructors seemed to be an appropriate, knowledgeable, and accessible group to interview about how oppression is conceptualized in social work.

Consistent with a qualitative research design and its goals, it is stated that, "interviewing is particularly appropriate when you want to compare information between

and among people...and when you are interested in learning about a person's experiences, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings" (Tutty et al, 1996, p. 56). Further, I agree with Smith (1998) that interviewing social workers was appropriate as they are very familiar with this type of research tool, the interview process, and the skills required to interview. Ideally, I hoped that familiarity with this research methodology would result in the participants feeling more comfortable during their interviews. Adding to this sense of comfort, social workers should also be knowledgeable about, familiar with, and expect the social work standards of informed consent, respect for others, and confidentiality (see appendix 2). In addition, the choice to interview drew upon my own strengths as researcher, educator, field instructor, and supervisor, and clinical practitioner. I have had over fifteen years of direct social work practice in a variety of work settings with numerous service user populations and would see myself as an experienced, highly skilled interviewer.

Guided interview. There are three main types of interviews: structured or standardized, unstructured or open-ended, and semi-structured or guided (Tutty et al, 1996). I chose to use a semi-structured or guided interviewing format. A guided interview allows the researcher to explore some predetermined questions and key concepts while encouraging participants to take an active role in the interview process. This type of interview uses more open-ended questions than structured interviews, allowing people to respond in more depth, with richer detail. The advantages to using open-ended questions and minimizing leading questions are that they: provide full expression; allow for the drawing of salient distinctions; tap unanticipated answers; add to the respondents' enjoyment; and provide rich vignettes (Gray & Guppy, 1994). Some of the disadvantages include: comparability (i.e., too many different responses); vagueness; discomfort with

recording; coding and summarizing problems; and more involvement and time are required (Gray & Guppy, 1994). However, even considering these disadvantages, I believe that the open-ended question format was conducive to having participants more fully describe their feelings, thoughts, experiences, and constructions of oppression and what these mean to them.

Pilot interviews. As a method to test, solicit feedback, and learn more about my initial interview questions, format, and style, I interviewed two of my academic colleagues. Both of these colleagues and I have previously worked as field instructors, directly supervising students in the field, in various social work settings. The three of us were also currently working as field supervisors and were responsible for supporting field instructors and students and evaluating students' performance in their practicums. Although not part of the data summarized in this study, these pilot interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, analyzed, and coded and assisted me to refine my interview questions and style. In addition, my colleagues' responses and feedback helped inform my thinking about the interview process, reflect on my interviewing skills and style, and deepen my analysis of the field instructors' comments.

Throughout the research process, I periodically consulted with these two colleagues, three of my other academic social work peers, and my thesis committee about the research process, the data analysis and coding, and my own thinking, experiences, and feelings about the research study. I also arranged for a colleague to interview me. I completed a written example of oppression, a demographic form, and kept journal notes and memos about the research process, experiences, and methods. My interview was also audio-taped and transcribed and these materials were analyzed and coded. In this dissertation, I

periodically share personal experiences and quotes from these materials, when appropriate, to illustrate major themes, demonstrate reflexivity, and provide auditability (Padgett, 2008).

Interview format. In appendix 5, the initial guiding questions for the interviews have been grouped based on three key areas related to the conceptualization of oppression in social work and in daily living. The first section, *The Concept of Oppression*, was structured to generate data regarding the individual's construction, "meaning - making", and understanding of the concept of oppression. The next section, *Personal and Professional Identity*, was used to situate the individual respondent in his or her particular social, economic, and cultural locations. To this end, field instructors were asked questions about their personal and professional identities related to their understandings of the concept of oppression. Consistent with the critical theoretical framework outlined earlier, the final section of questions, *Social Change/ Action/ Resistance,* linked the respondents' constructions, understandings, and experiences of oppression to specific local and social action, change efforts, and resistance.

Audio-taping and transcription. All the interviews were tape recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy of data collection and analysis. The planned length of the interviews was between one and two hours as the social workers often had to take time out of their clinical practice and this seemed most reasonable to them. It ended up that one hour was often not enough to develop penetrating conversations into very sensitive issues. Thus, several interviews were completed closer to the two hour time frame. These interviews were then transcribed by a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement.

Written assignment. In addition to the interview, as illustrated in appendix 6, interviewees were asked to write about an incident, event, or interaction in their personal or professional lives when they witnessed or experienced oppression. They were also asked to pick an experience which they did not discuss in the interview. It was hoped that this means of collecting data would give participants the opportunity to further think about and reflect upon the concept of oppression, at their leisure, without the influences and constraints of the interview and tape recording process. This also supported the notion of collecting multiple sources of data (Smith, 1989). The written examples of oppression were then collected from or mailed in by the participants two to four weeks after the interviewing process. Participants were also asked to complete a demographic form (appendix 4). The demographic form was included because it was assumed that differences and similarities might emerge from the respondents' data based on broad categories of social and cultural location and identity such as gender, race, class, and so on. One person chose not to fill out the demographic form or complete a written assignment.

Researcher reflexive journal. One of the most important aspects of qualitative grounded theory research methods is the acknowledgment of the researcher as "human instrument" (Rodwell, 1998, p. 198). Consistent with the literature review, the theoretical framework, and research design justification mentioned previously, I have already emphasized how one's social, cultural, and geographical location creates a lens through which one filters or sees the world and/or social reality. Our biases, world views, preconceptions, and assumptions influence what things, thoughts, and feelings we pay attention to, observe, ignore, and make decisions about both in our professional and personal lives (Gambrill, 2005). Just as it is essential for the researcher to explore the

participants' conceptualizations of oppression, the research process itself, as well as the relationship and interactions between researcher and research participants, it is also critical that the researcher her or himself becomes an object and subject of study.

Therefore, it was important that who I am as "socially situated researcher" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 633) be considered, reflected upon, and thought about throughout the research process. I come from a feminist and structural approach to social work practice, education, and field instruction. I believe in objective reality, for instance, the existence of capitalism, racism, sexism, classism, and so on. In terms of research of social reality, I prefer a subjective, interpretative epistemology and methodology. When it comes to notions of truth, while I accept and appreciate the nuances of postmodern skepticism about master truths, I support Carniol's (2005b) conclusion about truth:

> it is self-evident that when it comes to certain values, there are indeed universal truths. For example, real democracy is better than tyranny; respecting human beings is better than killing them; protection of our environment is better than poisoning our air, water and soil; caring about others is better than indifference, prejudice, hatred or contempt. Such universal values based as they are on reducing harm to people are consistent with social work values that seek to optimize human well-being (p. 155).

In addition, I am a critical theorist whose goal, with others, is to make political and social change through clinical practice, education, field instruction, scholarship, and research. To facilitate critical self-reflection and as a research tool, I decided to keep a personal reflexive journal (Davies & Leonard, 2004). I also replicated what I asked the research participants to do. In this personal journal, I focused on four main areas which basically correspond to the previously outlined interview question format:

Conceptualization of oppression. Throughout the research process, I kept journal notes about my own conceptualizations and constructions of oppression. I was interested in thinking and writing about what I saw, felt, and thought, based upon the literature review, interviews, written assignments, and research process, about the concept of oppression and how these understandings evolved over time.

Personal and professional identity. Similar to the participants, I was interested in exploring how I have come to construct and understand oppression in my personal and professional life. This is what I wrote in my journal about my identities and social location:

> I have been a social worker since 1987. I have also worked as a social work field instructor and field supervisor for Bachelor of Social Work students. I have a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Work, Masters of Education, and am presently completing a doctoral program in social work education. I have been teaching social work at an undergraduate level, at UBC-O, for nine years. I teach explicitly from a critical, feminist, structural, and AOP theoretical framework, while using postmodernism, as a critique of modernist theories. Although I was brought up in a working class family in rural New Brunswick, I recognize that presently, as a White, upper-class academic, I come to this research project with many layers of privilege and belong, in many ways, to the dominant culture in Canadian society. This privilege, particularly my class and White privilege, informs my ability to see, know, and understand oppression. I am also- a woman, mother, chronic pain sufferer, daughter, sister, friend, lover, colleague, student, teacher, Buddhist, and socialist- all part and parcel of the wonderful complexity of being human. My race, my class, my gender, and all of these previously mentioned factors and identities create the lens through which I see, understand, and make-meaning of my world.

In the journal, I reflected upon and wrote about how these multiple identities- my lenses, as it were- affect my conceptualization of oppression. Indeed, I ended up taking a further step and found myself writing this thesis in a much more personal way, like a conversation, rather than my usual academic style. This was, at times, quite uncomfortable and like the participants (see chapter 4), I found myself second-guessing this choice. Similar to Overall

(1998), in this thesis, "I break the taboo of my philosophical training by deliberately and explicitly using my own academic life experience as the primary resource for my philosophizing" (p. 19).

Social action and resistance. In my journal, I shared some of my own experiences dealing with, responding to, and attempting to resist oppression. I also thought and wrote about what I was hearing from participants, their stories, and emerging patterns, inconsistencies, and contradictions from the data which were linked to social work practice, field instruction, education, resistance, action, and change.

Research process. In these journal notes and memos, I documented the actual logistics of the research project such as schedules, activities, and deadlines. I made detailed notes about my choices and decisions about methods and also included observations and thoughts about the research process itself, the participants, the interviews, written assignments, data analysis, and my own experiences as researcher, student, field supervisor, and teacher.

Researcher as participant limitations. Grounded theory has been criticized for claiming to generate new theory as opposed to verifying what the researcher already knows (Charmaz & Bryant, 2007). As social scientists, how do we know that discovered stories, themes, and findings do not simply affirm what the researcher was already looking for and already knew? How do we avoid interpreting data in accordance to our social locations?

The answer in some ways is simple- I can not "not" interpret data from my social location. Indeed, one of the key concepts in AOP, feminist, and resistance research is the

notion of situated researcher. The idea that who I am- my specific social and cultural identities and locations- based on my philosophical approach, education, values, and personal experience, will influence my "store of sensitizing concepts" (Pidgeon, 1996, p. 83) thus affecting the questions I ask, what I see, hear, understand and interpret in the research data and also how I present my research and research findings. Pidgeon (1996) explains:

> …what appears to be the 'discovery' or 'emergence' of concepts and theory is in reality the result of the constant interplay between data and the researcher's developing conceptualizations, a 'flip-flop' between ideas and research experience (p. 82).

More radically, there is an assumption with this research design and approach that this interactive subjective process between me and the participants, me and the data, and me and the data analysis actually enriches the findings as opposed to contaminating them.

However, it is fair to consider (similar to what I ask my research participants), whether my good intentions, reflexivity, and awareness are enough to help to minimize bias so that others can have trust in my research findings? All researchers whether they are aware of it or not approach research with bias in terms of their social and cultural locations and theoretical orientations. Pidgeon (1996) recognizes this:

> In order to begin analysis, the researcher needs at least some theoretical resources to guide the process of interpretation and representation. Without the orientation provided by the researcher's prior understandings, no sense at all can be made in any data, whether qualitative or quantitative (p. 82).

Rather than objectivity and a guarantee of truth (if that was even possible), Pidgeon (1996) suggests alternative criteria be considered for evaluating qualitative grounded theory research including that the "results and analysis should 'work', 'fit', and be recognizable and of relevance to those studied" (p. 85).Other important criteria include: trustworthiness,

an established audit trail, transferability of the research findings to other settings, and the extent to which research reflexivity is built into the process (Pidgeon, 1996; Padgett, 2008). Please see the Data Analysis Evaluation section for more discussion on evaluating this research study.

Data Analysis

According to Tutty et al (1996), "the central purpose of analysis in qualitative studies is to sift, sort, and organize the masses of information acquired during data collection in such a way that the themes and interpretations that emerge from the process address the original research problem" (p. 90). Grounded theory methods were used in this study to analyze the interviews, assignments, demographic forms, and reflexive and methodological journal, manage data sets, pick out emerging patterns, and classify, interpret, and perform thematic coding of data sets (Allan 2003; Charmaz 2003; Padgett 2008). Grounded theorists suggest that researchers start their analysis by looking at smaller units of data and then later identify similarities and differences between these units to begin to formulate how they fit together as themes and patterns (Allan 2003; Charmaz 2003; Padgett 2008). They argue that this approach is more likely to allow the results to emerge from the data (Tutty et al, 1996) which is consistent with grounded theory methods.

Data collection process. The data collection process utilized five points of data collection. To complete the data analysis, each item was transcribed and coded for a total of over 600 pages of research materials (see table 2 below).

Table 2

Data Collection Materials

Tools	Total	Formats
Pilot Interviews	3	Audio-taped, transcribed and coded
Participant Interviews	10	Audio-taped, transcribed and coded
Written Assignments	9	Transcribed and coded
Demographic Forms	9	Transcribed and coded
Researcher reflexive and methodological journal notes and memos	1	Transcribed and coded

Note: Totaling over 600 pages of data which were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Data analysis process. From the research materials, I highlighted any data segments in the documents which seemed to contain "key ideas" (Allan, 2003). I then reread every document and attached a descriptive code, called "open coding" (Padgett, 2008, p.153), to each highlighted segment of key ideas. Each selected code name attempted to capture a main theme or idea expressed by the words from each document. Using constant comparative analysis, searching for similarities and differences across the data, I grouped together codes under common themes, called "selective or focused coding" (Charmaz, 2003). I then chose descriptive names which I thought were reflective of a uniting theme or thematic names that came directly from the participants words, called "in vivo coding" (Padgett, 2008) and assigned one to each group to identify "key concepts" (Allan, 2003). Key concepts were then compared to and against each other to form categories, called "axial coding" (Padgett, 2008). The following figure illustrates examples of the data analysis and coding process used in this research study:

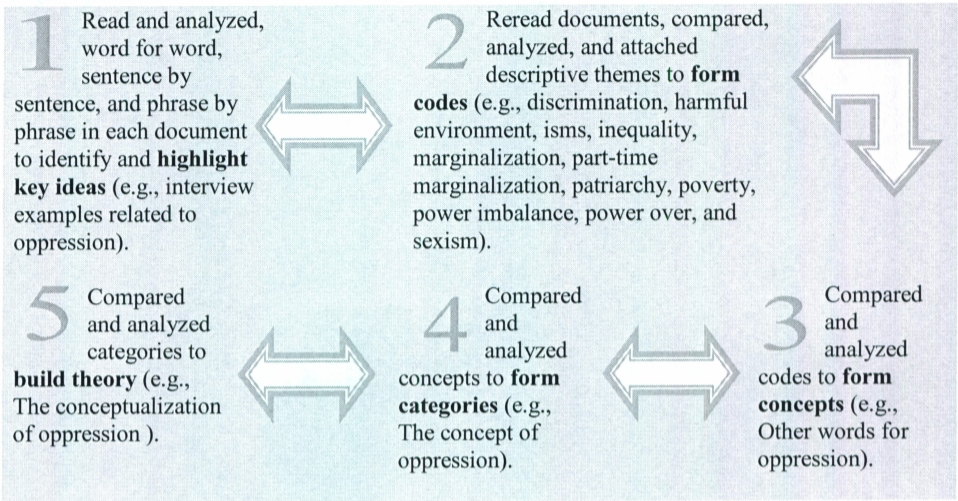

Figure 1. Example of Data Analysis Process

Please see figure 2 for the major category groups including: the concept of oppression; sources, forms, and types of oppression; conceptualization processes; diversity; service users; articulating theory; system challenges; becoming oppressors; resisting and responding to oppression; those who act; social work education, and research. These major thematic categories were then used to help further the analysis and build theory as documented in the main findings and discussion chapters. Appendix 9 provides a detailed breakdown of coding for key ideas, concepts, and categories.

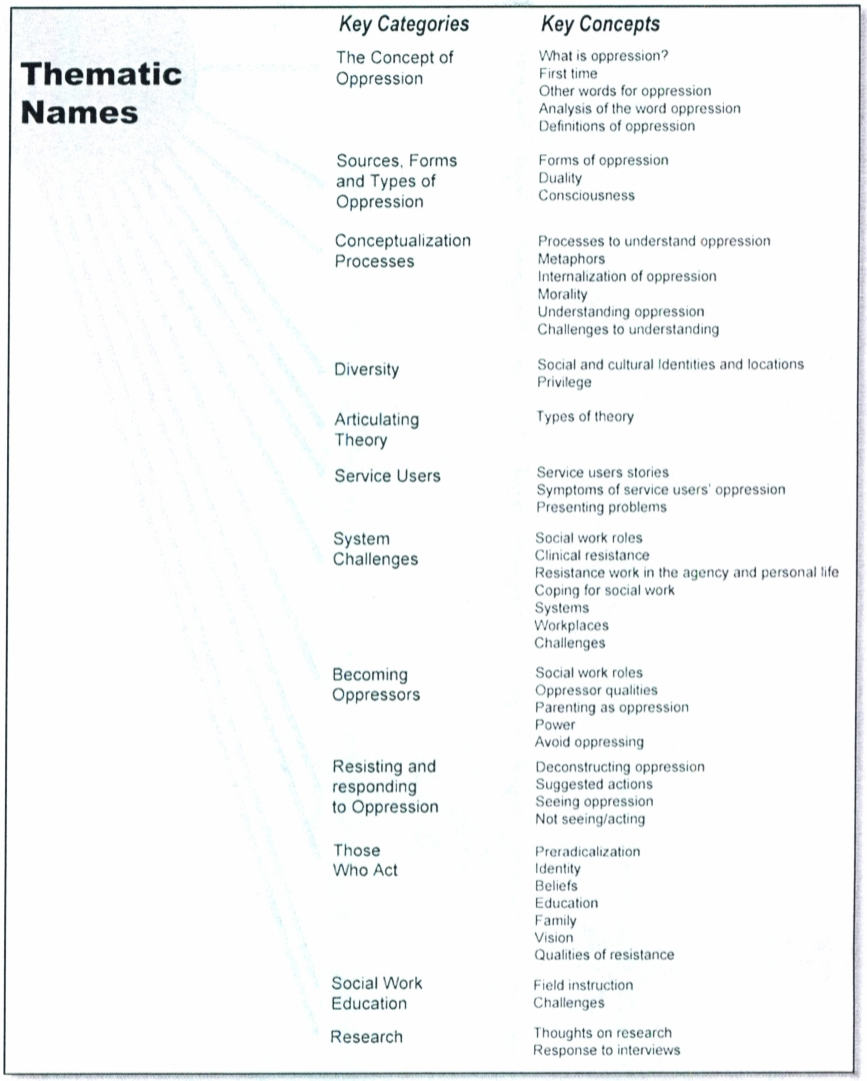

Figure 2. Thematic Names

The research findings were thus informed by these thematic units of meaning born in the respondents' constructions. I then used Atlas.ti software, a computer software program, to assist in the data analysis (Muhr, 1997). This program seemed most fitting for my research as it simplified the process of analyzing and coding data units from the interviews. Padgett (2008) advocates the use of software as "better suited to grounded theory as opposed other analytical approaches… to code, sort, create, reformat, and print reconstituted files with ease" (p.166).

Data Analysis Evaluation

Earlier, I highlighted Pidgeon's (1996) suggestions for alternative criteria that can be used for evaluating qualitative grounded theory research including that the research findings and analysis should: a) fit; b) be recognizable and of relevance to those studied; c) be trustworthy; d) have an established audit trail; e) be transferable to other settings; and f) have research reflexivity built into the process. Similarly, Padgett (2008) recommends a consideration of: "credibility- the degree of fit between respondents' views and the researcher's descriptions and interpretations" (p.181); "confirmability -the demonstration that the study's findings were not imagined or concocted, but rather firmly linked to the data" (p.181.); member checking; peer debriefing and support; and triangulation (i.e., multiple data collection methods).

Credibility. When considering credibility (or good fit), it is important to ask whether the research results "resonate with the experiences of the participants...do they ring true?"(Ristock & Pennell,1996, p. 49). I found that not only did the research results ring true for me, in terms of my life, social work practice, and field instruction experiences, but

there were also commonalities across respondents in terms of major themes, issues, experiences, and challenges. Rubin and Babbie (1997) argue credibility is supported, as in this study's research findings, when, "core concepts occur across a variety of cases and settings" (p. 280).

Member checking. Regular member checking during the interviews was performed to ensure accuracy and precision about my understandings and interpretations of what I thought I heard from the participants. Participants were also given the opportunity to review and change their transcripts if what they said made them uncomfortable or had been misinterpreted. Only two field instructors asked to review the transcripts and only minor suggestions were made by one of the participants specifically related to the transcriber having difficulty understanding the interviewee's accent. Participants also have the opportunity to receive a copy of these dissertation findings. In addition, peer support and review was an integral part of my own process of thinking about and reflecting upon the research process, data analysis, and findings. This was demonstrated in the pilot interviews as well as my decision to request regular feedback about process, data collection and analysis, and results from five of my academic peers and my thesis committee.

Reflexivity. Evidence of reflexivity was demonstrated by my choice to complete a researcher reflexive and methodological journal. In this thesis, when appropriate, I used personal and professional excerpts and quotations from my own journal, written assignment, and demographic form to illustrate major themes, analyze my thinking, decisions, and conceptualization processes, and reflect upon and attempt to be transparent about who I am as socially situated researcher.

Reliability. Reliability is most closely related to the concept of consistency (i.e., can multiple measures produce similar results) (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2002). Qualitative methodology emphasizes the generation of thick data from multiple sources to better capture and understand meaning and meaning-making. In this research study, the use of multiple data collection methods (i.e., triangulation) including personal reflexive and methodological journal notes and memos, interview transcripts, demographic information, and written oppression examples resulted in rich data from which similar and counter patterns emerged to shed light on the conceptualization of oppression in social work, both personally and professionally. In terms of transferability of this study's findings to other groups and future research, this study opens up a dialogue about how social workers analyze, interpret, and apply theoretical frameworks, not only in their professional practices, but in their daily lives. In other words, the findings should deepen our understanding and knowledge about how theory looks "on the ground" from the view of these particular field instructors. In this study, there is an assumption that rich data, triangulation, common patterns, and significant themes increase transferability of the findings to other research studies, sample populations, and settings.

Confirmability. In terms of confirmability and this research design, the researcher was responsible for illustrating that the research was done in a systematic, precise, and disciplined way. This final dissertation report clearly outlines, in detail, all steps taken in the research process. This is supported by careful journal documentation of the data collection and analysis process, including all aspects of planning, reflecting, and thinking about the research study. A clear audit trail of documented evidence is intended to further inform the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The Human Subjects Ethical Review Protocol which was accepted by Memorial University of Newfoundland and the University of British Columbia- Okanagan is attached in appendix 7. Also attached to this thesis are appendices 1, 2, 3, and 8 which include the Invitation to Participate, Informed Consent, Information for Participants, and Continuing Ethics Approval forms. All potential participants were asked to read the Information for Participants form prior to reading and signing the Informed Consent form. Both of these forms clearly outlined the research process, what was expected of participants, and discussed ethical considerations including confidentiality, information sharing, data collection, expected results, and risks. These issues were again addressed and discussed with each potential participant before he or she signed the consent form. Participants were informed that although direct quotes may appear in the final dissertation report, their names would not appear, and only non-identifying information would be used. Specifically, special care was taken to change identifying interview information and quotations to ensure that the participants would not be identified.

Because of the type of snowball, convenience sampling methods, the small number of interviews, and the geographical and employment nature of this community, I worried that it might be difficult to guarantee anonymity. Indeed, participants who referred other social workers for the research project might have been aware of who was being interviewed and may have discussed the interviews, research process, or results with other known participants. However, I ensured that anyone involved in this research project including academic colleagues, thesis committee members, thesis supervisor, and interview transcriber were not informed of anyone's identity. In addition, participants were invited to

use a pseudonym or an identification number throughout the research process. As well, raw data was stored in a locked cabinet (which could only be accessed by me) and identifying and non-identifying information were kept in separate locked drawers.

In terms of risk, no material or physical risks to participants were anticipated. However, the nature of the questions about oppression, particularly about experiencing or witnessing oppression may have caused some emotional, psychological, and/ or social discomfort. Every effort was made to offer support throughout the interview and the research project to any individuals who were feeling discomfort. This was accomplished by offering personal emotional support, and if necessary, referral to community resources. Participants were also given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts and change things with which they were uncomfortable. As researcher, I stressed to participants that my role was not to judge what they think, feel, or do, but to try to understand, through a mutually collaborative dialogue, how they make-meaning about the concept of oppression in their personal and professional lives. It is hoped that the benefits of discussing and exploring their conceptualizations of oppression in social work and in their lives outweighed any discomfort participants may have felt.

Conclusion

A rationale for a qualitative, exploratory research design based on grounded theory methodology and AOP and resistance principles has been provided and the research design has been clearly outlined. Issues related to sample, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations have been highlighted. Possible challenges and limitations to this particular research design and methodology were also considered.

Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion

In the next three chapters, the research findings from this study are presented. These chapters also include analysis and discussion of the findings. Congruent with grounded theory, the findings are continually grounded in the current literature. The following discussion and analysis are based on the previously mentioned thematic categories which emerged from the data including: the concept of oppression; sources, forms, and types of oppression; conceptualization processes; diversity; service users; articulating theory; system challenges; becoming oppressors; resisting and responding to oppression; those who act; social work education, and research (see appendix 9 and figure 2).

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion- An Analysis of the Concept of Oppression

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet"

(Shakespeare, as cited in Evans, 1974, p. 1068).

Chapter four presents this study's research findings related to an analysis of the concept of oppression, highlights discussion about these findings, and reviews relevant literature linked with the findings. This chapter's analysis of the concept of oppression includes a discussion of the relevance of oppression as a useful concept, the respondents' discourses about oppression, their thinking about the causes of oppression, and key aspects of the respondents' conceptualization processes for understanding oppression. Definitions of oppression and a conceptual sequence of how participants began to understand the concept of oppression are discussed. Respondents' identification of personal, cultural, and structural forms of oppression is also included. This chapter also features eight metaphors

study participants used to describe their conceptualizations of oppression and social work practice. In addition, the field instructors' processes of internalization of oppression, differences related to diversity issues, and how they described overcoming oppression are analyzed. Similarities and differences between male and female field instructors' experiences, reports, understandings, and articulations of oppression are also highlighted.

Oppression: A Useful and Relevant Concept?

As mentioned previously, there are instances when oppression is visible (e.g., discriminatory laws, policies, and practices). However, I agree with Hartmann (1981) that even when oppression is not observable, it is "real in its consequences" (p. 118). For me, the question in this research is less about whether or not oppression is true or real and more importantly about whether or not oppression as a concept is useful and relevant in our lives and social work practice? Does the word oppression resonate with social workers? Is it the best word to capture the conditions, stories, and experiences of privilege, domination, and resistance and can it motivate people to act to make social change? As Del Gandio (2008) states, "Truly powerful words capture people's imaginations and withstand the test of time - they are more historically meaningful and more politically powerful than mere slogans" (p. 136).

Respondents' Discourses of Oppression

> *I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I wasn't poor, I was needy. Then they told me it was self-defeating to think of myself as needy, I was deprived. Then they told me that deprived was a bad image, I was underprivileged. Then they told me that underprivileged was overused, I was disadvantaged. I still don't have a dime, but I sure have a great vocabulary* (anonymous).

As this quotation indicates, all too often we academics lose touch with how debates about semantics and language may or may not have any relevance to people's real experiences. The development of new ideas, constructions, and discourses about oppression is an important endeavour in social work. Furthermore, how we use language in our social work practice and personal lives is significant. Del Gandio (2008) highlights the creative power of language to shape our realities, perceptions, and actions:

> Change the rhetoric and you can change the communication. Change the communication and you change the experience. Change the experience and you can change a person's orientation to the world. Change that orientation and you can create conditions for profound social change (p. xiv).

Oppression as word. Broadly speaking, the first section of the interviews was structured to generate data regarding the individual's constructions, definitions, and understandings of the word oppression and to answer the interview question: "What comes to mind when you think about the word oppression"? I also included these probing questions: "What do you think, feel, see, or believe when you hear or see this word"? At a purely descriptive level, I was interested in exploring the respondents' thinking or cognitive understandings of the word oppression that is, simply exploring the word as object.

As I began to deconstruct the field instructors' cognitive understandings and discourses about the word oppression, three main object areas evolved: a) an analysis of the word oppression including the first time the respondents heard the word: b) their thoughts and writings related to definitions and a conceptual sequence for how they began to understand the word oppression; and c) how the respondents used their constructed definitions to make sense of the word in their personal and professional lives.

First time they heard the word. When asked to recall the first time that the respondents had heard the word oppression, several variations of the same theme came up with most respondents discussing university education as a key starting place to their understanding. The following comments were typical of the respondents' answers:

1. Those labels definitely weren't in my mind till probably university when people start labelling it oppression.
2. In a really thoughtful way I suppose not until university and I went to university late.

Others noted that a social work education at the Bachelor's level was central to their first becoming familiar with the word. A couple of respondents spoke to early teen experiences when they had been exposed to the word oppression in the feminist movement in the United States in the 1960's. Others spoke about cultural influences particularly literature and various media as important sources for reading, hearing, and starting to think about the word. Although is not evident at what age we develop the cognitive ability and understanding to apply broad conceptual frameworks to our experiences (Mezirow, 1990, 1991), two of the respondents were unable to recall any early consciousness of the word or concept of oppression:

1. I can't even imagine that because I can't remember but probably yes because I was a good speller and reader. But I just don't remember a consciousness about it.
2. Boy we're talking a long time ago, perhaps not explicitly but I do have a sense that I was sensitized enough to understand what that was all about. That at some point I would've put that together. But I can't remember when I first heard the word.

Sensed understanding before language. Rather than remembering hearing the word for the first time, some respondents described a more intuitive recognition of the word. Somehow, something about their experiences fit the word oppression in hindsight in

what one might even call a sensed understanding before language. This experience of understanding was described as an "unthought known" by the following participant:

> It's very likely a felt experience or a sensed experience. In other words, it's kind of what some people have described as being an unthought known. It's that known experience without necessarily a word or language. For example, if you had a father who's very physically abusive. This scares the heck out of you, you just learn to fear him, you learn to be very intuitive about his moods and those kinds of things. You don't say as a young child, "God I think my father is about to be oppressive here. If I don't do something I should I could… or I am going to get whacked".

Interestingly, respondents also expressed a retrospective understanding of oppression which emphasized a sense of specific language and meanings evolving over time. Del Gandio (2008) agrees with this finding. He states that:

> language is not static or locked. It's perpetually changing, with different words and meanings continuously emerging. Cracks and crevices are thus created, allowing for alternative ideas, insights, thoughts and actions. This allows us to outthink and overcome any and every language, no matter how ingrained or oppressive. But people must be motivated to do this. Just because they can does not mean they will (p. 108).

Definitions: A conceptual sequence for understanding oppression. The following are key definitions that the respondents developed, described, and explained through the interview process and in their written assignments. From the data findings, a conceptual sequence related to their understanding of personal, cultural, and structural levels and forms of oppression began to emerge (Sisneros, 2008; Thompson, 1997). First, the respondents discussed concrete external examples of oppression as part of their definitions. Thus, oppression was described as object. Through grounded theory analysis, a more complex picture began to emerge from the data. As the respondents continued speaking, I noticed a more internal subjective process in their constructions of definitions of oppression. The object had somehow become subject, part of who they were. In the

following sections, I will trace this conceptual sequence from external understanding to subtle manifestations of oppression to unconscious and unknown oppression.

External understanding. Oppression was initially defined by respondents as external forces acting upon human beings to constrain, stop, harm, or limit their opportunities. They identified broad external forces including culture, society, capitalism, patriarchy, race, and gender oppression. As this participant explains:

> I feel that it's like an external influence on someone's individual potential. That it's getting blocked. External could be from all levels. It could be an individual, like as far as a singular person whether being bullied or to a social kind of context or structure such as school, not getting the appropriate opportunities or lack of educational opportunities, lack of opportunities to have access to knowledge. Or it could be an overall social context like racial oppression or gender oppression.

From a cultural perspective, the "dream come true" what one might call freedom, was seen as having unlimited, increased, or equal opportunity. Here are some examples of this thinking:

1. I guess what comes to mind for me are just any kinds of forces, any kind of obstacles that inhibit people's growth and people's capacity to live the life they want to live, do the things they want to do, grow- just forces is not maybe the best word to describe it but things beyond themselves that limit them in ways that aren't particularly useful for them.

2. Being stopped. The expression of the human person is in some way thwarted, the full expression of the person. Be that through socialization of some sort or through structural oppression or even in families. Yeah that on all these different levels we sort of stop ourselves. And sometimes I guess when it has a NEGATIVE effect on the person, I guess that's when I would view it as oppression…Not everything that stops us is oppression but if someone is striving for something and it's within the context of normal human rights, what we would consider to be normal human rights and that is being thwarted by something, I would call that oppression….It's just people serving an interest that they otherwise would not serve for instance. And being expected to and being perhaps punished if they don't, being deprived of something if they don't.

These statements are significant as they are housed within a dominant discourse of "liberal" thinking about concepts such as opportunity, human agency, and normativity (Jeffery, 2005). This is problematic because the concept of normativity is not neutral and comes with a series of social, cultural, economic identities and locations about what is normal and what is not. Additionally, embedded in this language of opportunity are all the norms which underlie systems of domination (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, and racism). Del Gandio (2008) elaborates:

> There are no absolute social norms; we all enact these norms differently. This realization is obviously important, but does that safeguard us from oppressive social norms? Those who believe in monolithic norms, persecute those who break or challenge them. If you don't enact the norm correctly, you are marginalized berated and even physically assaulted and abused (p. 22).

In the interviews and written assignments, I noticed that respondents seemed trapped by traditional dominant Western narratives and discourses. Similarly, in my reflexive journal notes, I shared my frustration as a social work professor of trying to teach what could be called visionary or revolutionary concepts and alternative discourses while being trapped in all of the master's ideas, narratives, and language:

> While explaining my thesis to a friend, I found myself saying that I was interested in learning about what social workers did to fight oppression. My friend responded by saying that the word "fight" sounded aggressive to him. He found this ironic as my plan was to stop oppression…Audrey Lourdes says, "You can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools." So I'm trying to dismantle the master's house, assuming that dismantling is what we should be doing. Again that's language that's stuck. But I don't have the tools or the language or the conceptions in my brain to get me out of the master's tools. I have nothing but the master's tools. So even when I'm trying to explain this to students and trying to push them outside of that box, I'm using language that traps them, traps me. Yeah that's one of my biggest frustrations, how do we then linguistically get to a place where we're not supporting the same kind of structures. And I don't know how. That's one of my biggest frustrations.

Like the use of traditional liberal discourse mentioned earlier, respondents also unanimously referred to service users as clients. Because "the production, interpretation and reproduction of language are integral to social work (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 292), I was concerned that the respondents did not demonstrate or articulate any critical reflection or discussion of the implications of this language choice or how this discourse serves to maintain, perpetuate, and reproduce dominant- subordinate social worker- service user relationships.

Subtle manifestations of oppression. During the interviews, it became evident to me that respondents were struggling with quantifying, objectifying, or operationalizing their understandings of the concept of oppression. This respondent explained that:

> I think what I've learned about oppression as a human being is that it exists basically everywhere. I mean it's just everywhere. And sometimes it's worse than others and it's very difficult to pin down, very difficult to really clearly say, "That is oppression", on an objective basis. You can name it on a subjective basis.

Instead of selecting concrete examples of oppression, some respondents described feelings of oppression to explain their understandings of the word. The following respondent described not necessarily other words but other criteria that he or she would use to judge something as oppressive without using the word:

> You can say, be it oppression or not, that there are certain things that feel good in life and certain things that just don't. And so you can concentrate on that, which is what I do anyway. Kind of look what feels okay and what doesn't. Almost a spiritual concept in that it's based on higher values. That it's seeking as many religions do, sort of an objective reality, an objective set of parameters by which we are to live our lives, to govern our behavior. If certain things are right, certain things are wrong, there's good and evil and all that.

I found that, like the respondents' efforts to describe their understandings of oppression, even my analysis felt like it was shifting, sliding, moving, almost reconstituting, with each interview. This respondent also noticed how the term and word kept shifting, "Interesting term, how it's shifted all over hell's half acre in a way". This moveability and the notion of subjectivity moved my analysis from studying quantifiable objects to exploring much more subtle manifestations of oppression. The following examples represent a much more complex picture of what oppression means to these particular respondents at the personal level:

1. I just get a sense that it's so deep. I see oppression as something that's more subtle, that's occurring on a regular basis, that isn't necessarily over-planned but more built in. As we're talking I'm getting a clear definition on how I saw oppression or see oppression. I would be more tempted to define it as almost a side effect, not necessarily intended effect of a decision. I guess I'm a little more tuned in to sort of covert oppression as opposed to overt oppression. Oppression that people wouldn't label as it. If you said, "You're oppressing people there" – "Well no ah no that's not it, I'm just balancing the budget".

2. It would be a question of attitude and behaviors that would place barriers to equal opportunities for people. Well non-verbal behaviors where people through gesture or simply through the way in which they interact with people are giving off a message that would imply that the person has lesser value or importance to them. So I think much is conveyed really non-verbally to people. You'll hear probably there are some key words and things that people would perhaps use as people not being worth my time, these would be conversational kinds of things, just plain attitude that would be suggestive of oppressive or discriminatory kinds of values or beliefs. Those would be the things that one would be looking out for. I can't really generalize. It's specific to the situation.

Unconscious and unknown oppression. If an understanding of oppression can be an unthought known, it seems likely that an actual experience of oppression can be unknown and/or unconscious. The following respondent believed that for many people what we might see as oppression is unknown. In other words, when we are looking at and attempting to interpret someone else's experience, we run the risk of using our own class,

race, gender, and cultural parameters in concluding that someone else is oppressed. As this respondent noted:

> It gets fuzzy for me at this point. But my sense is that for sure some oppression is not known. The guy who's getting two bucks a day for his ten hour day in the sweatshop somewhere, I'm not sure if he or she would be tuned in to oppression. It might be more like, "Wow I get to do this work, and I get this money and I can"…so it might be a bit more gratitude at one level like, "Wow I get this opportunity, and I make two bucks a day instead of a buck".

Other words for oppression. Are there other words as powerful as oppression and do they have as much or more meaning than the word oppression? Other words for oppression that came up in the interviews and written assignments included discrimination, harmful environment, negative "isms", inequality, marginalization, patriarchy, poverty, power imbalance, power-over, unfairness, injustice, and sexism. Respondents also described the significance through their education, reading, and work experiences of learning and developing a new language - a politicized language- to describe their understandings, feelings, and their lived experiences of oppression. They highlighted the power of applying the right words or labels to name an experience or a feeling:

1. My BSW kind of politicized or gave me the political language to name what I was sensing. It gave me the language. It was like an "Aha" moment. Like I'd read these authors and I'd go, "YEAH! That's exactly what happened to me or that's exactly my sense of it" and it gave me the language to then articulate it, express it, or argue it. Before that, I didn't have the language. In a war of words I was weaponless. I just went, "Yeah it's wrong".

2. I was able to put a name to what I had experienced all of those years which before I never had and so what I was doing there was internalized oppression. Very empowering because then I knew that I could do something about it.

In addition, the following respondent identified the importance of having a shared conceptual framework and language:

> I started taking psychology and sociology and the concept of the patriarchal and structural oppression. And so I began to develop a framework for understanding my own personal experience. And not taking it personally. So being able to depersonalize it and seeing it in a much larger picture. I could understand it. And the beauty of the language is that it gives you a language in which you can frame it. Language is very empowering. And to have a language and a shared language that incorporates personal experience and gives you a way of understanding of that, that's life changing.

Summary

This section summarized respondents' discourses of oppression including their understandings of oppression, definitions of oppression, and a conceptual sequence for how they began to understand the concept of oppression. It seems that other words do come close to describing some of the same conditions of and experiences with oppression. However, to me, words like harmful environment seem to neutralize the analysis of power, privilege, and social discourses that identifies specific dominant groups whose interests are being served by these harmful environments. The environment is not neutrally harmful. Indeed, it is unequally harmful to specific groups. The harm is gendered, racialized, classist, ableist, and so on (Dominelli, 1988, 2002; hooks, 1994; Mullaly, 2007; Thompson, 2006). To me, oppression, as a word and concept, encapsulates the intersectionality and complexity of these relations of power, privilege, and dominance.

Causes of Oppression: Personal, Cultural, and Structural Forms of Oppression

Along with the respondents' definitions of oppression, it is also important to examine how these field instructors came to understand and describe the concept of oppression from within the context of their real lived experiences. In this study, I was interested in analyzing the respondents' discourse- "the ways that we make sense of and construct the world through language" (Hick, 2005, p. 44) - particularly the stories they

used to describe their theory, meaning-making, practices, and field instruction related to the concept of oppression. As Pozzuto et al (2005) propose:

> Theories of practice are manifestations of theories of action, though the theories of actions are often understated and unrecognized by the practitioner (see Schon, 1983). The theories of action tap into the deep stories underneath theories of practice, thus providing a coherence for the theories of practice and supporting a naturalness of the social world for the practitioner. Taken most broadly, these deep stories are what Foucault (1977) refers to as discourses or systematic ways of thinking and carving out reality (p. 30).

As a starting place to understanding respondents' deep stories about oppression, I was curious about what they thought were the causes of oppression. They responded in three explanatory categories: a) government policy, decision-making, and funding; b) unequal power relations; and c) poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth.

Government policy, decision-making, and funding. At cultural and structural levels, respondents argued that oppression is embedded in our current social, economic, and political environments and reflected in current government decision-making, funding, and policy trends. Respondents blamed government social policy and what was seen as neo-conservative thinking (Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; McLaughlin, 2005), decision-making, and funding over the last few years, stating:

1. I think that the policies for the provincial government's funding of health services are short-sighted, leaving many people in need of preventive measures out in the cold.

2. Certainly I've noticed a lot of change in social policy from what I might call the dark ages prior to depression or war but certainly social policies that differentiate between differences in people, differences in cultures, those kinds of things. And create an environment where again those who have the most commonalities are the ones that call the shots. And are insensitive to those who are off on tangents from those commonalities. I was talking about strategies so social policy, so it's institutionalized and that trickles right down into agencies and what not…It still probably suffers particularly when it comes to finances. I think there are a lot of inequalities and prejudices and discriminations in terms of who needs and who

> doesn't and who qualifies and all that kind of stuff....Just the barriers that are put in place to sort of hold back people who have certain challenges.

The following comments reflect the respondents' concerns about the current provincial Liberal government and the political, social, and economic climate of British Columbia:

1. The system here right now in BC. They oppress more the poor people because some people have defrauded but really if you look at it the rich people they defraud more massively but because they are rich, they cannot see it or they cover it up or they have a good lawyer.

2. I see some of the same kind of professional paternalism going on in BC now. Today - very open - homeless people sleeping on sidewalks and in storefront doorways. I think Gordon Campbell has a major attitude problem and should experience what he inflicts on his fellow humans before he makes up his mind about policies. I think "the system" is the oppressor, favoring the wealthy "strong" citizens.

Culturally, respondents also believed that Canadian society is becoming increasingly oppressive. As one field instructor suggested:

> I've learned that it's pretty well engrained and fairly endemic probably in my experience I think society in general is becoming increasingly oppressive at this point as opposed to less so that would be a trend that I've been seeing and experienced...That's been a political choice and decision that's been made as we've moved more and more toward the right politically. So that has changed the economics and changed our policies and the result of that I think is the kind of social conditions and disparities we're beginning to see and then the inequities that we see. The key is that this creates social disparity and I think that it becomes institutionally entrenched and becomes increasingly difficult for people and professions like social work that really want to work toward a more just kind of a society.

Unequal power relations. An understanding of power and the operations of power in society also seemed central to the respondents' understandings of oppression. Field instructors stated that an understanding of the concept of oppression was impossible without consideration of the power structures in our society and how power operates on us individually, in groups, and in our communities. This respondent explains:

> There are so many aspects to the hierarchal organization of responsibility and power that in the absence of the power structure, I'm not sure that we could conceptualize oppression. The assumption that I'm making is that oppression involves either a conscious or unconscious application of power in a subtle way which is either difficult for people to address directly or difficult for people to deal with in a social environment because it has repercussions for the actual structural environment that we work in or that we study in or that we're kind of engaged in social work. The concept of oppression can't be really verbalized without a backdrop of what the context of power is or what the construction of power is for that particular individual.

At the personal level, examples of being silenced, denied power, or restrained were also given to demonstrate unequal power relations:

1. Oppression occurs in situations where one party is unable or unwilling or incapacitated to defend themselves.

2. As well, I look at how this power differential is one example of how the subordination and inferiorization plays out in how women are socialized in our society. Sexual violence, such as rape, is one example of how men control women. The act itself is an example of male aggression and patriarchy.

Structurally, the nature of hierarchical systems and the way power is embedded unequally within Western culture were also noted:

> It exists within a hierarchal arrangement in our culture, in our academic culture, in our work culture especially in a health care setting which I'm in. It becomes so much a part of the backdrop of our culture that we don't identify. We tend to take it for granted, we tend to make assumptions that in certain systems a hierarchy is required for either efficiency or for accuracy or the medical system is probably a good example. That we accept this backdrop of oppression because we tend to take for granted that is the only way the system can run or that's the only way the system can exist.

Poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth. Participants identified poverty as a primary symptom of oppression. Poverty and classism were mentioned frequently as concrete examples of external forces which differentially harm certain groups of people. The field instructors also sometimes linked the country's economic health with an increase of oppressive policies. The following statement reflects one respondent's belief that if a

country's economic situation is bleak, the disparity between the rich and the poor becomes larger:

> It tends to do with how we distribute our wealth too. So we've seen a change in the distribution of wealth. Then we have policies that have encouraged and actually perpetuate and created that distribution of wealth that essentially put the majority of the wealth into the top quintile of the population. I think there's a strong link between the economics of the society and the economic health of a society and the degree of oppression that we see within society. So I think there's clearly a relationship there. And the more economically challenged the society is, the more likely we're to see oppressive kinds of behaviors and policies as well, social policies. That seems to be my experience. Economically if a country or whatever is not doing as well then the attitudes or policies may change to become more oppressive. And I'm wondering the chicken and egg argument. Is it the attitude that changes first and then the economics or the economics and then the attitudes?

If this is true, given the wealth of the Western world, a valid question arises as to why, even in times of prosperity, we still have huge numbers of people who are hungry and homeless in countries such as Canada? Indeed, McMullin (2004) explains that people are poor, not because a country or nation is poor but because, "opportunities are distributed differentially in society on the basis of things such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race" (p. 96). One respondent identified a contradiction between the government discourse of economic woe related to funding cuts to social services and the wealth of multi-national corporations:

> Yes, in terms of government funding we've certainly seen significant cuts but we know that the multi-national corporations are making millions and billions of profit. So they're not economically unhealthy. So in a era of a lot of riches, we see this cutting of social services. And so I wonder if it's an attitude or perception of economic ill health versus reality?

Respondents also saw oppression as a reflection of our current socio-political and economic realities. They argued that capitalism and its embedded values and beliefs advantage some groups over others and this structural system of advantage creates the conditions that we describe as oppression:

1. Capitalism is good because everybody gets a hunk of the pie and if you want a big hunk you work harder, you can have the bigger hunk versus if you don't want the big hunk, you don't have to. At another level, WOW does it justify a lot of kinds of behaviour that I don't think are very moral or very good if you start to look in the big picture. That's what my generation or at least a lot of us believed I mean it was sort of an automatic. It was sort of expected maybe.

2. I think that whole idea of a winner and a loser supports everything I don't like about capitalism and Western thinking. Black and white binary thinking. And yet I am so competitive in nature.

Similarly, one respondent linked unequal distribution of wealth with global exploitation:

> Is it okay that I save a buck on an item and somebody else in a third world country now gets a dollar a day instead of a dollar fifty a day?...When I buy my stuff at Costco I don't plan on subverting or oppressing the population of some small sweat shop in China somewhere. But in fact am I contributing to that and do I need to be aware? Now one can get crazy right?

Summary

This section reviewed what these field instructors defined as the causes of oppression and what they identified as personal, cultural, and structural forms of oppression. Government policy, decision-making and funding; unequal power relations and poverty; and the unequal distribution of wealth within capitalism and the global context were seen as the main causes of oppression in our society. In addition, gender and class inequities were also identified as contributory factors.

Conceptualization: Meaning-Making Processes

While the last two sections focused on an intellectual analysis of the word oppression as object, a conceptual sequence for beginning to understand the concept of oppression, the causes of oppression, and a description of oppression as subjectivity, the following section analyzes the stories and narratives the respondents' used to describe and explain their key processes of meaning-making about the concept of oppression in their

professional and personal lives, conceptualizations about truth, and the use of eight metaphors- pressure, earth, quest, nature of society, seeing, building, dancing, and water- to describe conceptualizations of oppression and social work practice. The stories they told about oppression and how they told them are significant (Freire, 1993). These stories served to situate the individual respondents more deeply into their particular social, economic, and cultural locations. As well, similarities and differences related to diversity issues and experiences of being "other" become clear. In addition, the respondents discuss the processes of the internalization of oppression and how it can be overcome.

Key processes of meaning-making about the concept of oppression. One field instructor explained conceptualization, "as a way of trying to interpret reality". This recognition of constructed reality represented a deeper knowing. Another respondent stressed the challenges and complexity of trying to articulate her or his conceptualization process:

> As a result of our conversation, trying to articulate structures that go on in my mind without necessarily my conscious awareness, just the way that I think the world view that I have, the philosophies and theories that are affecting that, I would probably underscore that it's always open to change. The challenge to our thinking is can we expose structures that may not even exist if they're only made up in our minds anyway? Likewise for everybody that we're working with to try and honor that experience by conceptualizing and then verbalizing a description of that experience, is always risky. We always run the risk of not being accurate to the experience or not being loyal to the experience and thus subtlely changing the interpretation of the experience through our lens, through our particular way of verbalizing and narrating it…I realize working in a so-called scientific system that it is hard enough to nail down a biological process that's reliable, let alone nail down a dynamic constructed way of thinking process that is probably ever changing and probably open to influence.

Similarly, this respondent explained his or her use of a social constructivist approach to explain his or her conceptualization or meaning-making process:

> Although I've accepted it in my head the reality of power structures and oppression, I come very much from a constructivist point of view in terms of looking at how we make meaning…It's one of the things that I find both most exciting and most disturbing about a constructiveness or narrative approach. That we are making it up as we go along and that approach, holds the power for equally great oppression, as much as the overt structures that we might protest in our life. There's an initial excitement to embracing that constructivist' viewpoint. The idea that we're all kind of making it up as we go along and that everybody's experience is unique and deserves to be treated uniquely.

Conceptualizations about truth. In terms of the respondents' conceptualizations, I wanted to find out if there was something about the concept and language of oppression that captured reality- that rang true- for this particular group of field instructors. As I listened to the interviews, it struck me that we can never really get at reality, at truth, as an external object. To these respondents, truth in all of its complexity was seen as a subjective internal construct. One respondent summarized this way of thinking about truth:

> The concept or the idea of postmodern means that there isn't one single truth that should pervade or should kind of dominate over any other possible truth. I'm aware that even though I have lots of things to say, I'm not invested in the ultimate truth of what I say. That I know that part of it is made up.

The following comment outlines truth in clinical practice as explained by one respondent:

> As a professional working with the individual, I don't define truth. The client defines the truth. I mean what's truth for them is really their process, their experience – that's truth. I can hear their story. I never actually know what their experience is. I can hear their story of that experience but ultimately their experience is truth. Doesn't matter about what it is, if their experience is that, that is truth for them. And so ultimately oppression's truth or whatever is truth then it comes down to that individual's experience. If your experience is your experience, that's your knowledge, your understanding, that is your truth.

Of course, this explanation negates the possibility that a person could be inaccurate, missing key information, or be irrational. However, from this, what I realized is that all we can ever access in ourselves and others is simply our stories and memories about what we think happened. However, the content of our memories and way we story *is* significant.

Mensinga (2009) suggests that stories illustrate how people, "make meaning out of and navigate their way through the myriad of personal, social and professional agendas to make decisions" (p. 193).

Thus, given the subjective contextual nature of people's stories, understanding is a more meaningful concept in this research study than truth. As Mensinga (2009) explains:

> life stories are understood to be constructs used subjectively by people to provide a 'narrative truth' that accounts for culture, person and change. As such, the emphasis is on exploring meaning rather than discovering the truth (pp. 195-6).

However, although the research participants' stories can provide us with a much richer and deeper understanding of how they think, feel, and conceive of oppression, their social work practices, field instruction, and personal choices, researchers need to be cautious when considering and interpreting participants' stories. Reissman (2001) warns that stories: should not be taken at face value; should be understood as "situated utterances" (p. 81); shine light only on certain aspects of identity; are open to subjective interpretation; and expose an analysis of the relationship between social agendas and individual agency.

Meaning-making through metaphor. As I was conducting the interviews, I remarked in my journal notes, that, "if something is difficult to grasp, we seem to use metaphors to explain or understand it". One of the respondents also discussed service users using descriptive or metaphorical terms to explain their lived experience:

> Even if a client says, "Growing up it was brutal in my family". Or if a client says to me, "Everywhere I go I just get trampled" or, "People use me like a doormat". Or there's usually metaphorical ways in which people can describe being treated badly.

Consequently, I started to become interested in the idea of the use of metaphor as part of a conceptualization process to more vividly describe and understand the concept of oppression. Bernard and Blair (1989) define metaphor as, "a figure of speech in which a

word or phrase is used to describe something in a way that does not fit it in reality, as a method of suggesting likeness" (p. 656). Furthermore, the metaphor, "can assist in making an experience more understandable-an experience which cannot always be captured and represented by formalized means" (Osmond & O'Connor, 2004, p. 683). In the following section, I have grouped the respondents' choices of metaphor into eight broad categories- pressure, earth, quest, nature of society, seeing, building, dancing, and water- that seem to represent significant areas of agreement and understanding about the conceptualization of oppression and social work practice (figure 3 below). Some of these metaphors relate directly to individual processes of conceptualization about oppression and their personal experiences with oppression and others apply more to the respondents' descriptions of their social work practice with service users.

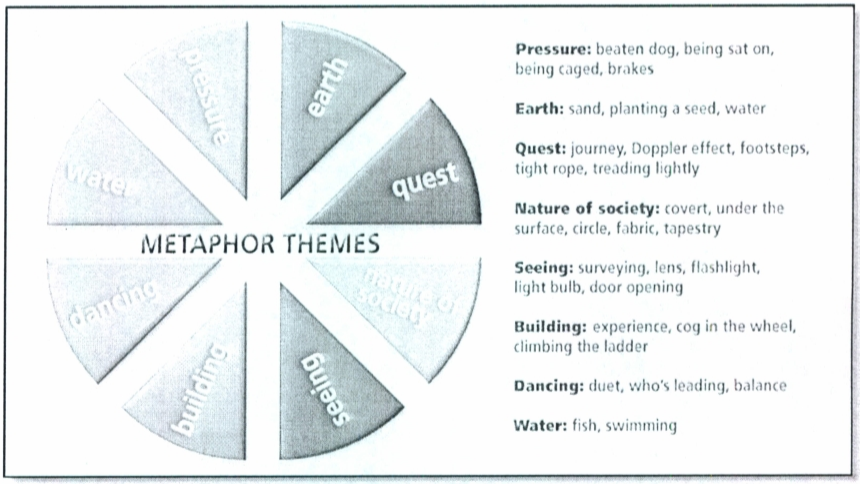

Figure 3. Metaphor Themes: Conceptualizations of Oppression and Social Work Practice

Pressure. The first general metaphor theme involved respondents' descriptions of visual images of someone or something pressing, stopping, restricting, harming, or physically exerting pressure (sometimes violently) on another subject:

1. An image comes to mind - one of a dog who has just been scolded or beaten, cowering and creeping away with her tail between her legs.

2. The visual image comes to me of someone is sitting on you. That very physical very simple concrete image if you've ever been bullied by someone, if you've ever been sat on or held down. I mean that to me is a very concrete image of being oppressed.

Earth. The second broad theme involved respondents' metaphors related to earth images such as sand, soil, planting, tilling soil, fertilizing, agriculture, and growth:

1. We play a part, we plant a seed. Because we are planting seeds that in whatever way they will grow and they'll shape how that person thinks…It's like sand in your hand, it kind of slips through your fingers. You try to nail it down, make it solid, so you can say, "Okay that's oppression". Yeah well for some people it is. For many people it is. For the vast majority of people it is. But there will be one or two for whom they say, "No, it's not".

2. I have a core belief that when clients come in and walk out, they hopefully will walk out with at least seeds to help grow those tools or strategies that will help them deal with their oppressions and things like that.

Quest. The third group of the respondents' metaphors described traditional quest, journey, travel, and movement images:

1. It's the classic QUEST kind of story. In terms of taking our journey and facing our challenges and that's one of our biggest challenges and I think as we overcome it and have our victories with it, we become stronger and better people I guess. I look at things in terms of a journey.

2. There is something known in physics as the Doppler Effect. And the Doppler Effect is that as something is approaching, it sounds different than when it's moving away from you. So for instance, as a train's coming you can hear it coming and then as it's going away from you, it has a different sound. So he uses this Doppler Effect and says, "I want to hear your life as it sounded as it was approaching you. And I want to know what that was like. I don't want to just see it now as I am seeing it, but as it is now receding from you with all the grief and the tragedy and the lost expectations". How I understood that was that what he was seeing was somebody

who has been very defeated by life and what he wanted to know was what was their life like before that happened and how did they understand that. And I wanted to understand that too.

A metaphor that kept coming up in terms of movement particularly around field instructors who had personally experienced oppression was an image of footsteps -our walk and how we move- and the need to tread lightly. In this way, our journey as other is very different from the dominant group's lived experiences. This brings to mind the environmental slogan of "walk carefully and leave a small footprint". These images whether they are sand, planting a seed, a journey, or treading lightly are very symbolic. There is a sense that as oppressed peoples, we have little choice but to tread lightly. The earth is not ours to leave large footprints on. We are not allowed to occupy space in the same way as the dominant group (Burstow, 1992).

Nature of society. There was a fourth group of metaphors related to the cultural and structural nature of oppressive societies and the hidden aspects, the invisible characteristics of what is seen as covert oppression. These metaphors referred to webs, tapestries, fabrics, and circles:

1. It's like a huge circle, it just depends where you punctuate it, where you're going to start with an assumption of equality or an assumption of access, opportunity, those kind of things are affected. You can look at it before or after one individual's experience but I would see it on a continuum almost a circular continuum. The concept itself doesn't exist in a vacuum.

2. I assume for example that we're all racist, we're all sexist, we're all homophobic, because I think those are just parts. I think of society like a woven carpet with tons of threads in it, they're just threads that we weave our life that you can't always sort out. A client that comes to me I see very much, bell hooks talks about it, a matrix of oppression. And that's what I see. I almost see a tapestry. A person like a tapestry that is kind of woven in and out of their life are all these experiences of oppression and maybe oppressiveness. They have the capacity to be oppressive. I think we have choices, we make individual choices depending on our own resiliency and whatever

but…yeah so I can't ever see a client without seeing that tapestry. That's my lens and I can't assess without it, it filters through everything I do.

Seeing. The fifth group of metaphors involved people describing strategies and responses to oppression in their social work practice. Central to these images was the dominant metaphor of seeing: watching; witnessing; vision; lenses; and helping others to see. One could link these vision words to the ideas of enlightenment or perhaps consciousness-raising:

1. It's where you find that little flashlight…It's what direction is the light as far as what direction you point the light. I mean light usually means something in form of life, or strength or through to darkness or whatever. I mean people generally have attachments to light that are generally positive and so then you are able to go with that as far as in a positive direction, "Do you want to start making the changes"? They gotta hold the flashlight, they gotta point the light otherwise it doesn't work. So I never hold the light. I never point the light. I might give a hint to say, "Hey try over there". Whether they follow me or not is whether or not you're really successful.

2. I use several images too. And one of the things I talk about is a lens to look at things, the idea of the microscope looking at something or someone but also turning around for a mirror looking at yourself. So interesting kind of these images connected.

3. Most clients really grasp on to this. Really go, "What, you mean there's other people that have felt this, what do you mean it's not my fault, I'm not crazy" and you can see the power in them when they do that when that light bulb goes off and they make that connection. So I have found that in practice, it seems to be this practice approach is supported by the clients' feedback about it. Like an opening. You can use a lot of different images. Like a door opening that they can step through or not, a light bulb going off that they continue to explore or not.

Building. The sixth group of metaphors that came up in this study was building metaphors: the idea of layering, adding on, progression, and construction. Social work is conceived, so to speak, as laying bricks:

1. If a client comes and sees you and doesn't change, I don't think you're not being effective necessarily. Whatever that is they're building on their experience within it. They come and see you and they're able to talk and do this and that. And if they go

back to the abuser, they go back to the abuser. I wouldn't say you've been ineffective because they've gone back. But I mean you might've put that next cog in the wheel so the next time it works out.

2. My analogy is or my metaphor is that someone is standing in the muck and through the therapeutic helping process they get to the first rung of the ladder. Their feet are dry now they're not standing in the muck, "Holy smokes, is this much better. Now I realize that there's rung 2, 3, and 4 that you know you could get to". I mean hey what you're able to do is incredible. So but hey man just being out of the muck is so much better and drier. They don't even care about rung 2, 3, and 4. So who am I to impose upon them rung 2, 3 and 4.

Dancing. The seventh metaphor group represented social work practice as dancing with service users. As this respondent stated:

> I would characterize it as a dance. If it wasn't real and I wasn't experiencing my personal tweaks, that would be an interesting experience to counsel people without my own values. Without that little dance, duet, that I'm doing between the client and myself cause we're kind of leading the dance.

Water. Finally, the following water metaphor was used to describe one respondent's understanding of cultural and structural levels of oppression:

> I think of it like a fish swimming in water. You don't really know that you are swimming in polluted water until you start getting sick and you know that it's just there, it's just all around you.

In other words, the fish swims every day in this water but may be completely unaware that the water is polluted or that there is air and sky above the water or that there is a world and universe beyond the water. All the fish knows is that this is home and this feels like normal. Like the polluted water, respondents spoke about how the structures of oppression remain invisible or become invisible or are made invisible overtime. Like the fish, we can not, will not, or are unable to choose to see what is surrounding us. Field instructors offered these comments to explain the invisibility of oppression:

1. Society as a whole comes to accept this disparity. How people learn to overlook what is around them, and over time - no longer question.

2. I also realize how culturally ingrained and pervasive oppressive behaviours and characteristics are and how impotent people often feel (including me). Also, increasingly aware of the apathy (if correct word) I and many of those around me experience. Me and others around me – mostly would say the poverty and despair we see on the streets is an assault to the sensibilities of many, if not most people, and should not be tolerated, yet we do tolerate it.

3. Because the oppressive forces if they were really successful in silencing me, I wouldn't even think it. And that's what we have. We have so many people who aren't even aware and some people of course who argue that it's not even real. That there's no such thing as oppression, there's no such thing as patriarchy but to me it's real. And for other people not to see it, means to me that oppression has been successful. Silencing their thinking and their brain and their way of kind of looking at the world.

Del Gandio (2008) offers an explanation for this invisibility:

> We commonly forget that we ourselves create our realities. This forgetfulness directly contributes to social oppression, marginalization and the pressure to conform….Most people just don't consider how the process works. We do not sufficiently think through the situation. Most people just accept never question their culture and society. This is partially due to mental laziness. But it mostly occurs because the creative /rhetorical process hides itself. Once a social norm has been created, it appears as if it's always been there (p. 22).

Processes of internalization. Most respondents spoke about another key conceptualization process in their lives, what they called the internalization of oppression. This next section looks at the respondents' definitions of internalization and the processes they described that created internalization. Here is one explanation from a field instructor about his or her understanding of the process of internalization:

> It's quite easy to take in characteristics or qualities and aspects of other people around us, particularly when we are young and very easily influenced by and need these people. There is a lot of taking in and when it's done young and it's done without critical filters and it's done without developmental perspectives you have later on in life, those are the things that I find interesting in terms of working with people of what they hold on and carry even when they remove themselves and hopefully move into other healthier environments. But I think we also absorb and take in the larger things like social structures, and racism, values, and beliefs of the cultures that we live in that go without challenge without really even knowing. I

> think of it as the impact it has, or what gets internalized, taken in from environments that don't facilitate people's healthy growth…The way I think about it is that we internalize a good deal of our environment. We internalize a good deal of the important relationships we have. We internalize a good deal of our parents and this happens both consciously and unconsciously and we internalize people that we identify with and wish to be like…that we enact in our relationships now. So some aspects of those kinds of stories are within me.

Consistent with the literature, the idea of an unconscious taking in of oppressive ideas, beliefs, attitudes, stories, social norms, and patterns of behaviour was repeated by more than one respondent (Kellner, 2009; McIntosh, 2007; Mullaly, 2010). This finding is supported by Bartky (1988) who theorizes that "something is 'internalized' when it gets incorporated into the structure of the self" (p. 77). Respondents added that:

1. I think of structures, systems that define the norms for people and often most of the time it's quite subtle. When I say internalized I mean you're just socialized into that. So whether you're on the receiving end that is part of the oppression for other people, I think a lot of it is there's a lack of consciousness on both sides.

2. The old transactional analysis idea where if you're taught socialized in a certain way and you internalize those beliefs but they don't rationally and logically apply to your present situation but you're still living with them and still guided by them then those in some ways can be oppressive if you let them be.

Negative internalization. Field instructors hypothesized that the process of negative internalization results in people blocking themselves from opportunity and the full expression of their human potential. As one field instructor explained:

> Internal oppression which to a certain extent is almost worst, meaning those external oppressions have now changed the individual to the point that they oppress themselves. I think those are what I mean as far as the internal oppression. Cause they're technically then oppressing themselves and giving themselves lack of opportunity cause they're blocking their own potential by not seeing it due to the external oppression, starting that process. It depends on the person but ultimately it's probably just a perpetuating force of oppression that has caused them to think that way. Whether they can see it or not, whether it's a lack of knowledge, or whether that's just because of the continued trauma over the chronic timeframe has put them in that frame of mind.

Internalization of scripts. Moreover, respondents spoke about lifelong messages and beliefs about self- their negative broken records - which resulted from the internalization of oppression. According to Burstow (1992), these messages, broken records, or "scripts are a function of oppression and our own internalization of these" (p. 56). One respondent maintained that this internalization process and related scripts change our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours about self and others:

> When the oppressed have come to believe whether they are aware of that or not but believe what the oppressed have been telling them through either verbal or non-verbal messages. And so that becomes part of their belief system.

Raheim (2002) explains this internalization process:

> These mechanisms of oppression may result in internalized oppression, whereby target-group members come to believe the prevailing stereotypes and negative valuations of themselves (Frye,2001)…This internalized oppression may lead to hopelessness and further disempowerment, disconnecting them from the knowledge of their strengths, capacities, and internal resources (p. 95).

Ironically, in order for this process of internalization of negative messages to be successful, it seems that you have to convince people that they have free will, agency, and that their present life circumstances and reactions are somehow their fault. The dominant discourse and social assumption is that if it was not their fault, they would not "choose" to be in their current position. This assumption is demonstrated in social work when conventional theorists focus on individual internal pathology and ignore cultural and structural impediments thereby "blaming the victim" (Mullaly, 2007). Accordingly, Bartky (1988) maintains that:

> One of the ways in which oppressive systems are particularly effective is by training us to police ourselves, to accept and actively apply within our own personal spheres the social norms of invalidation and discrimination (p. 80).

As one respondent expressed:

> I do remember believing it was my fault ... my fault for sneaking out; my fault for accepting the drinks and getting drunk. I remember feeling so guilty for these behaviours leading up to the rape, for enjoying the first kiss and feeling so special that such a handsome, older man would want to be with me, and then for not being able to stop the progression of events. With these thoughts and feelings, it took me a long time to even call this experience a rape. This whole experience was my fault. And with this belief, I felt incredibly dirty, guilty and full of shame. I also felt intimidated, fearful and betrayed - betrayed that another human being hurt me on so many levels and took something so precious away from me.

Summary

It is evident that a cognitive and metaphorical understanding of oppression was significant to the respondents' conceptualization processes. In addition, eight categories of metaphor themes- pressure, earth, quest, nature of society, seeing, building, dancing, and water- were highlighted. This section also analyzed key aspects of the respondents' conceptualization processes, explored the significance of storytelling as a means of constructing reality, identified metaphors respondents used to describe their understandings of the concept of oppression, and discussed the processes of internalization of oppression.

Treading Lightly: The Experience of Otherness

The following section explores understandings of oppression and the internalization of oppression related to diversity issues.

On being "other". As I listened to the field instructors' stories, it became clear to me that the capacity for resistance seems linked to privilege, power, gender, race, and socio-economic status. Indeed, respondents who spoke from the social position of "other" identified differential responses to oppression. One respondent who identified as other had this to say:

> This explains why Native people in communities are experiencing what they are and the whole reserve system. I took that personally as a personal shame when people were saying, "Oh they're dirty and their reserves are nothing but all these broken down cars and all they do is drink" and all of that. I took that as a personal affront basically and internalized that shame. I had internalized all of those messages. Otherwise why would I have felt ashamed of being Native? My mother telling us you're not Indians and having her own internalized oppression being played out, by putting down Native people herself which she also had that parentage....I have an assumption though or an understanding I choose to call it, that their addiction where they're at today is linked to that whole legacy that Aboriginal people have experienced. And I believe that it's passed down, that internalized oppression, that shame is passed down.

The following field instructor speaks about the lasting effects of an internalized sense of shame and blame from the after effects of sexual assault:

> To this day, I still get angry thinking about this and the impact it has had on my life. Despite this, I have come to a place where I no longer believe this situation was my fault and with this, my shame and guilt have lessened. However, this experience has had a life-long impact that I will continue to evolve from. Not only has it influenced how I relate to and interact with men, but it left a sort of legacy of victimization. Believing that not all men will hurt me continues to be something I work at. There are times in my life, when I recognize that I fall into feeling like a victim - for instance, bringing this scenario to the forefront of my mind elicits feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness - I continue to work towards eradicating this subconscious, entrenched state of being and consciously remind myself to make that shift to believing that I have control and choices.

Disowning of self. In particular, respondents reported that this sense of internal shame, the message that one is not good enough or that one is "other" had led them to what I describe as the "disowning of self":

> I experienced a lot of discrimination and tried a lot of the time to pass for being non- Native and was able to do that a lot of the time. I would say I was anything except Native. I didn't understand while I was doing that what that was all about. It just didn't feel good. And so it was like I wasn't being who I really was because I was ashamed and hiding a part of my heritage right. And I mean I got that from my mother as well. Not wanting to admit that because it just wasn't okay. So there was a long sort of legacy that I had adopted just through being in that family and so again lots of dissonance and just not being who I truly was meant to be. Carrying a lot of shame and feelings of less than and just those messages from society. I remember several times sitting in a group of people or whatever and hearing

> negative talk about Natives – "Oh those drunken Natives" or whatever. Feeling in the pit of my stomach, "Ooh I hope they don't find out I'm one". Sitting there and actually experiencing discrimination but keeping very silent not saying anything so I experienced lots and lots of that.

Passing. Along with the disowning of self, the above respondent also described her or his experience of "passing". Overall (1998) defines passing:

> as the concealment of a stigmatized identity, often through the assumption of a counterpart non-stigmatized identity…The reason people pass, or attempt to pass, is that there are penalties for possessing or being perceived to possess a stigmatized identity and rewards for successfully presenting oneself as not having it (pp. 156-158).

Overcoming the Internalization of Oppression

The idea that some people, for whatever reasons, seem more resistant to external forces and internalized negative messages than others was expressed in the interviews. As interviewer, I was curious about how some people managed to ignore, change, or resist oppressive scripts and messages:

> *Interviewer:* Do you think that each of us takes on those messages or do you think that some people are able to filter or stop the message better than others?
>
> I think both of those are true. I think that, yes, we all experience messages however, I think that certain groups of people it may be a little bit harder to filter some of those out. Just because it sort of entrenched and not just like in society structurally as well as on personal basis or on a business level.

In contrast, one field instructor believed that some people choose to accept oppression and bad treatment:

> I had an understanding of how come that person would allow themselves to be treated that way and that person would raise hell or get mad or do something….as a child I became really tuned in to sort of just what it was saying. That certain people accept treatment that other people don't….because a lot of us don't do our internal world too healthy or too respectfully especially maybe those that are in quotes "oppressed"…If I can use the term oppression and how I was aware of it when I was younger, I would say some people were oppressed and accepted oppression.

> Others appeared to tend to get oppressed but didn't accept it. Now you can call it bullying, you can call it other kinds of things. I was more aware of it at a peer level – how kids treat other kids.

In this study, I was curious about how participants had overcome their internalization of oppression. Respondents spoke about how on their path to recovery, they fought back and resisted this internal sense of shame or blame. Burstow (1992) suggests that what is essential for healing is the development of the, "...ability to see through hegemonic pretensions despite the mystification and confusion" (p. 16). Respondents claimed that they were able to finally see through when they were able to widen their perspectives- change their self images, values, and beliefs - achieve consciousness in a way. This ability to develop critical filters, shift perspective, and look at things differently retroactively seems to be key to the process of overcoming the internalization process. Two of the respondents commented that:

1. It took me a long time. It wasn't until I put those other oppressions into play like for me I was just looking at patriarchy for a long time because that was my main oppression because I'm white and we were working poor but everybody else was so it wasn't like there was a sense of not having stuff but it was only after probably having my own children realizing how tough parenting was and realizing that my mom and dad were very much products of their environment. That it wasn't just about patriarchy, it was about their experience of poverty as children and so they were very concerned with making us compete and win in the system. And preparing us to fight and get there. And so a lot of what my dad and mom became is very much out of other structural forces like capitalism and their poverty and their experience. So then came understanding.

2. Having much more confidence in who I am and just by allowing that rather than buying into what I should. It makes me very much more conscious, of who I am in interactions, of where I'm coming from, what my purpose is, what my motivation is, and that I too could be a person who abused power and was an oppressor. I think as human beings, we all have that potential to self- interest. So, it's really important to know what my motivations are.

Recognition of and sensitivity to other ways of being were also highlighted as significant to participants as the following field instructor notes:

> Re-looking at things as a woman and being proud of it and knowing that it is a unique position and unique perspective, it doesn't have to be right or wrong, it's just different.

As mentioned earlier, education and a politicized language assisted respondents to transform and widen their perspectives:

> It took a lot of detachment and through academics that was the process that allowed me to detach to see it as not about me. Not about my mom and dad. And not about just our particular family but this was something that they've experienced they internalized it they still do. They don't have any consciousness around the fact that they are products of that system.

Collectivity and normalization were also mentioned by two of the female respondents as key parts of overcoming their negative internalization. Being able to talk to others about our oppressions, what Collins (2000) calls, "breaking the silence" or "coming to voice", was a powerful experience for the following field instructor:

> Parallel to that was my own need to find other women who I could share that experience with so I began with probably two or three people and we started meeting and talking. Maybe you'd look at that now as sort of the formative years of the consciousness-raising movement.

Summary

As outlined earlier, this last section of interview questions and answers focused on the respondents' storying of their constructions and understandings of the concept of oppression. It also explored the process of internalization of oppression including negative scripts, passing, and disowning of self. In addition, respondents reported differential responses to oppression and the internalization of oppression based on their individual

social locations, identities, experiences of otherness, and resistance to internalized oppression.

Moving Beyond Conceptualization

> *Son, what's the meaning of justice? .... That was a trick question, son. Nobody can answer it....I can no more define justice than pick up a bead of mercury in my fingertips. But what I do understand, son, is injustice.... Injustice is something we all understand because it's happened to all of us* (Martel, 2001, pp. 79 – 80).

The following section emphasizes how field instructors applied their conceptualizations of oppression to their lived experiences. In addition, the following areas will be highlighted: a) how the research participants said they achieved an awareness of oppression; b) male experiences and conceptualizations of oppression; c) male denial and White privilege; d) female experiences and conceptualizations of oppression; and e) poses the question, is imagining oppression enough?

Awareness of oppression. Beyond a conceptual and metaphorical understanding, this section summarizes how these field instructors described processes of coming to understand the concept of oppression within the context of their personal and professional lives. These ways of understanding included their understandings through their own lived experiences, others' experiences, research, education, mentorship, literature, clinical practice, and service users' stories.

Lived experiences. Respondents first discussed understanding oppression as lived experiences of feeling, recognizing, and seeing oppression in their own lives. At the personal level, they saw their own experiences of oppression as being invaluable in helping them recognize, empathize, and respond to what service users and others may be

experiencing. One respondent expressed how he or she was able to finally understand his or her family experiences:

> Well my answer to that is, as I understood it, I began to understand my experience through my family. I was able to start working on my family stuff. Through my own childhood and understand what happened to me in terms of having physical abuse and things like that happen but I didn't have a name for it then. I just had the feelings and the experiences and the coping and all that kind of stuff. After I named it, I began to see it everywhere.

Respondents reported "Aha" moments in terms of gaining a personal understanding of oppression. As the following two field instructors describe, these moments happened when the interactive dialectic processes of personal experience, personality, critical thinking, conversation, maturity, and education coalesced:

1. I think it's more like an "Aha" moment. I can't just name one image but yeah it's a moment of connectedness I guess.
2. Probably a bit of maturity on my part, probably some experiences and readings and training and I guess a combination of all of those things.

Experiential learning. Experiential learning was identified as a key factor in helping individuals understand their own and others' oppressions. Indeed, one respondent claimed that, "Having an experiential understanding is a different and richer experience from an abstract recognition of rights". Indeed, some respondents maintained that without experiential learning, people were missing a key component to understanding the concept of oppression. Additionally, the following field instructor expressed a strong belief that, without an experiential understanding of oppression, social workers are not as effective in their practice:

> Quite frankly even though people who really want to help, if they haven't lived the position you can do the theory but you cannot do it fully… They give you a position that you have to do what people on welfare has to do. Or people who has been in

abusive relationship. So you have to go what they did in order to feel what that mean. But those people they are able to be doing it that then they going to really fully understand. But people who are in power most of the time coming from high level income so they don't have a clue. How they going to change? It gets back to that idea that it's education plus the experiences that teach us.

Male Conceptualizations and Experiences of Oppression

The male respondents in this research study struggled with naming an experience of personal or professional oppression. In fact, they had extreme difficulty in both the interviews and written assignments identifying or recognizing when they had been oppressed or describing an incident of oppression that they had experienced in their lives. Three respondents commented that:

1. Oh I've got a charmed life! O gosh, maybe we can come back to that because I still my mind kind of … because other than watching the news every night, I'm not affected by that kind of oppression….Anything related to oppression that I might experience, maybe this is why I have trouble coming up with an example, because I would feel guilty or I'd feel like I'd be whining if I was to really force myself to think about situations where I've been oppressed because like comparatively, it's not.

2. Well I don't think I've experienced very much oppression personally and I'm not sure that's good or bad it's just what it is. I think sometimes it's hard to understand until one feels, until one senses not just cognitively but one has it in a deeper place in one's life to be able to really know it. So I'm not sure that I really truly understand true oppression because I can't think of a time….Have I observed it personally and seen it? I'm not sure that I have. Nothing really I mean I'm just thinking of incidents maybe with conflict with my wife or where there may be oppressive moments where I felt not heard not understood. But I don't think that's oppression. I don't see that as oppression.

3. I really can't. That's one of the things that I was thinking about over the last day or so. Just giving a little bit of thought just wondering sort of asking myself if I ever felt as though I was in some way oppressed, and I can't really say that I've really felt that to any great degree. I can't think of an example.

One of the male field instructors did share the following story that he stated *might* be labelled as oppression, although he had not and did not label the experience as oppressive:

> There was a group that I was involved with that I initiated and set up and facilitated and supported a group for people who were having a long-term experience with (type of medical problem sic) support group as it were. The group itself went quite well and involved about two hours a week of my clinic or direct time. One of the directors of services had a patient involved in the group. The feedback that he/she got from the patient was that the group was not particularly effective or helpful for him/her. People were challenging doctors' decisions, were questioning medications that they were prescribed, people were trying to find ways to advocate for better responses by public systems, people were complaining about being mistreated or not having their concerns addressed when they were in the hospital. In other words, that there was a little bit of consciousness- raising happening in the group. The director then took that information and came directly to me and said, "I don't think this is a good way to spend your clinical time. You've got a lot of patients that you have to deal with, sometimes you're not able to get to all those patients, or do all the things that you want to do with them, and you have made complaints about workload from time to time. So this is a group experience which I don't want to sanction you doing in a clinical capacity". The dilemma there I mean it was interesting because that was a direct exposure to, "I'm the boss, I have the power to tell you that you can do this work and you can't do that work". In looking back, that was a degree of oppression but specific to a clinical setting. The decisions that I would make about the use of my time were different than the decisions that the people who pay for my time were going to make about the use of my time. I don't know whether one would conceptualize that as oppression or whether in looking at labor laws, there certainly wasn't any other way that I found that I could protest that. If I framework it or conceptualize it that way yeah disempowering, devaluing, immobilizing. It certainly was like an invitation to me of why you working so hard?

Respondents' previous comments and the above story left me wondering about differences in the way that men and women perceive, think, articulate, and report their experiences. Interestingly, Overall (1998) addresses the issues of male experiences with oppression. She remarks that:

> Individual men may be oppressed on the basis of their sexual orientation, their class, their race, their disability, or their religion, but they are not oppressed as men. For in the system of male dominance, reinforced by masculinism, the male is socially constructed as an asset, not a liability (p. 65).

When I further explored the reasons why the male respondents had difficulty articulating experiences of personal oppression in the interviews, they offered the following explanations for their struggle:

1. My concept of it is sort of heavy duty and so maybe I might minimize if I have experienced it because in relation, I might rate mine a 2 and when I can imagine oppression being 10.

2. The reason for that partially is I don't see myself as being in a particularly disadvantaged class or age or there's nothing typically stereotypically about me that would put me in a position where I think that I would be likely to be discriminated against or oppressed. I think that's why I feel the way I do.

3. If I'm experiencing oppression one of the criteria that I'd have for experiencing that is that I wouldn't be able to do anything about it or that it would affect me in an immobilizing way. I try and approach my work such that if there is something that's there on the table that I will deal with it. So for me to classify something as oppression, it probably would either have to be something that I'm not aware of or that's not in my immediate scope or one where I have tried and failed utterly at addressing the power structure that's behind it.

Male privilege. This last response is interesting as the field instructor presumes that, as an actor, he has the ability, skills, opportunity, and power to change his circumstances (and as a male, he may be correct). At the same time, there seems to be limited recognition (at least as articulated in the interview) that his power to do so may be linked to his privilege, gender, race, and/or socio-economic class. There is also minimal recognition of how dominant-subordinate personal, cultural, and structural relations of power within patriarchy and capitalism serve to benefit men.

The latter comments support McIntosh's (2007) observation that this type of denial including neglecting to identify or acknowledge privilege is common in men. She comments about her experiences in academia:

> I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged in the curriculum, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. Denials that

> amount to taboos surround the subject of advantage that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully recognized and acknowledged, lessoned, or ended.... Only rarely will a man go beyond acknowledging that women are disadvantaged to acknowledging that men have unearned advantage or that unearned privilege has not been good for men's development as human beings, or for society's development or that privilege systems might ever be challenged and changed...Virtually all men deny that male over-reward alone can explain men's centrality in all the inner sanctum of our most powerful institutions (pp. 344-349).

This situated and perhaps gendered understanding of oppression and privilege reminded me of a teaching incident that I wrote about in my journal notes:

> The other day, I was having a very strong conflict with a student in class. I was trying to teach strategies to survive in social work and shared personal examples of methods I had used with groups to achieve whatever goals I had in meetings. A male student kept accusing me of being manipulative, passive aggressive, and deceitful. I was quite offended by his reaction and accusations. I took a break from class and thought about my strong reaction, and then I had an "Aha" moment. I realized that I was describing my gendered experience of surviving in social work teams. My experiences were very much a female experience of surviving social work and the gendered politics of team meetings. I had no access to male strategies nor do I think that I would have been successful using male strategies. He did not understand or accept my strategies because they came from a framework he could not understand. He lived in a world where he did not have to "manipulate" or "deceive" because he lived in his male privilege. For him, he had the freedom to speak directly without fear of reprisal. Unlike my gendered experience, people actually heard him and valued what he said.

Not only was I trying to teach alternative discourses and strategies (i.e., feminism) but in some ways, this male student and I were communicating from very different standpoints and discourses. At the time, this was a revelation to me and I suspect an all too common occurrence for those of us who occupy the social position of "other". Lips (1991) concurs explaining that, "women and men use different methods to get what they want" (p.8). She suggests that this stereotype holds true when, "women use hidden influence strategies

because they lack legitimate power and have less control over resources" (p.8). She also maintains that these types of passive strategies take the largest toll on women's self-esteem.

Male Denial and White Privilege

McIntosh (2007) compares male denial and belief in agency with White privilege and entitlement:

> I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals change their attitudes; many men think sexism can be ended by individual changes in daily behaviour toward women. But a man's sex provides advantage for him whether or not he approves of the way in which dominance has been conferred on his group… Individual acts can palliate but can not end these problems. To redesign social systems, we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silencers and denials surrounded privilege are the key political tools here (p. 351).

McIntosh (2007) furthers her exploration of the implications of her Whiteness and compares it to male unconsciousness:

> I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious.Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of colour that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I begin to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way… I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege as males are taught not to recognize male privilege… My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor; as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture…Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'. I think many of us know how obnoxious this attitude can be in men (pp. 344- 346).

Female Conceptualizations and Experiences of Oppression

In this study, the female field instructors ways of expressing their experiences of living, recognizing, understanding, and articulating oppression were very different than the male reports. Each woman could easily name several examples of multiple oppressions. Oppression was very real and alive to these respondents; it was not simply a mental

construct. Listening to their stories, I was struck by the sense of loss, grief, and the multiple little deaths experienced by the women in this study.

On Being Dead Meat. How oppression and inequality is played out on the bodies of women and the colonized is a significant aspect of our gendered experience. As Burstow (1992) states:

> We are not seen as a living being with directions and functions of our own but as a collection of parts that exist to serve and please the male…Women lose in all of this, as our body is divided, degraded, damaged, and stolen from us (p. 4).

One respondent aptly described the following experience as oppressive:

> I had a unique experience because I went through years of working under a tyrant. And even the people who didn't work there because this person was well known and would demonstrate her LACK of respect. And for other people, people were mostly silent. And even the guys who came in that were contract workers, they were silent. But I noticed that she would very much alter her behavior around people who were leaders or who she perceived to be able to affect her position. I thought, "Okay, I'm going go down the hall and say come on guys we have to get going here". And she was standing at the end of the hall talking to someone with a coffee in her hand and turned to me said, "This from the woman who is always late to (event)". And I said, "Well that's not true." "Yes it is." "Well that's just not true" and, "YES IT IS", she said. And that was the turning point for me. It was downhill from then because I spoke up. There was no room for opinion or discussion or coming up with problem-solving or anything. It was, "This is the way it is, go do it". And so I was *dead meat* after that. She turned around and just screamed at me for the next 45 minutes. I heard about all these terrible things about myself that were not even mentioned in my appraisal. And I was in a state of shock. I mean now I learned from that. I mean I wouldn't have sat there and listened to it. I would've got up and said "When you calm down we can have a discussion with the union rep here if you need to if you've got problems with me". But when I'm being taught in a very religious background to cooperate with everybody and there try to be nice and blah blah blah.
>
> *Interviewer:* And being a woman as well.
>
> And being a woman. I mean I felt completely immobilized. And I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. Because when you're in it, you're just trying to survive. And my doctor said to me when I told him what was going on and what I was feeling and etc. and he said, "Well don't you think you're experiencing some post-

> traumatic stress?" And I just looked at him and thought, "What are you talking about, post- traumatic stress. I said a situation like this"? And so I thought, "Well I don't know". He says, "Well you think about it". So I went and I did my research and I looked it up and I thought, "Oh my God". That's what it is. And then there was this website on post-traumatic stress and bullying. And it was the situation to a T.

On being a piece of meat. Sexual assault and violence is an all too common occurrence for women (Avis, 2006). One respondent shared her painful story:

> When I was 16 years old, I was raped. I was camping with my family and my (relative sic) and I met these two older men on the beach one day. We spent some time with them that afternoon and they invited us to come to their campsite that evening for some beer. Pretending to go to bed, we snuck out to go on this adventure. After numerous drinks, somehow a decision was made that my (relative sic) and one of the men were going to go for a walk along the beach and the other man and I stayed put. To this day, I cannot remember all the details of how I ended up on the floor and this man being on top of me, taking away my virginity... I do not remember my (relative sic) and the other man returning and vaguely remember us walking back to our campsite....I responded with silence. I did not tell my (relative sic) when she and the other man returned. I tried to pretend nothing had happened. As said previously, the progression of events is pretty blurry, but I do remember not saying anything to this man. I left just wanting to disappear. I did not tell my family about this until 16 years later, when I was finally able to acknowledge that this was a rape and sought out counselling to come to terms with what had happened.

On being a brood mare. The notion as mentioned previously of respondents' internalizing oppressive messages such as knowing one's place and accepting proscribed gender norms is demonstrated by the following report:

> The childhood that I had was in a very traditional home, patriarchal. Expectations were that if you were a woman you were going to get married and have children. And the very first experience I had, I'm the eldest of four children, so there are two females and two males and being a reasonably well off not a wealthy but a middle class family. And my father's saying, "Well there's going to be money for your brother's education and that's being put aside but because you're a girl you'll just be getting married and having kids. That would really be a waste for you to go on after high school". And so the internalized oppression was, "Oh okay, I agree". I mean I'd understood that, it made sense to me but yes I mean there's this money but it would be better invested in my brother's education. So now many many years later the irony of that is that I'm the only who has any university education.

On not being "grade a" beef. Similarly, stories about being treated as second best or not being good enough were frequently expressed by the female respondents:

> I think it was related to my role in my family because I was very conscious that females were second class. It was a very traditional military family, my dad was like God and my mom was fairly subservient. Like in sports, I was always a really good athlete and I was always playing on boys teams and I ALWAYS had to prove myself always forever and ever.

On being as dumb as meat: Second guessing. I wrote earlier about the concepts of disowning of self and passing related to the internalization of oppression. Of particular relevance to that discussion was something else I noticed from the findings, a phenomenon I call "second-guessing". Female field instructors, who identified as having been oppressed, described not only having to deal with their own sense of internalization, shame, and blame over their experiences of oppression (as discussed previously), the actual oppression from others around them, but they also emphasized a psychological phenomenon in which they felt compelled to second-guess their every reaction to see if their feelings, thoughts, and reactions were valid. In other words, these particular field instructors reported being engaged in a continual ongoing internal process of evaluating and validating their own experiences and feelings, to find the courage and confidence to act on these conditions (an exhausting process- to use another metaphor- that those who do not swim in our waters can only imagine).

To illustrate the nature of women's experiences of oppression and the phenomenon of second-guessing as well as some of the challenges of field instruction, I have selected the following story about a female field instructor and a social work practicum student:

> I had taken him/her to a meeting with me and this was the first meeting we were going to together. And it was very animated which they often are and it's outside of the community so it's being a part of a committee which it's all (specific race)

service providers. And so I'm coming as the one of the service providers in that particular area of (medical problem).I was trying to say what I wanted to say but I'm not good at interrupting and that's one of the things that I struggle with being from my grandmother. You know *that voice* always pops in as if something like, "If what you have to say is meant to be heard, it'll be heard and you don't interrupt people when you listen to people, and listening is better than speaking cause you learn more", all of this kind of stuff. And again which is not really valued in this society so there's that incongruence and it creates dissonance within me. I can only speak for myself but so it's something I've struggled with. And that's what I mean, it touched on a core issue not at that time, because I was comfortable in that meeting. I know these people, I've been working with them for years in the community a good six years and so they know my style, I know their style – that kind of thing. But the practicum student did not. This was new for him/her. So anyway the facilitator of the meeting who knows me very well popped in and said, "Okay I know (name) is trying to say something so what do you have to say". So then I said what I had to say. By this time what I had to say was already previously voiced so I just kind of agreed with that person and added something to it and that was about it. And so then there was other people who hadn't been speaking too much either and so the facilitator also asked them, "What are your thoughts"? So they spoke as well.

Anyway the meeting ended. I stayed behind to speak to some people about whatever and told the practicum student I'd meet him/her back here. So I came back here and was walking through and he/she was sitting out there. I just said to her/him, "What did you think of the meeting"? and she/he said, "Well you were quiet as a church mouse". And I became very offended and I said to her/him, "I'm not quite sure what you mean by that" or whatever. So then I asked her/him to come in here so we could talk about it. And so he/she said, "Well you didn't say anything". And I said, "I was attempting to". Then I said, "What did you mean by that" or something like that. And she/he said, "I didn't see you as representing the (specific race) community when they were talking about marginalized people", because we were looking at populations that we needed to put more focus on. And what came up were street people and just the revolving door syndrome kind of thing. So he/she thought I guess that I should have popped in (specific race sic) people as well. And so I said to him/her well "I work predominately with (specific race sic) people and in this case I'm not seeing them as marginalized. Okay where yes in the broader society but not this instance that we're talking about" but *again justifying*. I found myself justifying and then I thought to myself, "*Why am I justifying my behavior to him/her*"? And anyways I had spoken to her/him and said, "I was feeling a little bit offended by what you had to say" and that it was something I had struggled with, this was all *part of my justification. But here I am justifying myself* and so anyways that was surprising to me and I let her/him know that I thought he/she could be a little more sensitive and that anyway we had worked through it or whatever and that was fine. BUT I thought that it was fine. I got home that night and it didn't hit me until I was lying in bed. And then all of this

> old stuff started happening. And I realized how to what extent I had been triggered and it brought out all of that stuff about the times that I'd heard that in the dominant society. "You're real quiet or you never have nothing to contribute" or those kind of messages. And was struggling with, "How do I fit in, where's my place kind of thing"? And sometimes it was avoidance like just don't go there because it's not comfortable and then lots of work around being able to come to a place where it's okay just to be who I am and when I have something to contribute I always do and if it's something that's really dear to my heart I will. So there again I was lying there going through in my bed going through all of this stuff.
>
> *I'm still having little doubts about it*, my own internalized oppression is still very active I'm noticing as we talk about this whole situation. And I guess that's where again oppression is becoming just validating again how destructive it is and how it really alters a person's view because I'm talking about it so much. I'm still working through it I think is what's coming for me right now. And *still parts of that self doubt, did I do the right thing or was I overreacting? Even though I checked it out, it still is that self doubt.* And I believe that it is connected to all of that internalized oppression. I talked to three different people to help me filter out that I wasn't just reacting based on how I was offended. And also had taken into consideration some of the other people's responses to this person's attitude… I called the clinical supervisor and talked to him/her. I also talked to a colleague who then started saying "There's some other issues" so that's when I found out about the cleaning thing and the sense of entitlement and the condescending attitude. So I thought "Okay, I'm getting all of this other information". The other part that still sort of pops up for me having done all of that is could it have been handled differently where this person still could have had an opportunity to learn in this environment? So I still even though everything is all said and done, that is *a little bit of residue that keeps popping up for me every once and a while*. For me to be justifying and laying there in bed and wondering am I overreacting like why was I even wondering that, it's that doubting myself right. That's all of that stuff that was triggered.

Female respondents also identified the feeling of being different- alien, being a minority, the experience of otherness- and spoke about feelings related to this experience such as alienation, depression, and rage. According to Overall (1998), these feelings and reactions are common:

> Minority status often results in a kind of self-consciousness- not through any inherent wisdom or epistemic insight of the minority group person, but because a deviant social status tends to create self-consciousness. Marylyn Frye astutely observes, one of the privileges of being normal and ordinary is a certain unconsciousness. When one is that which is taken as the norm in one's social

> environment, one does not have to think about it… If one is the norm, one does not have to know what one is. If one is marginal, one does not have the privilege of not noticing what one is. This absence of privilege is a presence of knowledge. As such, it can be a great resource, given only that the marginal person does not scorn the knowledge and lust for inclusion in the mainstream, for the unconsciousness of normality (p. 178).

Is Imagining Oppression Enough?

As social workers, what are the implications of practitioners not experiencing oppression, not being able to identify personal experiences of oppression, not recognizing the various sources, forms, and levels of oppression, and/or perhaps denying positions of privilege? When we cannot identify personal experiences of oppression, perhaps we are then left with trying to imagine what oppression is. When asked, in an interview, to imagine oppression and what it might look like, one male respondent replied:

> Third world countries maybe or ethnic groups who are minority in certain places. Maybe the gay population I don't know, I'm sure they feel oppression…I imagine that those times where I may have had something close to oppression …so I'm just processing as we talk here…I can't, it doesn't surface to me that there's times where I've been oppressed. There's times when this happened or that happened or somebody freaked out here, someone had power, did something but I can't think of many times in my own personal life that I felt really really oppressed. Or what I imagined deep oppression to be let's put it that way. I'm not exactly sure.

Although there is some recognition that racism and heterosexism may be sources of oppression, this respondent struggles with understanding the concept of personal, cultural, or structural oppression. If we have no experiences with oppression, can we really imagine someone else's oppression and is imagining enough for effective social work practice? If we have to imagine oppression, does oppression then simply become a mental construct? If this is so, then an obvious solution to solving oppression is to just change our minds. A strong belief in individual internal agency and free will (i.e., the discourse of liberalism) underlie this type of thinking. However, again what is missing in this solution is the

recognition that perhaps free will and agency are increased or constrained by experiences of differential oppression, privilege and power, for specific individuals and groups or that privileged groups benefit from these social, cultural, and power relations. Furthermore, I would propose that oppression and the conceptualization processes necessary to recognize, grasp, and understand it undoubtedly have diverse meanings and implications for various populations.

Summary

In this section, I explored how people in this study conceptualized, experienced, developed awareness, and recognized the concept of oppression in their lives. The data analysis indicates that men and women (and I would argue White people and people of colour) have very different experiences, understandings, articulations, and conceptualizations of oppression. Unlike the male respondents, female field instructors were able to identify several experiences of oppression especially at the personal level. For the most part, respondents did not explicitly acknowledge or identify cultural and structural levels and forms of oppression, positions of privilege and entitlement, or identify and articulate how these factors play out in their clinical and personal relationships. Correspondingly, the male denial of over-advantage was compared to the social denial of White entitlement and privilege. As social workers, we need to be concerned about the implications of this denial for social work practice, critical thinking, and clinical assessment, decision –making, and intervention.

Conclusion

Chapter four offered an analysis of the concept of oppression including the respondents' discourses about oppression as word, their thinking about the causes of oppression, key aspects of the respondents' conceptualization processes for understanding oppression including the use of metaphors and processes of internalization of oppression, differences related to diversity issues, and how respondents described overcoming oppression. An exploration of male and female field instructors' experiences, reports, understandings, and articulations of oppression was also highlighted.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion - Constructions of Oppression in Social Work

Studying and exploring social workers' conceptualizations and metaphorical understandings of oppression, while interesting, only represents a starting place in this research. It is essential to move beyond broad definitions of oppression into constructions and from metaphorical thinking to clinical decision-making and practical actions within social work practice and field instruction. Healy (2005) suggests that, "despite critical theorists commitment to practice 'praxis', that is, the linkage of theory and practice, many social workers experience difficulties in translating critical theoretical perspectives to practice" (p. 221). As such, social workers need to be able to translate their cognitive theoretical understandings of oppression into real practice situations. In other words, as a profession, we are concerned not just with theory but with the real lived experiences of people who are harmed by oppressive conditions.

This chapter emphasizes two main areas of research findings and discussion. First, it explores the respondents' understandings of oppression and their application to social work practice. The impact of their conceptualizations of oppression, dilemmas of working within social service systems and care agencies, and service users' perspectives are highlighted. Throughout this chapter, the importance of narrative not only in terms of this study's methodology but also in terms of how people get a sense of other peoples' experiences is examined. The second section reviews how the field instructors applied their understandings of oppression to their personal lives, what they identified as their social and cultural identities and locations and related privileges and entitlements, how they understood the operations and intersectionality of power, privilege, and why they thought

people become oppressors. They also offer suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor.

Understanding Oppression: Descriptions of Social Work Practice Knowledge

"*Some things have to be believed to be seen*" (Brashares, 2003, p. 117).

If social workers are prepared to accept that the concept of oppression is real and meaningful, what do we then do about it? What happens "when the rubber meets the road"? How do the field instructors' understandings of oppression influence and possibly transform their practices? How social workers describe their practice knowledge is an important aspect of research that has not been fully explored. Indeed, Osmond and O'Connor (2004) concluded that the ability to articulate practice knowledge is essential for social work accountability and also enhances, "the likelihood of providing quality service delivery to clients" (p. 678).When social workers describe their work, they often use an informal storytelling process through case examples, metaphors, and stories to suggest, name, and share their theoretical and practice understandings (Osmond & O'Connor, 2004). Social workers are also very familiar with listening to other people's stories as part of their practice. Although listening is key to social work practice, social workers also bear witness to other peoples' experiences and stories. Perhaps one of the gifts we bring to the planet as a profession is the grit and determination to be the ones who hear, really hear, someone else's pain.

Awful stories: Being a witness. The field instructors in this study seem profoundly touched by the stories of the people they work with. Here are some examples:

1. For me, it's my clinical practice, the work that I've done listening to people's stories. I worked in clinical practice particularly in psychiatry. I spent a lot of time

listening to a lot of *awful stories*. And I still do. What's kind of influenced that or helped me make sense of it is primarily the stories of people…most profoundly is the experience of people that I work with. To actually witness or hear stories that people tell with the right invitations and the right degree of safety kind of set up there. That the stories people tell about the limits on their choices, limits on their ability to act which seem deliberate. The experience of hearing someone's story who has simply not been able to do something about their situation or even have their voice heard about their situation.

2. I think that's probably the most profound change factor, to actually hear the stories, to actually hear the experiences. I think it's impossible to hear the experiences and not be touched by it or not be affected by it. So that's probably the most direct way that I've developed my understanding or added to my understanding is, just more and more and more stories.

Clinical theories and social work practice. I was interested in what field instructors thought both about theory in its broadest form as well as theory applied to practice. One respondent stated the following about theory:

> We have to assume in a postmodern world that much of the theory and construct that we're using is made up. It's a way that we have of taking ideas or experiences and trying to translate it into words in such a way that people can make sense of it or understand it or at least have access to the ideas so that they can change their experience.

Two respondents issued warnings about the problem of using a one size fits all approach or a cookie cutter approach to service user' problems:

1. One of Bill O'Hanlon's (theorist) favorite lines is that, he says, "Don't get stuck with a theory because if you're stuck with one theory, all your clients are stuck with that theory too".

2. I think I'll talk about the possible negatives of this approach. The negative is if I'm completely wrong, like if oppression really doesn't exist and patriarchy really doesn't exist and racism really doesn't exist, if they're the whole postmodern kind of thinking about it, then I'm completely way out in left field and wrong with my clients. So I always keep that in my head, "How useful is this construct or this word"?

As mentioned previously, this study is predicated on the assumption of the importance of seeing and recognizing oppression in social work theory and practice.

Respondents commented on why seeing oppression was important in social work and with service users:

1. The assumption that if you raise consciousness or you expose certain structures so that they're made more obvious, then people have more choices. And that the idea of having more choices is a better idea or an idea we would value higher than the idea of having fewer choices even though that may simplify parts of life. If our own lens is not able to identify some those things, then we're not likely to be able to assist other people in identifying them either.

2. To resist oppression, to fight it, to become aware of it, you have to do the thinking, you have to SEE it. If you don't see it then it's not real. So I think it's real and external but it becomes unreal, if we don't see it.

Anti-oppressive practice theory. As mentioned previously, the social work theory most related to the concept of oppression is anti-oppressive theory. Related theories that share some of the same values, beliefs, and assumptions include feminist, structural, anti-racist, critical, and queer theories. However, it is not always clear what is meant when social workers use the term anti-oppressive practice. This study then essentially attempts to respond to this respondent's criticism:

> We throw that word around so much in our practice and in our education when we talk about anti- oppressive practice but we've had very little dialogue about what oppression actually means in terms of working with people. It's one of those words. You can tag on the word anti- in front of it, it presumes you know what the word oppression means. And then the more you tag or hyphenate things on to it the more difficulty that we get into.

Although only two respondents specifically named AOP as their theoretical framework, others named feminism and Aboriginal theories or described practices which could be described as anti-oppressive. For instance, although I call myself a structural feminist, I definitely see my clinical, education, field instruction, and research frameworks as congruent with AOP theory. As I stated in my interview, my understanding of the concept of oppression in my social work practice is that:

> I really believe that it's true, that with every service user I go in, knowing it's not about them. They're not pathological, they're not deviant, they're not evil, that they are people who are surviving the best way they can, given these structural forces that influence them. So a service user that comes to me I see very much, bell hooks talks about it, a matrix of oppression. And that's what I see.

Consistent with the AOP principles outlined earlier (Baines, 2007a; Fook, 2004; Mullaly, 2010), respondents in this study also mentioned using depathologizing approaches and building strengths as well as validation, consciousness-raising, and empowerment skills:

1. Part of my work always needs to be, not only the validation and the realization, and trying to empower groups, but also that consciousness-raising, how it does not necessarily have to be, "This isn't about you, this isn't because there is something wrong with you, this is because"… Looking at those societal attitudes and expectations around that and debunking those a bit. So, helping the client come to a place where he or she does not have to buy into it.

2. It's very entrenched with me. A danger here, we all fall into assumptions when our clients walk in the door. I don't want to say that I assume that they're oppressed but I expect that there's going to be some feelings around that and when I explore feelings with clients, I certainly explore their experience of power or lack of power in their own world. And then that's how oppression begins to weave into our conversations and that kind of thing. And I usually sort of frame it around things like power imbalance.

Respondents suggested that the essence of what we do in social work, alongside witnessing stories, is naming oppression for service users, and perhaps one could argue, also for colleagues, teams, systems, and communities. In accordance, Caputi (2003) sees naming as "crucial to the social construction of reality, to the validation of experience, to the acceptance of the existence of the phenomenon, and, indeed, to further bring that phenomenon into being (p. x). When asked to elaborate about how the process of naming helps the service user, the following field instructor responded:

> I guess it's a core belief of mine. I guess because certainly that was my experience all through life and as I worked through my stuff –family, relationships, and everything else – I realized when I was able to NAME it that didn't solve it. I certainly carry many of those things around with me but it certainly gives me the

> tools and the direction in how to deal with it when it does come up. So if we're wrong and it's not about power and it's not about people being oppressed, then I need wow that's a real core belief of mine. It just brings to light how much that does drive my work.
>
> Interviewer: Cause some people argue that it's not real, that oppression doesn't exist except for in our own minds.
>
> Yeah, and I realize that and hence another really good reason for naming it.

Social Work Practice: Dilemmas and Challenges

The following section examines the dilemmas and challenges social workers face when confronted with the implications of applying understandings of oppression to clinical practice. In addition, the respondents identify how social service agencies and social workers are implicated in reproducing and perpetuating oppression.

Service user oppression within clinical practice. Respondents made connections between service users' lives and the concept of oppression. One field instructor strongly believed that all service users experience oppression:

> I don't think there's anyone I see or have seen who hasn't dealt with or struggled with or been exposed to the harmful effects of oppression.

When asked to write about and describe examples of service user oppression (i.e., what they saw as manifestations of the consequences of oppression), the respondents told several poignant stories. Based primarily on class oppression experienced at the personal level, these narratives fall into six categories and summarize what these field instructors defined as oppression within clinical practice: a) lack of services and under-funding of resources; b) withholding of information; c) violence and coercion; d) disrespect of the service user; e) cultural and structural forms of oppression- racism, gender inequality, and ageism; and f) policy. In each category, I chose one story that I thought best depicted the categorical

theme. These examples implicate social workers, social services agencies, and related caregivers and systems in the practices of perpetuating oppression. Identifying information has been changed in these narratives to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of field instructor, agency, and service user.

Lack of services and under-funding of resources. All of the field instructors commented upon the lack of services available to service users and the chronic under-funding of necessary resources. The following story highlights how these issues impact the people with whom we work:

> Paraplegic client, long term care client for many years with steadily increasing problems with skin breakdown. This is a younger individual with spouse and kids. Has spent as long as one year in hospital due to skin breakdown and other related problems. Equipment needs are not adequately met at this time due to nonexistence of funding from any source. Family relationships are breaking down and this client, who now has to spend 24/7 lying down on alternating pressure air mattress, spends virtually entire day alone, excepting home support visits. Client recently requested exploration of alternate living arrangements on a temporary basis, i.e. long term care/nursing home placement which would include intensive wound care as part of the care plan. Client's options in this area are non-existent, and writer's inquiries (so far) have been met with many comments about how such services to people with intensive wound care needs would be great but don't exist.

Withholding information. As social workers, how we choose to share information was expressed as a central concern by the following field instructor:

> The clearest example I had was a physician. We were in a team meeting without the patient discussing what the treatment follow up was going to be. The physician said this person needs to come into our coordinated outpatient program which includes four different types of therapy that they can get on the same day come in three times a week and have it organized quite well. The physician and the team agreed that's what the patient needs. The physician was then told by the manager that there was a two- month wait list for that program. Meaning that the patient needed it but was going to have to wait two months before they could access it. The physician then left that meeting, sat down with the family with me present and said, "You don't need our coordinated program". So the patient and family never got the information about what was needed. What they got was a sanitized version of, "You've done well with this, you've done well with that area, you're going to continue to improve,

mother nature is on your side", that kind of thing but were deprived of the information about you can really benefit from this but it's not available or there's a wait list or there's problems with funding, or there's access issues or whatever. That to me is huge and unacceptable source of oppression. That we are actually depriving people of the information that they need to protest decisions or to request services or to look at other ways that they might be able to receive what they need. So that's probably the most striking example of something that I think we're all at risk of and that I'm at risk of and that I may subtly be balancing in my own mind the reality of what's available. It was a big dilemma. I could see that the patient and family were not distressed by what they weren't hearing because they didn't hear it. I did confront the physician afterwards and said, "Why did you do that"? That was withholding information". His/her position was that it would be more upsetting and disturbing to pass on to the patient the political problem or the funding problem than it would be to sanitize, to put it together in a package that was acceptable to the patient who of course was grateful for all of the help that they had received and was grateful for any possible further help whether it was kind of what was intended when the system was created or whether it was an adjunct that was kind of put in there as a better second best kind of option. So the physician genuinely was surprised when confronted with that because he/she felt that he/she was making the most gentle and sensitive presentation of a reality that he/she could. That there was no need to trouble the patient with the political issue or the funding problem behind it and in fact there was a risk. That if that information is "made public" in quotes or given to people through the process, that there will be chaos, that there will be pressure, that if that patient then goes and complains then there are likely to be political solutions brought in that will make the system worse as opposed to better. So the physician is kind of playing a high role there in balancing what is part of the greater good. That it's good for people sometimes not to have information because they lack the sophistication to protest in an effective way or that they may accidentally kind of draw the ire of someone who can punish the system or can punish them for the active complaining or punish the system for being inefficient. In other words, that the senior manager then comes in and says, "Why is there a two-month wait list? You guys are bad, you guys are doing things inefficiently, you'll have to restructure, you'll have to blah blah blah" ending in a less effective service or a less responsive service kind of one that increases the risk that people won't get the information. So the physician in his/her own mind was trying to balance all of that and I guess my position was that's a huge responsibility and you'd better really know that's the right way to do because it is a huge thing to deprive people of basic information about their health.

Violence and coercion. As mentioned earlier, all oppressed groups experience violence or the threat of violence (Young, 1990; Bishop, 1994). Field instructors identified many examples of service users experiencing violence. For instance:

> A young special needs child around the age of 10 was taxing the patience of a teacher and the teacher took a book and hit the youth over the head with it. Another member said she knew how to handle "these type of kids", because at the organization she attended in Alberta the person had a "Down's Syndrome child" who was acting up and she slapped her/him in the face and she/he never did it again.

Disrespect of service user. In my written assignment, I disclosed the following clinical experience:

> I advocated for a 16 year old girl to get assistance. When I went with her to the office, I experienced first-hand the way they treat service users. We were treated with contempt at the front desk. We were then treated rudely by the worker, who did not introduce herself or ask who I was. She even lied to the girl and said the girl's social worker, Susan (me), should have given her certain info. She was quite shocked and changed her attitude when she realized who I was. At first, I was irritated at the front desk treatment, but attributed it to poorly paid receptionists, giving minimal service. I was amused initially by the worker's treatment of us (I guess I could afford to be amused as I wasn't stuck with this oppression. I wasn't poor and had probably more status and income than the worker so I could afford to watch like a cat with a mouse.) However, I was furious as it continued, with her showing no compassion or caring, and lying to the girl. It gave me a glimpse, about what this girl's life actually was, outside of our rather protected appointments and my experiences of entitlement. This was her real lived experience, so different than my own, and I felt great sadness and anger on her behalf.

Cultural and structural forms of oppression. Racism, gender inequality, classism, and ageism and their intersectional nature were also specifically identified by respondents as examples of oppression within clinical practice. The following quotations from the interviews highlight these different but intersecting types of oppression:

On racism:

> For instance, we have seniors who have had life long histories of maybe they've come from different cultures where using herbal medications and other things that don't fit the kind of norms that we describe as being appropriate, and they bring that to their elderly years where they're now having to pay for private facilities. Boy the door slams shut right there. Because that is just not understood or supported by people who are within that system because they don't understand it and they have no sense of the safety of that. They see that as a risk and so they will not tolerate it.

On gender inequality:

> The continual inequality for women in the justice system, it is often cases of sexual assault or domestic violence that would often face difficulties to prove. Usually their cases involved alcohol, or the offender is someone that they know, or began a relationship with, and their trust will be betrayed. The justice system most often would not forward charges, because most likely the individual who experience assault will not be a reliable witness, or they may feel intimidated by the offender. Evidence will be difficult to collect and corroborate. This situation will compound the level of trauma that victims of violence will face, and the victims will find it difficult to trust and report again.

On ageism:

> How then as professionals we are relating to our clients, I mean there's a huge power differential. Probably ten times more once you get somebody who's now elderly, female in many cases, and physically frail, and cognitively impaired as well as psychiatrically challenged now in terms of some very difficult issues that they're dealing with. So, all of those factors create a lot of vulnerability.

On classism:

> Certainly I've seen people who I think are not treated in the same way as other people may be treated. For example, people who are judged to be drug users or street people or that sort of thing. Certainly you experience that there's judgments made in terms of care and they may not have the same opportunity for care as they would otherwise.

Policy. One field instructor described oppression at the structural level identifying policy and its interpretation as oppressive to service users:

> I get a lot of kids come in and say, "I've been kicked out of school, I've lost my education because I smoked a joint". Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of hard core kids that come in, so in other words addicts or not addicts but dependence and that kind of stuff, abusers. But a whole pile of kids also come in when I do the assessment and talk to them about what they're doing, they're at the experimental stage. They smoke pot three or four times, or they might smoke pot once every month or two months and they just happen to get caught. And now they're going to lose their education for a year. Some of them well actually most of those type, yeah they would lose it for this year. And I struggle with that, I really do because they're really criminalizing I think and punishing, overly punishing somebody for going through what they now term as a developmental stage for teens' experimentation with drugs. I believe that's a HUGE barrier and a HUGE example of how policy

> sort of trickles down and just really makes it hard for a teenager to still do all the positive things in their life do their experimentation thing and probably get out of it. I don't see anything wrong with getting caught for smoking pot and having to go to counselling. Certainly, absolutely find out about it, get the information of course but to get kicked out of school for it? I really think that's a big example of how oppression happens with disadvantaged kids. And really a huge disadvantage for some of them and so they're losing their resources based on some questionable decision-making for sure.

Social work practice without an understanding of oppression. In the interviews, I asked the field instructors to consider what would happen if they chose not to practice with an understanding of oppression as a root cause of service users' troubles. Respondents had slightly different answers about how this choice might affect their practice:

1. I don't know cause it's such a part of my practice, it's such a part of who I am. I think without it I may be a little more judgmental and a little less collaborative. Why I say that is because I think I may have expectations around them that I may not have today. I think I'd be doing practice a little bit differently just in how I would be maybe making demands on people cause I see it sometimes happening. I'm thinking that if I didn't have this understanding I may be coming at people from a different sort of lens where I think that experience has helped me to be a little more collaborative and a little more inviting to the person. Well you tell me about that or how can I help you rather than you need to be doing this. If I took this lens away from my own practice, then what exists in that vacuum? Obviously things will fill and what other models are there other than individual pathology and blame.

2. If we weren't aware and didn't have that kind of lens that we see the world through, it would seem to me that the world would not change in my opinion for the better. There would be no opportunity for that. We would simply perpetuate the "status quo".

One respondent saw a difference between her or his practice methods and colleagues who practiced without an understanding of oppression:

> Sometimes I shake my head and wonder how people are seeing certain things and how they developed the assessments they have… the conclusion that I come to is that there's social workers that understand their client to be the patient or the family member or individual that we're serving. And those people tend to see through the lens that we're speaking of. There are others that at times see their role as to serve the institution. But based particularly when we work in a secondary setting, I think we're placed in a bit of a unique situation where we have demands placed on us

> both from the institution as well as from the client base that we serve. And the question then becomes who's our client?

I would propose, that if we do not use oppression as part of our practice lens, we run the risk of producing well-intended, empathetic social workers who at the least, conform with the status quo and at the worst, do active harm and change nothing.

Social work and decision-making. Seeing oppression is important not only in terms of what we pay attention or what we ignore around us, but it can also greatly influence the decisions we make- what to do, what not to do, how we act to intervene for ourselves and with service users, the social action and causes that we support, and how we resist oppression in our personal and professional lives. As Gambrill (2005) argues, social workers make judgments all of the time as part of our professional responsibilities. This is why the development of critical thinking skills and (self) awareness is so essential as we frequently have to make decisions about what to report, how to act, what story to believe, and so on. The following field instructor struggled with the idea of judgment:

> Who is the judge of what's negative and when one group or one culture or one notion is held up as normal or positive. Who is the judge of that? And how can it not be oppression if it's a parameter? If you talk to women within those cultures, many times they will say, "No, this isn't oppressive to us. We like living in this situation". You hear people talk and if there's a discussion about this issue of what about these cultures and what about the situation that women find themselves in the Middle East. With the Shi'ite political movements, they're looking like they would like to gain some power in Iraq now. And people are thinking this could be bad for women and yeah I mean that's our judgment from our perspective in this culture and I mean in some ways women are just as oppressed in this culture, it's just in different ways. I know the feeling and I know that's me entering into it and I don't want to impose my values on the situation. It depends on your perspective I guess. But most people would view that as a subtle form of oppression.

Self-awareness, an intuitive sense of right and wrong, fairness, empathy, and justice, an appropriate knowledge base, critical thinking skills, the ability to develop critical filters,

and a combination of (social work) education and experience over time were seen by the research participants as being vital to making effective and ethical decisions.

Historical baggage: Keeping myself out. Although the field instructors recognized that they do sometimes make judgment errors in clinical situations and decision-making, most of the respondents reported that they were successful at bracketing their values, their beliefs, and their biases when working with service users. Three respondents explained how they were able to handle their "historical baggage", make no assumptions, and "keep themselves out" of the therapeutic relationship:

1. Just a moment to sort of focus on who am I, where am I going, why am I here, why am I going in to meet this person? I have no idea who they are but I want to take off as much of that *historical baggage* that I can and just be available to them and enter into their reality. The population I work with are for the most part, our average age I think is 80+, so anybody over the age of 65 could be referred but for the most part, we've seen people from their mid- 70s. My oldest client is 97. So very very elderly. I'm working with people so going in and basically leaving your own value system somewhere, that's not at the forefront. Being open to whatever the value system is of the people I'm working with. For the most part I'm working with people who are my parents' generation and whose own consciousness would be very much in line with that I described patriarchal. I mean listening to your doctor is next to God, what else could you want?

2. It's not that I keep myself out of it…I feel that little tweak I just kind of know that's where I'm kind of entering into it and I understand what my view of oppression is and let's see where that fits in this client's work…I really try hard to be aware of that, of what I'm doing…I can explore that with clients, with people. I think I'm probably better equipped to explore oppression in people's lives objectively and compassionately and with an awareness of myself that hopefully prevents me from imposing or projecting my values onto other people.

3. I assume nothing. I try and assume nothing. I catch myself sometimes with that if I've been going to a place that wasn't healthy. And that's blocked something, that's limited something. Absolutely nor do I succeed all of the time.

Can we really keep ourselves out and bracket our own experiences of oppression, biases, values, or perhaps our lack of experience with or understanding of oppression? I am

not sure that the field instructors' sense that they can successfully bracket their histories and world views is accurate as it does not make sense to me in terms of clinical practice. I certainly find it very difficult to do this in my practice and this may explain why I am more comfortable with a feminist framework that does not assume objectivity (Darlington & Mulvaney, 2003; Marshall, 2000; Pershai, 2006) Moreover, the use of self including all of our baggage- lens, experience, education, view, values, beliefs, and so on- are part of the intangible dynamics of the therapeutic relationship. I agree with Fook and Morley (2005) when they conclude that:

> What emerges, then, is perhaps not the need to deny our theoretical orientations, values and ethics, but to give emphasis to the process of how we apply critical perspectives to practice…In light of this, perhaps the potential for social workers to engage in practice that is empowering for our service users lies in our responsibility to continually scrutinize and critically evaluate our practice, constantly extending the 'deconstructive gaze' (Fook, 1996, 198) to the disparities between how we intend to operate and how this is actually perceived and experienced by our service users (p. 80).

Service Users' Perspectives

"You can't see me with your mind closed" (Cox, 2002).

The most cited reason given for using an understanding of oppression as part of a social work practice lens was the belief on the part of the respondents in this study that an understanding of oppression reduces harm to service users and all peoples. However, not all service users will agree with our view of their problems. The following section attempts to answer some of the following questions. What happens when people we work with can not or refuse to see what we see or know in their situation? What if their beliefs seem irrational, inaccurate, or harmful? For example, a battered partner may not agree with us when we characterize the violence she or he experiences as oppression. If service users disagree or as

is more likely, minimize the amount of harm being done to them, is it our ethical duty to name and frame the behaviours or events as wrong, bad, or oppressive?

Helping service users see oppression. As one respondent proposed:

> In my head I can go to a place of, "Okay eventually they make whatever decision they make". But because I have a framework that says that counselling is a political process, the personal is political, I don't know how to separate what our moral obligation is as I view it as social workers and what we do in that micro.

Respondents recommended that to assist service users to begin to see oppression, social workers should use naming, validating, and consciousness-raising skills (i.e., AOP). This research finding was supported by the literature as Healy (2005) advocates consciousness-raising as a, "process whereby oppressed individuals can discard false ideologies in favour of understanding their structural disadvantage and an orientation towards developing capacities for overcoming it" (p. 14). Carniol (2005b) also found that this perspective shifting was effective with service users:

> From my experience, when service users are able to discuss their lived reality in terms of externally structured dichotomies (for example, a female survivor of male violence, recognizing the illegitimacy of male power over her) , I have noticed a shift in perception, and more precisely, a reduction of self blame and shame, by service users (p. 157).

However, by supporting and applying an AOP framework and helping service users see oppression, are we in danger of privileging a dominant discourse and therefore silencing other possibilities? In so doing, do we run the risk of oppressing service users, students, colleagues, and others because of our belief system? In addition, how do social workers resolve the dilemma of the postmodern critique of multiple truths? If we accept ludic postmodernist thinking, do we also run the risk of being immobilized, unsure of how

to act or what to decide? How do we know what story, what vision, or what truth to privilege in our discussions and interactions with service users? As one respondent worried:

> Am I planting my ideas or am I just looking at a more global reality? Am I looking at a more objective reality? What am I basing my thoughts on? Intuition plays a part, your intuition, your heart, that soulful part of you but I mean that has absolutely got to be balanced because we are balanced with that evidence-based knowledge that we have.
>
> *Interviewer*: It's interesting you talked about reality and evidence-based, what if we're wrong? Like we're talking about oppression like it's a truth. What if it doesn't exist?
>
> It is a highly complex and very movable concept, it's very fluid. And certainly it's based in many ways on a subjective reality. It depends on the subjective reality of who's experiencing that oppression or viewing it… We view oppression as a concept. We view it as evil, right? It's bad to oppress people, it's bad to be oppressed.

The most productive narrative. The following field instructor summarized the ethical responsibilities we have as social workers:

> If there are multiple possible narratives or multiple ways of understanding our experience, then the most productive narrative is the one that can interpret with a client or with a patient as being most likely to open up opportunities as opposed to shut down opportunities. As social workers even though we would hold the multiple truths, we do have a responsibility ethically to drift towards decision-making that would be empowering or drift towards decisions that truly do include the backdrop of invisible information.

Although this response is housed within a discourse of liberalism, I think that her or his philosophical framework is a significant finding in this study as it represents a bridge between modernist theories and assumptions and the valid postmodern critique related to privileging dominant narratives. Marsiglia and Kulis (2009) seem to agree advising that:

> Social workers cannot define for the community what social justice is or suggest the right steps to bring it about, but neither is it their role to remain neutral. Freire (1994) stated that 'claiming neutrality does not constitute neutrality; quite the contrary, it helps maintain the status quo' (p. 141).

So, as social workers, if we refuse to remain neutral and choose to drift towards an AOP framework of analysis and decision-making that service users, students, and colleagues may not agree with, where is the "line in the sand"- how far do we push, lead, or back down - before we run the risk of becoming oppressors ourselves? As I stated in my interview, I struggle with this balancing act in both my clinical practice and my teaching:

> *Interviewer:* How ethical is it for you to have a set ideology and impose it on others?
>
> I have to always try to recognize it. Like there's an author that talks about intellectual humility. I have to always kind of go, "There's a possibility I'm out to lunch". If I'm out to lunch on this then I have to be open to other ways of seeing the world. So I can't ever say I'm not consciously trying to move service users and students in my direction, I certainly am. But I try through my language and through my process to let them get there on their own in terms of critical thinking. So I drop hints but yeah you could argue that I'm just substituting one world view for the other and is it any better?
>
> *Interviewer:* As opposed to "is it any better", is it any more or any less oppressive?
>
> Yeah and I don't know, it may very well be. I don't know because people who disagree with this kind of analysis would say that I'm trying to indoctrinate and I think I am. But given that what are the pros and cons of doing that? If I'm trying to indoctrinate them to a point of view that I think is right, if I'm right, is there harm? If I'm wrong, yes it's harmful.

Clinical practice with service users who do not see oppression. As mentioned previously, not every service user will agree with an AOP analysis of her or his personal issues. Sometimes our efforts to help make people see oppression are unsuccessful. How do we then approach or intervene with service users if they refuse to accept that their personal troubles might be linked with external forces? Respondents' suggested the following approaches:

1. If you go back to validating that feeling, that's fine, they're there. I mean, it doesn't matter, you don't have to change that. But you talk about that and process it out and

acknowledge that where that's at. And then offer suggestions as potentially, that's what I mean by nudging this way or that, to say, "What about this, what about that". See if they agree with you and move forward from there.

2. I think about the clients we see which tend to be mostly women and so many women in my practice come to me who are completely numb to that and who if anything, have just blamed themselves for that feeling. So they might have an awareness of, "Yeah it feels bad" but they'll internalize that and say, "It's my fault", they'll pathologize. For me in my head I don't know where I would take that in practice because if you go with their world view then that would mean, not critically challenging them that it may not be their fault.

3. I'll say, "Sorry I can't collude with you to help you to live with an abuser cause I don't think that's in your best interest or the kids you have" or whatever it is and, "I can't go with you on that one and sorry you're in the wrong place to get that kind of service".

Summary

To summarize, when asked to articulate how they applied their theoretical understandings of oppression to social work practice, field instructors shared poignant service user stories, described social workers as witnesses and namers of oppression, identified six categories of service user oppression within clinical practice (with an emphasis on personal manifestations of oppression), compared social work practice with and without an AOP framework, discussed decision-making, and highlighted our ethical responsibility to choose the most humane, productive narrative for working with people and making social change. In addition, this section explored respondents' suggestions on how to help service users see oppression and how to work with people who do not see oppression as connected with their personal issues.

Walk Lightly and Carry a Big Stick

The following section assesses and analyzes the respondents': 1) social locations and identities and related privileges and entitlements; 2) recognition and identification of

their own oppressive attitudes and behaviours; 3) definitions and understandings of the intersectionality of privilege, power, and oppression and their applications to social work practice; and 4) suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor.

Assessing Social Locations and Identities

> One field instructor commented on the notion of treading heavily:
>
> It makes me wonder about times when I tread heavily without even being conscious of it. Because there is almost a sense of a process that when you automatically have privilege based on some characteristic you're not responsible for like birth or whatever, it's that lack of awareness. And that you can unconsciously oppress just by acting on your privilege and not being aware of it.

To discover where and how we tread heavily, Carniol (2005b) emphasizes the importance of "social workers assessing their own social locations" (p. 159). He also suggests "once social workers have assessed their own social locations, next steps include assessing the social location of the people we work with" (Carniol, 2005b, p. 159). In terms of their social locations, respondents in this study did demonstrate an awareness of what Ward (2007) calls, "the triad of race, class, and gender oppression, or 'triple jeopardy'" (p. 194).

On class. I would argue that Canadians rarely discuss or acknowledge the classist nature of our society. Leondar-Wright (2005) adds that:

> It's hard for us middle-class people to see our own class conditioning. Our lives are supposed to be the ideal to which low-income and working - class people should aspire. Get an education, work hard, play by the rules, and you'll get to be middle-class. This makes the particular nature of middle class conditioning, especially the harmful parts, invisible (p. 116).

In contrast, one particular respondent spoke about his or her experience of coming into Canada as an immigrant and a person of colour and realizing immediately how obviously classist Canada is:

> When I came to Canada for me it was pretty obvious that levels are very layered, low income, middle income, and higher income. And then you start to look at it, the majority the higher income, their kids have an opportunity to have a higher education so they maintain the system. And if you go into middle class, the majority they have middle-class thinking and their dreams are middle-class. And the lower end they barely have because they have a problem with drugs and alcohol like in other ones but the other ones they can cover it and the lower classes, it is very noticeable.

As summarized in table 1, the majority of this study's respondents could be classified as coming from a middle-class upbringing. Respondents did recognize that their middle-class upbringing had placed them in privileged positions in Western society. This recognition is demonstrated by the following statement:

> I consider myself privileged not individually but privileged not in a better than thou sense but in a whole. I have to appreciate more of what's happened and what I have or what I've been allowed to have. Not for the sake of possessing but for the safety. I mean wow I mean safety is like seems automatic. That's not in a lot of the world. So I guess trying to be a little more thankful for what I do have versus what I don't have because it appears we seem somewhat caught in our culture of what we don't have and what we could have and that striving towards working harder to get that. Which maybe is okay and maybe it isn't but I'm really questioning that more and more about whoa I've got a lot maybe I need to slow down and appreciate what I do have as opposed to be thinking about, "Okay I've got this now, what next"? So that process is going on. I was thinking the privilege of not worrying about food generally speaking, not worrying about shelter. I'm not saying everybody in this country is that way but the bulk I guess you can say, "How good's the food and how good's the shelter"? But that the basics for many in the country are met and I'm saying that's a privilege. It's like we are the privileged in the world but it doesn't seem like that sometimes when you live here because the neighbour has something nicer, bigger, better, and more time off or whatever. And so somehow you know it's easy to measure but I'm not saying everybody thinks that way. That's how I'm seeing it.

On being women of colour. Only two respondents described themselves as belonging to the working class or being poor in their families of origin and not surprisingly, both of these respondents were women of colour. Throughout the research interviews, these women's experiences and narratives seemed qualitatively different compared to the other

responses. These women specifically described and experienced their multiple oppressions "as layered, or additive" (Ward, 2007). For example, the following field instructor commented on her layered experience of being an immigrant and also being identified as "other" because of her race:

> We have some immigrants here but they are still White. So they still fit with the rest of them. But when you are immigrant and plus not White in this community. Yeesh!

On being a middle class woman. While it seems futile to debate about which oppression ranks as more destructive than the next, a sense of certain privileges trumping specific oppressions was noted in this study. One woman recognized that even though she had been sexually assaulted, her class, White, and heterosexual privileges had trumped her gender oppression:

> I was thinking yesterday, what have been some experiences where I felt oppressed? And it's funny because none automatically came to me. So, that's interesting, that as a woman, I feel like I am in a fairly privileged position. I am a single woman and in my professional career, I haven't really got tied down and have felt the freedom to be able to do lots of things. Whereas if I had children and a husband, it might not be so easy for me to become the person I am today so that's the BIGGEST thing that's at the forefront of my mind, my privilege. I feel really privileged to have this position that I have. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual social worker, I've experienced very little oppression in my own life, apart from patriarchy, and it would be misleading to say that because of the above experience (sexual assault sic), I know what it feels like on a day-in/day-out basis to live under oppression. It gives me only an inkling.

On being male. As previously mentioned, male respondents had extreme difficulty identifying any experiences of oppression. One field instructor did acknowledge his position of privilege as a white middle class able-bodied male within patriarchy:

> Again I go back to that idea that I had it reasonably well growing up and I have it VERY well as an adult. And I'm white, I'm male, I'm able bodied and a lot of that's come not because of my own hard work, but a lot of it was the cards that I was dealt. Playing a lot of poker lately with my kids and you just realize that royal flushes come one out of every 620,000 or something that you realize that some

> things are given to you and I think I've become more aware of how privileged my life has been. By listening to clients and listening to other people's stories about their growing up and how they got to where they are now, watching TV at night, reading novels and so on that has helped to reinforce for me that comparative to most of the rest of humanity, I've got it good. Again I go back to the idea that I had a reasonable good start in life, made some good choices myself and have had enough privilege and combination of hard work and other things to have created a life for myself which is really really good. It's made me grateful or appreciative of the things that were handed to me, a bit more humble about that.

Another field instructor spoke about how his white middle class privilege had trumped his experience of being a minority -a white child in a (specific race) school system:

> Not necessarily enjoyable experiences but at the same time it was maybe population or number wise we might have been in a minority in that context. Yet at the same time, people in authority or teachers, they were all white. We were sort of picked on, to a certain extent, but then at the same time we were sort of protected too. Because we had that kind of authority alliance so it's different. I wouldn't say I had the experience of being a minority in the same context cause as far as within the authority timelines or the authority figures that were there, they were definitely on our side.

Privilege, Power, and Oppression

Privilege and entitlement. Respondents recognized a sense of entitlement that came with their positions of privilege from their middle-class locations within Western capitalism. Allison (1994) defines entitlement as:

> a matter of feeling like 'we' rather than 'they'. You think you have a right to things, a place in the world, and it is so intrinsically a part of you that you cannot imagine people like me, people who seem to live in your world, who don't have it (p. 33).

One respondent commented on her or his participation in the North American hierarchy of privilege and class:

> Well I think by definition of who I am in this society, I participate in that, in ways that are probably unconscious to me....I believe that to the degree that we live in a capitalist North American society that uses 97% of the world's resources that I'm part of that whether I say I am or not. I mean that's just the way it is. So those

> changes in your life you can make at a personal level but you still have to acknowledge the larger context. I mean we're hugely wealthy here – hugely. And there are just so many issues internationally that are a reflection of how much that's an imbalance in our society.

One field instructor described what it was like when a social work student came into a (specific race) service organization with a sense of entitlement:

> Just even comments okay. Comments from someone who I think was not understanding cultural or was insensitive looking at life through their own lens and not being sensitive to what others may experience. And I think that's part of oppression, having a sort of a sense of *entitlement*. Like coming in to the organization and having a sense of entitlement, just an expectation that things will just sort of fall into their lap? And this was a (specific race sic) person. And he/she had made some comments that were, well I was very offended by one and there were other people who were offended just by some of his/her behaviors and an attitude that she/he was displaying. That was the hard part to explain to her/him. That it was sort of an attitude that when people put a name to it words like condescending came up and another one was entitlement. So this person had come in and wasn't asking basically for materials or whatever but just sort of demanding. That was one of the things that happened and I saw this as being again a combination of things in this particular person that sense of entitlement because being very new but not asking and just saying to people, "Go photocopy this for me" or this or that and without that sense of humility…Cautious is the word and this I wasn't seeing that happen nor from the feedback that I got from other people were they seeing that happen. People were thinking she/he was very pushy I guess. Like this person's sense of entitlement coming into the organization. I think that's oppressive.

Does this sense of entitlement for people with privilege cause them to automatically be oppressive? Does it logically follow then that in order to keep what we have, we have to oppress others and ignore inequality? From the interviews, there was recognition that our privilege has global impact, that is, the notion that "more we have, the less others have". When questioned about the above notion, that privilege and oppressive behaviours are automatically linked, one respondent remarked:

> I'm beginning to believe that more and more by the mere fact that I have, somebody else has less. Is what I have, is that in fact oppressing someone else? And maybe I have some responsibility to find out about that versus just saying, "Hey nobody told

> me. It doesn't say on here made by people who are getting ripped off. Shitty wages or doesn't tell me anything about it and I don't want to know". Yeah I'm in that place a lot of the time but I'm beginning to think more and more maybe that I'm omitting a whole part of my responsibility by being in that place because I'm just thinking of me? And I want the best deal on the best thing and that's a GOOD consumer? That's a GOOD value, you're looking after what you should look after. Well hold it now maybe that value isn't a good value. Maybe that value used to be a good value but maybe in fact my holding a historical value of go get the best deal, maybe in fact, you're saying by doing that you're oppressing someone if we want to, since we're on the topic of oppression. In fact, I'm beginning to think that that's probably more true than it isn't.

One respondent also mentioned that privilege sometimes acted as a buffer protecting her or him from seeing, knowing, and experiencing oppression:

> Those who have, feel entitled to it, and above and somehow safer than those below us. It's like we unconsciously keep them down, perhaps because we know how precious our own position is. We fear what they live, so we push them away and further down and blame them for their place in society. I think it's despicable and I try on every and any occasion, to point out these types of attitudes and to be very aware of what I may be doing or saying with my actions.

Power. In this study, most respondents agreed with Hick and Pozzuto (2005) that: "Whatever its form, critical social work is concerned with the power imbalance that exists between workers and clients and seeks constructive methods for addressing it" (p. xii). How did these field instructors define and understand power? One respondent stated that there are only two kinds of people, "those who are kind of 'being oppressed' and those who are carrying the power." Another respondent also expressed this binary relationship saying that, "overt covert oppression is where somebody with more power does something to someone with less power, with or without intent."

As social workers, we cannot ignore the power we own or the implications of the uses of this power. Indeed, Raheim (2002) emphasizes that "an understanding of this oppression-power-privilege dynamic is essential for practitioners to engage in the power

analysis that empowerment practice demands" (p. 101). One respondent clearly recognized her or his power in the clinical relationship:

> Whether that's kicked out of school or within a juvenile justice system or whether you're dealing with a student or whatever that might be, they're technically not in a power role, you are in the power role. And for you not to be aware of it and use it appropriately I think is unethical…we're back in the power role now. We have the potential and I've seen that like iatrogenic injury causing more harm to good… just because you give and the power language here, you "GIVE" the client an opportunity to be equal, doesn't mean that the client becomes equal. The client is not equal.

Social control and power. Throughout the research study, field instructors spoke extensively about their recognition of the risk of them becoming oppressive because of their roles as social workers, their privileges, and their power within systems and over service users. The field instructors discussed the complexity of inhabiting and performing multiple roles within social work. The following response reflects the complexity of the multiplicity of our roles ranging from social change agent and liberator to social control agent and policing:

> The place where I show up perhaps as the oppressor is where there is a dependency relationship where the perpetrator is living with the vulnerable adult, is economically dependent on that person, has sort of set their life up around exploiting this other person. The other person is not really able for whatever reason to stand up to that and say, "I don't like it, I don't want it, you've got to stop that". And so there is this balance and sometimes that person will be dependent in some way on the abuser. And so you've got this balance that's struck and it may have been going on for a long time. And there are relationships involved there that even though things that are going on in that household may be very unhealthy and not in the best interest of either person if you look at it in more global terms but for them there's the exploitation that occurring and that's not good but there's also a relationship. And that may be about the only relationship that vulnerable adult has too so you have to be so careful. But where I show up and start moving into that and separating the exploitation from the relationship and let's say the public trustee comes in and takes over in that situation. Well then the money is no longer available to this abusive person, what do they do? Do they leave the relationship? Often they do if there's nothing economically to be had anymore then their motivation for being

> there is gone. And so they just kind of evaporate. The vulnerable adult's experience of that is one of abandonment. And so what have I done there?

As most social workers know, this protecting service users against their wishes is one of the most difficult aspects of social work practice:

> We practice in a setting where we're expected to intervene in adult guardianship cases. And when that happens I mean you do often go against the wishes of people. And you're often just kind of just going over people heads. Saying, "No, this is not acceptable, this has to change, it's going to change right now". It's always a very uncomfortable place for me to be. Even though I appreciate sort of the spirit and the intent of the adult guardianship legislation I think it's pretty decent legislation in that it really does bend over backwards outlining and protecting human rights. But still the way it kind of boils out on the front-line is that you often end up just stopping people. And sometimes I mean it's for their own protection. And so you can look at it from your objective or maybe subjective reality and say, "Well this is for this person's own good and even though they can't quite understand that".

Obviously, child protection work is similar to adult guardianship work in its potential to be oppressive. Respondents agreed that it was difficult to apply AOP approaches while having to perform these gatekeeping or social control roles within traditional institutions. Strega (2007) admits that, "Child welfare is a particularly challenging field in which to practice anti- oppressively" (p. 72). This respondent agrees:

> The child protection system has oppressed certain people and not all and not general but some people some of the time. And talking with them, I can feel what I've called oppressive stances that they've had or what they might feel – very disempowered, not heard, not respected, those kinds of things.

Women and Power. The female respondents in this study expressed discomfort with the power that social work positions invite. They specifically reported struggling with this issue. As Rebick (2009) states, this is not unusual for women:

> Many of us don't like to admit we have power, and because most of us don't recognize power, we tend to exercise it badly. Both the tendency to refuse to recognize leadership on the one hand or eating the leader on the other were problems in the women's movement (p. 158).

In particular, the female field instructors also expressed a desire not to repeat and perpetuate traditional oppressive power practices. Caputi (2003) stresses that it is important for, "women to attain, define, and exercise power in ways that do not recapitulate the traditional model of force, domination, and control, naming and education are essential" (p. x).

Power-over. The respondents acknowledged that with power comes rights, responsibilities, and the need for ethical decision-making. As part of their ethical stances, respondents claimed that, for the most part, they only used power-over as a last resort. As mentioned previously, Starhawk (1987) links power-over with domination, oppression, and exploitation and emphasizes how this type of power is divisive and reinforces obedience in patriarchy. Two respondents suggested that (self) awareness was key to minimizing the use of power-over in their own work:

1. I'm particularly aware or try to be aware in terms of the work setting. Given that potentially there's a differential in terms of the power base with the work that I do. So I try to at least be aware of that and try not to be influential in that way at all.
2. I guess an attempt to be aware of how I am and how I'm coming across. Am I trying to do this to someone, to sort of power over them, to get what I want or am I trying to be sensitive of what it appears their needs are or what I learn their needs are?

Empowerment. Respondents also indicated that empowerment was an integral part of their social work practice. The following narrative describes how one field instructor uses empowerment in her or his social work assessments and interventions:

> To coin a well overused cliché to empower or to help empower people to take their own stand. My goal in counseling is to help people walk out feeling that they can handle it, that they're capable of dealing with their world, and their oppressions and their challenges that happen in their lives. I don't want them to depend on me or anyone else. I like to think that they're going to walk out feeling capable, feeling good about themselves, so that they can take these things on. I always frame it as,

> "When you walk out this door you will have more information and awareness and more power to make the decisions that you are going to make. And I'm not going to tell you what decisions you're going to make, you're just going to have more information and more knowledge so that you will have more power to make the decisions that you will make". So hopefully that empowers the young person to face that oppression themselves and make their own choices about whether or not they're gonna smoke on school property.

Oppression and Oppressors

The following section explores respondents' personal experiences of being oppressive and their thinking about why people become oppressors. It concludes with a summary of respondents' suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor.

The Process of Becoming an Oppressor

It seems clear that the use of power and the concept of oppression are inextricably linked. In addition, consistent with the literature, these field instructors seem well-intended in terms of trying to identify and recognize oppression and the negative use of power in their personal and professional lives (Ellsworth, 1989; Razack, 1999). Furthermore, the field instructors suggested that the explicit identification and recognition of oppressive structures and power dynamics were enough to stop them from becoming oppressors in their professional lives and personal lives. In the following section, I want to look at the accuracy of this belief and examine the process of becoming an oppressor.

Personal experiences of being oppressive. I was curious if the field instructors would identify any personal experiences of being oppressive or being complicit with oppression. It seems likely to me given our socialization into capitalism, racism, and patriarchy, etc., that at some point in our lives, most of us have acted in an oppressive

manner. Most respondents did report a recognition that they sometimes acted in oppressive ways. Two field instructors shared the following comments:

1. But again we do it in one way or another. We oppress in one way or another. By criticizing, by minimizing, we oppress.

2. Well I look at my own life and I have to realize I have moved along way from being what I call really outside the box to going more and more within a main stream system and looking and feeling quite mainstream. So I can see these gradations of compromise that have happened. And it hasn't all been an unhappy experience but I'm just very conscious of that. So to the degree that I participate in that collectively I think there's probably lots of oppression that is part of that, that I'm not even aware of.

Recognition of oppressor within. Interestingly, two respondents denied any experiences of being oppressive to others. The fact that two respondents did not recognize this made me wonder if oppressors are conscious of their oppressive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours? I asked the field instructors, "Do you think oppressors are aware that they're oppressing?" The following responses were received:

1. Often oppressors aren't aware that they are oppressing and the oppressed aren't aware that they're being oppressed or that there is an element of internalized oppression.

2. Once I am aware that I can be oppressive then I am responsible then to resist that right in my head. And so it's a lot easier if you are not aware of it. You could just do whatever you want. And go, "Whoop". And so it's much harder when you're aware of it and yes so I am very aware with my kids about how I'm oppressive. I also know that I'm probably blind to ways that I'm oppressive to moving to the upper middle class. I mean the privilege I have. I may be oppressive in ways I'm not aware of that play out unconsciously or whatever…If it's a continuum that we're all on of course then I have to be oppressive without knowing it. Just in maybe my ways of being, my ways of talking, I always try to solicit feedback about that particularly with clients around, "Is there something happening I'm unaware of"? But I find they're very reluctant to give me that feedback. So it's hard to find out that because nobody tells you.

3. It's hard to believe that someone beating up his wife doesn't know that that's wrong. I mean there are some fundamental human instincts that kick in.

How do we become oppressors? During the interviews, I was interested in exploring how the respondents would explain why and how people become oppressors?

Oppressive attitudes. Two respondents emphasized the experience of newfound authority and the reluctance to surrender power:

1. It has to do with having not had power and then gaining some power. So that goes to their head or it gives them the authority or the ability to experience power that they've never had before. And so because they have that sort of license now to do power, I don't know what other way to say it, that they take advantage of that. It happens on many levels. I think it happens just through behaviors. I think it happens through yeah just how one is treated. And so there are subtle messages.

2. Oppression is easy to spot but tough to effectively address, as the power differential is real. Even in service-based settings, the identification of oppression is not popular and not without risk. When "the system" is empowered to do something good, like deliver health care, and someone comes along to challenge or question that power, the threat is inherent that any modification of the power will result in less capacity to do good. Of course, this is all subjectively filtered through many individuals in the bureaucracy, and each person's construction will vary, but the bottom-line is generally a reluctance to surrender the power, and a reluctance to surrender the control over the construction of the dominant narrative of what is good.

One respondent indicates below that sometimes her or his AOP values and beliefs conflicted with getting her or his own needs met:

> Sometimes that can be very tricky for you because if you are against oppression and sometimes you blind yourself and you don't see the right thing to do that some we have to be honest…sometimes we do acts that maybe are not totally appropriate and then really have to look at myself, "Okay what am I doing, is this for my own personal purpose or is totally part of my values and beliefs"? Because gee you can get lost.

When explored further, the respondent above linked his or her oppressive behaviours with the choice to put his or her needs first, stating:

> Yeah, I guess you have to look after yourself by any means… I can say that I don't in a negative way but I'm pretty sure I do certain things that make other feel people oppressed and totally I'm blindsided on that and gee shame on me. When I say shame on me because I need to be cognitive about this.

Internalized domination. Two other respondents highlighted the process of what Mullaly (2010) calls internalized domination as a causal factor:

1. People can internalize I think all kinds of stuff both in ways that protect them from the harmful aspects of that. So for example, a boy who has been beaten by his father may in a way of trying to deal with the internalization of the father and say, "I am actually not a helpless young boy who has had the crap beat out of me. I am actually like him and I am tough too and I am going to go and beat the crap out of other people".

2. I do know that being in a very highly conservative religious background and then going into social work that you can very easily become the oppressor – very easily. Because you just get impatient. It's like with parents when we put all these people in to help them do parenting skills, and life skills and whatever it might be. It's great while the people are there helping but the minute they leave, you revert back to what you've known. I think that as much as we might educate ourselves, it's so easy to just revert back to patterns or whatever. Cause I think that most people act in relationships, not from an educated style, but from an inherited style.

Parenting as oppression 101. Although some respondents had difficulty identifying when they had been oppressive within their own social work practice, almost all of the field instructors identified oppressive instincts and behaviours, at the personal level, within familial relationships and parenting. Correspondingly, they also located the beginnings of power, power-over, and powerlessness as originating from their families of origin. This finding is supported by Bishop (2002) as she realized that, "children's experience of powerlessness at the hands of adults it is so common, world-wide, that it passes for normal" (p. 63).

In particular, thinking about oppressive parenting seemed to strike a chord with the participants. As one field instructor stated:

> I think being a parent is the 101 of being an oppressor. When I reflect on some interactions I have with my kids, I just wonder why I do things, or why I did that or why I was being so bossy or controlling or whatever which I think again is dimensions of oppression. That's a kind of small example of ways which you can use your size, your power, your adulthood to take over, you think that you know

> better, then take away their autonomy, their sense of planning for themselves, and who they are and what they need to do and so on. I think being a parent you could be the most oppressive person in the world or you can not be. It's a very very challenging role. I think being a parent probably is good training as well for understanding this stuff, understanding the harmful effects of being oppressive, being a bully or being overbearing or over-controlling or all those things.

One of the participants who had experienced an abusive marriage worried about the impact of oppressive parenting on her or his child:

> I think I was more the oppressor than the oppressed because I was taking out my internalized messages of not being good enough or whatever through him/her. I wasn't physically beating him/her or anything but I was definitely neglectful. And wrapped up in my own pain, I wasn't conscious of his/her needs. I feel regret, remorse, sadness and that's the one area I'm very conscious of that is still the biggest piece of my healing that still is outstanding and it just seems to always be there and I don't know that it will ever be healed. Thinking now in my personal life and before when I was still in my, what'll I call my previous life basically when things were not clear to me and where I was engaging in self- destructive behaviors, and having my own children in that environment. I think I was oppressive to my child based on my internalized oppression. I think it was because it didn't allow him/her to flourish to be the person that he/she could be so it had to be oppressive. Yeah because it was taking away the stuff that he/she was entitled to, like the nurturing and the promotion of self growth and all of that.

I also noticed in the interviews that almost every parent laughed nervously as they identified themselves as oppressive to their children. I think that it is particularly difficult in Western society, especially within capitalism and patriarchy, to find models of family making and parenting that are not oppressive. As social workers, I think that this nervous laughter is our recognition of the contradictions between our professional social work beliefs and the specific types of controlling parenting that we actually do. One respondent summarized this contradiction:

> I know that there are times that I'm uncomfortable with that because in my heart I truly believe that I know what's best for them. I mean they're my children the decisions that I make about safety, and protection, and continued opportunity, don't shut this door because it reduces the amount of choice that you have in life. Can I really apply an empowering approach that I would use at work? Can I really talk to

> my kids that way, can I outline the choices, can I "give" in quotes, give them, responsibility for those kinds of choices and actually follow it through? I had the experience within family on numerous occasions of being identified as the oppressor or identified as the kind of carrier of the power. It's not fun, humbling.

Respondents' Suggestions: How to Avoid Becoming an Oppressor

Respondents expressed a desire to avoid oppressing others. They shared examples of how they attempted to avoid becoming oppressors in their personal and professional lives. Awareness, empathy, and sensitivity were highlighted by the following respondents:

1. In the last ten years of my life, I have been very aware of opportunities to oppress and I really fought that. I resisted that. And really tried to acknowledge and take responsibility for those aspects of my personality. Put them out there and say, "Here's what I am. I can be controlling, I can be this and this but I'm trying not to be". And really naming that and trying to put it out there so that I can really work on that.

2. My understanding of oppression with my child would be that I feel for the most part that I'm in control of what I do of how I handle my emotions, anger, and how that might look to him/ her and I pay attention to her/his cues when he/she's got that look of terror on her/his face. You know if I've raised my voice or something. I think to the best of my ability, I think I'm aware what that's like for him/her knowing what that's like for me so I'm always again coming back to my experience with oppression and empathizing with the other person, with my child and try and hopefully that helps guide our conflicts and disciplinary actions and things like that.

Not jumping to conclusions, always trying to collaborate, respecting colleagues, and knowledge about the operations of power were also mentioned as important to avoid becoming an oppressor. This respondent also spoke about his or her management style and how he or she tries to avoid oppressing his or her staff:

> If we're talking about the staff that I work with primarily steps initially I would take would be one of trying to be respectful of and understanding the situations that the staff find themselves in uniqueness one to another, having some understanding of what people wish to share with me, be respectful of that, trying to together find ways that we can meet desires and needs of staff, at the same time understanding what the expectations are in terms of the work that we're doing. Through dialogue and trying to lay a foundation of respect and of openness with one another both on

> an individual level and then across the board as the staff. So I think that's my style and that's how I try to and that would be the way.

Trying other ways of thinking, doing, and being -broadening perspectives- were also suggested by this respondent:

> You have to come up with other ways. Because you don't have other ways. Then in desperation you go back to whatever made you may think worked in the past. I came up with an idea a few years that whatever I felt like doing, I'd better not do that. Do the opposite.

Further study analysis suggested that respondents believed that knowledge and awareness were enough to stop them from becoming oppressive:

> I guess the more we are aware and own what it is we do and understand why we do what we do and if we could own why we ask certain questions or chose to impose certain things and we know where that fits for us. It's when we don't and we're just doing, that I think we're a danger. Now that's making an assumption that it's in everyone's best interests not to be used and abused. That would be an assumption.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter examined the respondents' understandings and narratives of oppression and their application to social work practice. The second section assessed and analyzed the respondents' social locations and identities and related privileges and entitlements, reviewed their definitions and understandings of power and their applications to social work practice, explored the process of becoming oppressors, and discussed respondents' suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor. As mentioned earlier, the respondents present as well-intended and believe that consciousness of oppression, sensitivity, and good intentions are enough to stop them from becoming oppressors in both their personal and professional lives. However, as one respondent noted, the subject continues to be open for debate:

As a result of our conversation, I'm aware that there are a lot of things I'm not aware of on a regular normal kind of conversational level. I just am operating assuming that my own benevolence is enough to take me through that my own value structure is enough to say that I'm empowering versus oppressing. I don't know.

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion: Resistance Work

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".
(Margaret Mead, reference unknown)

Once oppression is seen or recognized, social workers then have to make a decision about whether to act or not and specifically, decide what actions they should take to resist oppression. What does acting to make change mean to these social work field instructors in their personal and professional lives? In an attempt to answer this question, the following section explores what I call resistance work. In this chapter, the research findings and discussion related to the social work field instructors' practices of resistance, the joys and challenges of resisting, social systems and agencies, and teams, and their responses to system backlash and oppression are highlighted.

Getting Ready To Act

As a starting place to exploring resistance, I was interested in how these social work field instructors in the study responded to their own experiences of oppression and the actions they took to assist themselves and service users to overcome oppression. In other words, before we are able to act, to resist, and make change, we have to be ready. Mullaly (2010) notes that many oppressed individuals and groups tend to evolve through a liberation process ranging from intra-psychic healing and grieving, building strengths and developing solidarity, naming and developing their own interpretations of oppressive conditions, and acting to change individual, group, and cultural, social ,and psychological patterns. What were the respondents' processes in terms of moving from the recognition of oppression, to decision-making, to acting to make change? To examine this area, the

following will be explored: preparation for resistance, social work practice and resistance, and barriers to action and resistance.

Preparation For Resistance

Respondents detailed a process that I call "preparation for resistance" which included: shock and disbelief; anger; being silenced; reacting to the oppression of others; and changing perspectives. Each item is explored below with supporting comments from social work field instructors who participated in the study.

Shock and disbelief. First, respondents described a series of emotional reactions to their own oppression. For instance, two field instructors reported:

1. Initial shock and disbelief, followed by intense anger.

2. What I felt was powerless. I felt disrespected for my beliefs and values which I hold to be true to the core values and principles of social work. I felt unimportant and that my opinion did not matter on this topic, on both levels at the workshop and the workplace. I felt incapable as if I did not know the balance of confidentiality and harm and that there was an immediate assumption that only the policy makers and decision makers "know" the practice of social work. I felt beaten down. I believed that when it came down to certain positions, at certain levels, it really doesn't matter what my opinion is. Those who hold the power in this field get the final say.

Anger. Anger also seemed to be a common reaction to oppressive experiences:

1. Angry for one. Silenced which feels like, frustrated. I think that it felt very powerless cause I talked about something that I should have definitely been involved in the conversation and for that instantly come out in that meeting without us having a conversation about that. So it FELT disrespectful as well.

2. I guess that feeling wise what comes to mind for me is just frustration, anger, and fear. But I do remember being really angry about that, just because I was male, I wasn't going to be able to perform or not that I even necessarily wanted to. I mean there wasn't even a role to perform it was just part of the dynamics of the group at that time and her comment. I remember just being very angry about this.

One field instructor spoke about swinging to extreme anger for a period of time before she or he was able to return to some balance in her or his thinking and feeling:

> Then I became very angry and just angry for what had happened, for the oppression that had happened to (specific race sic) people and for the loss of everything. And just became so angry at that so that was from the extreme. Now I'm in a place and I don't know how long it took but it eventually balanced out and it levelled out and it's like okay. Today I'm not angry about it.

Being silenced. Field instructors spoke about being silenced, frozen, or stuck after their oppression experience:

1. The biggest thing when I'M personally oppressed, is the silence that comes with it. My first response is I get very angry and I do get silenced.

2. They were ALL silenced. I think everybody just kind of went (facial expression of distaste sic) and the whole meeting though was a bit bizarre, the whole dynamics were a bit bizarre, and people were making decisions all over the place. I just felt that the energy was really strange and I haven't quite figured THAT piece out because decisions that were made are now coming back to me and people are now saying that that shouldn't have been the decision so I don't think people were really present. I don't think they were really invested in the decision. They didn't really give a shit. It basically just shut everybody up.

Reacting to the oppression of others. Respondents also described similar reactions and feelings when they witnessed the oppression of others:

1. I felt extremely frustrated, powerless, doubting myself and shocked. I was thinking that this couldn't really be happening and they would let me out. I was regretting going to the station to help my friend. That feeling powerless is a horrible feeling that I do not want to experience again.

2. Anger. REALLY big time anger. And the loss of creativity and talent that occurs when people are in that situation.

Changing perspectives. After initial emotional reactions, respondents reported that over time, a change of thinking or perspective (a common theme in these research findings) assisted them to respond to their oppression. They reported that these initial reactions and feelings eventually led to a need or drive to respond:

1. Part of what helped me through this process is having a knowledge base to say, "Okay that guy is a jackass and he's doing that because he's doing this to feed his own ego because he has to look smart in front of these other people because he runs this agency".

2. Now when I'm an adult I say, "Well I think is not about me, it is the other person". Of course, it hurts. Right from the beginning – ouch. But then later on, I rationalize and intellectualize, and I really understand that they don't have one clue.

Personal Qualities of Resistance

What are the qualities of the people who tend to act or resist? Is there something specific to the individual- personality, family background, training, privilege, and so on- that might make a person more likely to act? In this study's findings, a vision about the type of society people want, fundamental beliefs about human rights, a social work knowledge base, a sense of optimism and patience, early politicization and previous social justice and action involvement, family background, personality, identity, and personal experiences of otherness, oppression, and abuse were identified as common characteristics in the respondents who chose to act and resist. As support to these findings, Shragge (2003) also found that community activists tended to share family background, personal experiences of activism or volunteering, education, frustrating or negative experiences, oppression, and becoming paid workers in a social organization. He concluded that the best educator for resistance work is a combination of experience and action.

I was curious about resistors. In my own life, I have often wondered why I tend to react to or notice conditions as oppressive while others remain silent? Is there something about resistance workers- our families, cultures, and life experiences-that prepare us differently, where oppressive structures are somehow more easily unveiled? Significant personal qualities of resistance will be explored below, through the voices of the study

participants, including: vision; type of society; social work knowledge base; optimism and patience; pre-radicalization; identity; personality traits; socialization; families of origin; and experiences of "otherness".

Vision. In developing new constructions of our understandings of the concepts of oppression and resistance, it is important for us to have a dialogue about the vision(s) we are moving toward. Respondents who saw themselves as resistors in this study articulated a vision of the type of society in which they would like to live. As such, visioning seems an important exercise in the resistance enterprise**.** This respondent shared the following vision for the transformation of society:

> That the end place isn't what I can imagine because I don't have the ability to imagine it yet. But if people evolve their critical thinking and evolve their understanding of the way we organize societies, if we at least try alternatives maybe we try enough that we get to a point where we go, "Here's different language that works better. There's a different way of thinking about humanity, there's a way of doing collective or cooperative stuff that works better". And then from there maybe we find the language or the tools. I don't have them right now but maybe society can as it evolves. With a goal of if we change the way we arrange society and we eliminate things like poverty and we eliminate things like patriarchy and power over, that eventually we move to a place where kids aren't assaulted, that people aren't hurt.

Type of society. Resistors also shared fundamental beliefs about the kind of society that we should live in, basic human rights, and the obligation to make the world a better place:

1. "Canada isn't supposed to be like this". There seems to be a widening gulf between rich and poor - largely due to a decade or more of neo-conservatism pro-business policies. The question this raises for me is - How much WILL we tolerate and accept before we no longer tolerate, but take action toward change. It seems, I and we are, sadly, not there yet.

2. I believe that my client could lead a productive happy life if we provided a few well-placed resources for him/her. I believe that to provide these opportunities and resources is the right thing to do and that not doing so is wrong. I believe that the

> quality of society is measurable by how the most vulnerable citizens are treated. I think that when given other options people tend to choose the better way. I believe the process is slow, but a single incident can create a profound difference, if addressed.

Social work knowledge base. A social work knowledge base, specific to responding to oppression, was also seen as invaluable. In other words, visioning alone was viewed by the field instructors as insufficient and needed to be linked with appropriate knowledge. Indeed, activists are most effective when we, "know what we are talking about" (Shaw, 1996, p. 229). As one respondent explained:

> Hey I put in four years or five years altogether and worked really hard and accomplished something I'm very proud of. On the other side of the track, I feel having that education helped boost me up over a certain line. So feeling about that – proud, less helpless, more opportunities, more capable, able, a little more able because of education. So that is the difference between those who are educated and those who aren't.

Optimism and patience. Along with vision about types of society, beliefs about basic human rights, and a specific social work knowledge base, resistors also reported having a sense of optimism and patience. These qualities were seen as essential to resistance practice:

1. I think there are challenges to it and I think the challenges in many ways are increasing. It's getting more difficult if I look at my working career say the last 20 years, I have some concern about, are we heading the right direction or not? But overall I believe that we are and do believe that we do make a difference. Not to expect change necessarily to be forthcoming overnight but that's not a reason to give the fight up. So be patient and be optimistic that things over time will change. I'm optimistic that things will change and things will balance themselves again. I really think that there's a pendulum swing that goes back and forth and sadly I think that we're in a swing right now that's further and further to the right. But I do think that if there are people who do have a social conscience and continue to find ways to articulate that, then again policies will begin to shift backward and move to more a balanced equation. But patience I think is the key.

2. If more people stand up something's going to happen. I believe nationally and internationally we're going to have a major movement. I can feel it in my bones.

Because everywhere is oppression, everywhere is poor. But why is poor and why people getting all rich, something is wrong with this picture.

3. Social policy change and social attitude so you've got one person who's maybe, well look at MADD, I believe it was started by one of the mothers whose child died from drunk driving and man, she took it on. She created this HUGE movement that now is beginning to change social attitudes. So that's a good example I think of the question of, "Are we changing it"?

Pre-radicalization. Brown (1988) writes about social work students who are "pre-radicalized". He claims that there is something about certain students or their backgrounds that predisposes them to think critically, to see oppression, and to act upon the world to make change (i.e., praxis). For pre-radicalized field instructors, early politicization and previous social justice and action involvement were seen as central to resistance:

1. Long before I ever became involved in any academic work. I went back to school as an older adult –mature student is what they call it. And prior to that I'd been involved through social justice groups and particularly through church which was my background. Dealt with a lot of social justice issues in developing countries and also even right here in Canada. Raising awareness and what not. So I would think that probably in my 20s, I would have started to have a growing awareness of that.

2. I was in non-profits before going in and then I had to make a conscious choice. Even in the beginning of when I did my first degree is because I think I was one of those pre-radicalized people that just for whatever reason was able to see things through that lens.

Identity. Who we are, our sense of identity or multiple identities and in particular, our sense of what social work is about are seen as key by field instructors in terms of the decision-making to act and resist. Respondents saw their resistance as congruent with their sense of professional identity:

1. It is part of who I am and the reason that I chose this profession.

2. That's part of the thing that drove me into social work, I remember being the guy that would stick up for the underdog, or the person that was getting picked on, like I was in the whatever it's called – cool crowd. And people would get isolated out within different social settings. I'd be the guy to kind of help that guy out. He might get pushed but then it would stop at that point say, "What are you doing?" to the guy that's doing it. And he'd be my friend or I might not hang out with him now but he'd be in that kind of crowd within the high school setting.

Personality traits. In contrast, two respondents mentioned personality traits that tended to stop or delay their decision-making and action:

1. Part of that is just my personality. I am not one to really rock the boat; I don't feel comfortable in creating dissonance a lot in my environment.
2. Yeah it's probably not within my style to be quite that confrontational.

Socialization. Socialization from within dominant social and cultural institutions like families, schools, churches, community, culture, and nation impacted the respondents' decisions and choices to act and resist. The following respondent offered her or his view of socialization and how these experiences contributed to her or his decision-making about action and resistance:

> I guess the whole system. Each of us how we can contribute by the way that we teach our kids, by the way that we perform our job, by the way we persistently permit other person maintain that status. From churches to institutions and even if you go to the store. I mean you go to the mall. And if they don't see you well-dressed or sort of a peer they're going to treat you the way that they see you. Where you coming from, how you been taught, how everything is. So we learn when we are a child we don't question it at the beginning. Cause I used to question a lot since as a child my mom always say, "You should be a lawyer". I always have to question, I always have to be inquisitive about things that don't make sense.

Families of origin. Like strategies of power, respondents identified their families of origin as being central to the development of their identities, values, and beliefs. Some people learned resistance strategies which frame what might be called a "culture of resistance" from within their families, communities, and cultures:

1. My parent is a social worker, comes from a social work background. As far as those types of values or ethical values as far as human beings go and different things like that, was definitely kind of bred into us as far as an environmental context to stick up for yourself but at the same time be aware of components that are going on in social context too. Whether it's an advocacy role or understanding or empathy or validation or acknowledgement whatever those labels are now, we were automatically doing them. We were brought up to do that, within those contexts. I think that was a large component.

2. Cousins of mine they were part of the (year) movement so…they have to hide themselves some of them they have to get into the sewer line and some of them they request people help them and they open the doors and help them. And in (year) my grandma personally opened the door to some of this unit that they were requesting assistance.

Respondents also reported personal experiences of oppression and abuse within their families of origin. In addition, two of the female field instructors had experienced abusive marriages. These abuse experiences were seen as influencing the respondents' thinking, beliefs, and decisions, even sometimes, inhibiting their ability and inclination to resist:

1. In hindsight I guess. Well at the time I knew that this wasn't good. I knew that it wasn't, yeah I knew that it wasn't good. See my ex-husband was really oppressive. And discriminating and stuff as well and I sort of allowed that to happen, I didn't stand up for my child.

2. The one thing I want to add about me and oppression is, I talked about going to that anger place of being angry, and my family doesn't do anger well at all, doesn't do conflict well, and so I think for me that's a key piece in how I deal with conflict or oppression or whatever.

Experiences of "otherness". Experiences of being situated and identified as "other" seemed to be significant contributors to the field instructors' decision-making processes in terms of choosing to act. One could argue that these "politics of difference" (Young, 1990) teach people to survive and resist within dominant systems. As one field instructor explained:

> A lot of us have been raised to not be really aggressive and so that's conflicting in this society because that's seen as valuable. Where for people who have grown up, where that wasn't valued and in fact that was really discouraged, and humility was more taught. That's a real area to struggle with and that's what popped up for me. I'm pretty acculturated in terms of levels or degrees of acculturation. Had those earlier influences from my grandparents and my father till he died. So a lot of the learning that I had was really sort of ingrained from a young age which created a lot of conflict for me out in the real world.

Social Work Practice and Resistance

In the vernacular of Western society and in social work practice, the word resistance is frequently used to describe difficult people or service users. Indeed, one often hears social workers talking about "resistant clients". One respondent expressed anger about this practice in social work:

> I've heard it said where that person isn't doing what they're supposed to be doing because they're being resistant, because they're being defiant, because it's all about that PERSON. Well maybe it's not about that person. Maybe it's about the worker, maybe it's about coming at the person in the same way that person has experienced oppression in the past and taking away rights or whatever.

In contrast to this traditional definition of resistance, I wanted to explore resistance as deliberate social, cultural, and political acts to make social change. The Canadian Social Work Code of Ethics clearly states that we have an obligation to make change when we see social injustice (2005). Respondents agreed that a call to action to make change and resist are congruent with our social work code of ethics and values:

1. Ultimately go back to your values and ethics and social work stuff and you're going to be alright. You are supposed to help out the people that are being oppressed and not perpetuate it yourself.
2. The whole premise of our profession is built on the notion that there are injustices and that we're to challenge injustices when we see them and to make efforts to toward a more egalitarian broader-based fairer just system.

Indeed, Hoefer (2006) agrees finding that:

> The major reasons social workers are involved in advocacy are because of personal values, professional responsibility and they like to see things change (Ezell,1993, 89)…Values related to working for social justice include a strong sense of fairness, feeling that people should try to make a difference in the world, and often a religious background that emphasizes the quality and importance of all persons (pp. 40 -43).

Choice of profession. For this particular group of field instructors, in this study, their choice of profession seems to be connected to their personal experiences of oppression, reflection, perspective, experience and knowledge over time, and the desire to act to make social change. Here are three examples of typical responses from respondents:

1. I think social workers are people who come to social work because their orientation to life defines that for them. I don't think it's the social work curriculum that makes you a social worker. I think it just gives you the tools so that you can then use whatever it is that you are as a person to work with. It gives you that framework.

2. I understand it and this is why I do the work that I do is to somehow help the communities and the people to heal in whatever way that I can do that. It's such a part of who I am. I am starting to think that this is almost a defining feature of our social work identity that makes us different in philosophy and in nature than maybe some of the other helping professions.

3. A hypothesis that just struck me was that maybe those of us – because I always had that strong sense of justice and injustice from as early as I can remember. And I wonder if that made me more open to seeing oppression at later life or is that what draws us to social work in the end, like that link of just feeling that from an early age? I knew that the jobs I had that weren't related to people work were not satisfactory, didn't last long. They died pretty quickly in terms of my interest.

Social Work Clinical Resistance Skills

It is important for the social work profession to determine the best ways to educate and assist social workers to develop practical clinical skills for resistance. One respondent correctly acknowledged that, "I don't think that there's a set formula. There isn't necessarily one particular way of looking at it". Barnoff and Coleman (2007) concur adding that, "It is important that workers do not force people to adopt a particular way of understanding, but

rather offer alternative possibilities for consideration" (p. 44). Although I would not presume to recommend a "one size fits all" formula for resistance, I was interested in uncovering commonalities- points of affinity as it were- in respondents' answers which might be useful for social work practice, education, and field instruction. Considering that resistance, "...varies in degree, effectiveness, and scope" (Burstrow, 1992, p. 18), what counselling skills and interventions, strategies, and actions did the respondents suggest to make change and resist oppression?

Resistance counselling skills and interventions. Barnoff and Coleman (2007) recommend five resistance counselling and intervention methods: educating service users; empowerment and capacity building; engaging authentically; assisting service users to navigate systems; and educating other service providers. Similarly, normalization, validation, reframing, consciousness-raising, and building strengths were identified as the respondents' most common resistance counselling and intervention skills. The following field instructor outlined her or his use of normalization, validation, and consciousness-raising skills:

> Well, I think that part of what happens in the counselling sessions with me, is that WHOLE validation and normalization. I think that being heard and having a voice, somebody actually listening to them, is huge. I think that consciousness-raising, about, this is not just about them, it's the bigger picture stuff and giving people an opportunity to look at it that way.

This process of reframing personal troubles as public issues, and thus, transforming flaws or weaknesses into resistance is consistent with AOP approaches. According to Avis (2006):

> Feminist-informed narrative therapy is thus the process of re-authoring to assist women to separate themselves from internalized self- disqualifying narratives, to

> unmask the source and impact of these narratives, and to remember their own resources, competencies, and resilience (p. 403).

For respondents, reframing skills were closely linked to building strengths and were seen as vital to effective social work assessment, intervention, and practice. One respondent expressed the belief that:

> Ultimately what I found that generally works is from some capacity they have to see the positive and strengths within themselves. No matter what's going on and be able to capitalize on those to then be able to maneuver through whatever they need to go. And it doesn't really matter what that external oppression is, if they can capitalize or see some strength or potential within themselves which goes back to my definition of oppression as far as a blockage of their potential. If they can see that blockage of their potential and see their potential, then they can move forward within that. However, I've never bumped into anybody that doesn't have something that's a strength.

Social Work Resistance Strategies

In terms of professional lives and their clinical actions, the field instructors' resistance strategies included: a) developing and implementing resistance plans; b) critically thinking- assessing systems to best meet the needs of service users, analyzing policy, and helping service users resist systems; c) increasing service user democratic participation in decision-making, and d) resistance collectives.

Resistance plans. The most frequently cited act of resistance mentioned in the interviews and written assignments was developing what might be called a resistance plan, based upon strategic decision-making about how to choose battles, maximizing internal knowledge of the workings of the system, and negotiating and implementing strategies which are most likely to succeed within a particular system. The importance of a resistance plan is supported in the literature (Shaw, 1996). The following field instructors outlined their resistance planning processes:

1. Yeah which ones can I do and have the most opportunity of having some success at and which one am I just going to be digging myself a hole in? It helped to kind of put it in perspective that, okay I may not be able to take on every battle and every example of oppression and deal with it, because I will just not be able to do that. It's humanly impossible. To the degree I can have as much consciousness in my own sphere and what my own sphere of influence is and choose which battles I can take on and as a social worker, there's actually a fair bit you can do within the system.

2. It's a question again of recognizing and knowing where we can influence change because systems aren't necessarily humane as you're pointing out nor are they necessarily perfect. I mean they're certainly not a perfect system. It's a question of how do we then continually re-tool the system to become increasingly responsive. And that becomes really the challenge and the dance I think that we find ourselves in so often. It's a question of really assessing the situation to see to what extent the system has helped to be malleable in order to be able to be responsive, so making some assessment around the ability of the system to bend and to be flexible. Where the system is not going to be flexible and that happens at times.

The respondents' suggestions are supported by the literature. For instance, Rebick (2009) summarizes her understanding of Starhawk's recommendations for resistance:

> It's also about having a strategic understanding of power and understanding that oppressive power always rest on certain supports. One support is the willingness of people to comply with it. One support may be the resources it can commandeer. One support may be the level of violence it can bring to bear against people. And then you look at those supports and say okay, where do we have power in this? How can we withdraw our consent, how can we not comply with this system? And when enough people do that, it's like you pulled one leg out from under the table, and the table falls (p. 76).

As one respondent proposed, sometimes strategic resistance is not about acting immediately but waiting until the appropriate moment to act:

> Sometimes it's simply a question or a matter of storing that as information taken. Then walking away and trying to think of how one might be able to influence or change somebody else's attitudes. Sometimes it's a question of or an issue of actually trying to confront somebody and ask, "Help me to understand why and how you see the person in this way" so I guess it's situational in that way for me. What's the percentage of one day being able to influence change in this instant or is it something that may have to try to look at a more systemic approach at a later time. I'm still relatively new here at (work name) so I'm still learning about people and learning about how much of this organization works. And so from a work

> perspective sometimes I hold myself back a little bit as a matter of learning and trying to understand the culture here. How can I make change, where can't I influence things, so a lot of that is storing of information. Knowing that at a later date I might have an opportunity to make some change.

Critical thinking: Helping service users resist systems. Critical thinking in social work was best described by a respondent as:

> What I would call the formulation work, the passing of all that stuff through your own filters, through your own kind of lens of world views which would include philosophy, would include clinical theory, it would include organizational concepts and methods.

Examining systems critically, encouraging service users to also analyze systems critically, policy analysis, and facilitating a process in which service users join us in acts of system resistance were cited by the field instructors as successful resistance strategies. Sharing the system's secrets- hidden information, rules, resources, and strategies-with service users was also viewed as resistance. Writers have referred to this type of social work as banditry or assisting service users to work the system to meet their own needs, improve the system's capacity to meet human need, and make social change (Mullaly, 2007) Following are some examples of respondents' resistance practices:

1. Debrief the couple immediately after this encounter. They readily expressed their fear and uncertainty, which was acknowledged and validated. They asked if there were any other options for them, and I indicated there was indeed a third option, which involved having him/her wait in the hospital for the first available bed in a care facility. They indicated this had been their hope, and expressed some anger that the manager had not informed them of this option. This was also acknowledged and validated. They then indicated they felt guilty about taking up a space that might be needed for someone worse off than them, as the manager had implied. This too was acknowledged and validated, while I explained that our system has the responsibility to provide care for everyone who needs it, and that she (the patient) needs it. I then called the manager and explained the outcome of my discussion with the couple, requesting we meet to clarify our respective mandates. She expressed outrage that I would "sabotage" her discharge plan, and indicated her supervisor

would deal with me. Nothing further has happened, and the patient remains in hospital waiting for facility.

2. Giving them as much information as possible about their situation. It's very important. And to say, "This is the way it is now but this is how you get out of it". And not only say it but write it down. I know when I'm stressed out or overwhelmed. I go, "What? What did you say"? I don't remember what you said in a few days. So that is one of the things I started to do even though I felt SO overworked. That I would really try to put things in writing so that they knew. Also to give them hints about how to work with their lawyer, etc. Depending on who it is and what kind of stage they're at, I would show them that there's a law and what the criteria is for a (process sic).

3. Really looking for opportunities to ensure that the department can be leaders within the broader context of the (work place) in terms of either developing first of all recognizing oppressive policies that relate specifically in the (work place) or external to the (work place) that would have implications for the people who we care for. So first of all, recognition of those. Then finding ways that we can to try to be critical of such policy and try to define thirdly then ways to promote change for those sorts of particular policies where it gets then translated into attitude generally.

Increasing service user democratic participation in decision-making. Similar to the examples above, the idea of increasing service users' democratic collaborative participation in decision-making, by teaching service users about their rights within systems, and ensuring that service users are given the most information possible related to their situations, were also recommended by the respondents. One field instructor shared the following example of working within the medical context, trying to get patients, colleagues, and the medical system, to broaden their perspectives about full service user decision-making, optimal health care, and quality of life:

> If someone comes along and says, "Well how do you think these decisions will affect your family, or how do you think these decisions could affect your work life six months down the road, or how do you think these decisions are going to affect your view of yourself, how do you think these decisions are going to affect other parts of your life"? It's like there's a double think involved there, people just kind of stop and say, "Why is that relevant"? As a social worker in pointing out that there are implications, I am going to encounter a system of reluctance or hesitance or even over- resistance to including that part of human functioning or to including

> that part of a patient's experience in the decision-making which to me is a subtle form of oppression because it deprives someone of the information and the opportunity to make meaning of that information in leading up to decisions that are often huge decisions. The second step there then I think is to inquire and again it's a process of invitation and inquiry to say, "Do you feel that your choices are in any way limited by virtue of the structures that we're working within? Do you feel that you have the opportunity to go inside to your own experience sort out what's best for you and then come back with some input to the systems that you're working within or input to the people you're dealing with to be able to actually specify what you would want?"

Resistance collectives. Although collective action was mentioned infrequently by participants, two field instructors did recommend finding allies to act collectively to make change as an important strategy in system resistance. Having more power and influence to change things often depends on having greater numbers or voices. Indeed, Shragge (2003) maintains that, "Social power is gained through collective action, the core of organizing" (p. 42). As one respondent affirmed:

> Good strategies too are building allies and that's social networking as far as within the structure of the oppression and how that's going to look around developing that. You're stronger with allies rather than on your own.

Networking with other groups and agencies in the community and practicing from a community development perspective were also mentioned as useful by these same two respondents.

Missing in the current study's findings was any indication that this particular group of field instructors take, what is recommended in the literature (Baines, 2007d; Ife et al, 2005; Mullaly, 2007; Razack, 2002), as the next step in resistance work -to link service users with each other, connect service users with broader social change movements, and work together, within and outside of social work practice and systems with service users, to make change in the community and nation. Respondents also reported a lack of opportunity

to engage in meaningful dialogue about how they understand social work theory, practice, and field instruction and how they apply their understandings in their everyday lives. Here is what one respondent had to say about this lack of opportunity:

> On the front- line I miss the opportunity to engage in some of the intellectual and meaning-making conversations about the work. I do the work and have lots of fascinating conversations with people through the day about that but I don't often get to talk about doing the work and challenge or look at my own conceptualizing, my own theories, my own understanding of it so it's refreshing to have a chance to do that.

Correspondingly, any types of broader political affiliation, professional associations, union involvement, or grassroots' movements were also barely mentioned.

Resistance and Teams

"There is no I in Team"

Team relationships were seen as active sites where power, oppression, and resistance play out. Respondents commented on the divisiveness, oppressive attitudes and behaviours, hostility, and suspicion that characterized some of their relationships and team work with other social workers, caregivers, and colleagues:

1. I'd like to think that I'm working with a group of professionals who can set aside their personal feelings or in some way we have a professional responsibility to care for people and it would seem to me that we should be doing that. I'm somewhat surprised at times when that doesn't take place. I'm also surprised really at times in terms of the individuals. It's the people again that I would work with and who sometimes surprise me in terms of some of the prejudices or judgments that some people seem to hold that I might not have been otherwise aware of.

2. Knowing a lot of people that are in this field that are not educated that are sort of grandfathered into holding their jobs and that kind of thing that have TONS of experience and big hearts and that kind of thing, there's a real split in attitude and feelings between those who have education and those who don't. I don't display my degree because of the underlying resentment that is almost, I won't say blatant but underlying is probably the best word to use. You certainly can feel that. You can feel resentment from other people that don't have their BSW or their child and

> youth care whatever and yet they're doing the same terrific incredible job that I can do basically. So I've been on both sides of that track so not having an education, I did feel the resentment towards those who did have the education, towards the opportunities and the resources that they were able to have and felt that, "Hey I'm not saying anything different than you are so what's the difference"? I still do what I did before I was educated. So I deal with feelings and resentment from others, and then in terms of continuing up the ladder,

Resistance In Non Social Work Systems and Teams

One of the biggest challenges for social workers is surviving and being effective within systems which and with other professionals who are often unsympathetic, if not down right hostile, to social work and AOP values, beliefs, and ethics. In this study, multi-disciplinary teams were seen by the field instructors as particularly difficult work sites. Multiple examples of team conflict within these non- social work settings were offered by the respondents. One respondent highlighted the challenges of working with multidisciplinary teams:

> I'm quite aware that the questions or concerns that I'm going to raise from time to time in team meetings on behalf of the patient or family are not popular, are decisions that will bring the efficiency wheels to a grinding halt. Working within an institutional structure or a system that "delivers health-care" in quotes, through an institutional setting, the valuing of what's good for the institution and the valuing of what's good for the individual who's coming through the institution to receive whatever treatment or health-care product is relevant to them.

Many of the respondents' stories about teamwork difficulties came from social work within the medical and healthcare systems. I think social workers find working in medical systems particularly problematic as, in my view, healthcare systems remain relatively unsympathetic to AOP values and beliefs and are so often driven by power hierarchies, status, the medical model, and fiscal pressures. As one field instructor concluded:

> I discovered by coming into this and I really came in with the idea of being probably personally antagonistic towards what I perceive as the medical model and the kind of power that's entrenched in that. I thought because it was my practicum

> placement and it did allow me to work with seniors or elders where I had wanted to work, I would just put all that in brackets and see what I could learn about the system. And really was it as oppressive as I perceived it to be once I was working within that? And I have to be honest and say in some ways, I see that the structure of the sort of power that is within the medical system or the medical model, has an ever present oppressive kind of reality to it.

The following respondent analyzed how hierarchical power and status operate within medical systems:

> Professionally I could think of situations where I worked in multi- disciplinary teams and this is particularly a criticism of some physicians that they either had a position of authority or control and exerted it with little regard for the autonomy and abilities of other team members. Having worked in (specific setting sic) for over ten years, we have many many experiences where that was the case. There is something about being a physician that bestows upon people certain kinds of internalized power roles that historically physicians have always carried. I experienced it with white females, I've experienced it with physicians males of color, seem to be more of a something about the roles and the way in which people are trained and dynamics of those settings. It's contrasted with those experiences which could be and are not and because people have these positions they use their power in ways in which only they seemed concerned about.

Additionally, one field instructor described the clash of values and philosophy between medicine and social work:

> Within the medical system, there's like an assumption that the reality that we would hold around laws of biology, laws of physics, laws of chemistry are sufficient to encompass human experience, which I don't think that they are. The amount of choice is reduced or narrowed to, "You can do one of three things. You can do this, you can opt for no treatment, you can opt for this treatment, you can opt for another treatment", but there isn't choice four which would be to find out more about this, find out more about option two, switch from three to two if things change, take a little more time, include other people in your life in those decisions that kind of thing. There was an example a few years ago of an effort that I made to humanize what's called a central intake system or a system for dispersing referrals where people are requesting outpatient therapy. My suggestions about humanizing that system were not only not appreciated and not valued but were seen as heretical and seen as an attempt to promote a non-medical model, within a medical context and a huge risk of empowering crazy people, if that makes any sense?

Barriers to Action and Resistance

Whether it is stopping our own oppressive inclinations, refusing to participate in lateral violence, changing our family, parenting, and friendship behaviours and relationships, or actively resisting within our social work practice, teams, and systems, it is evident that not everybody who has awareness then acts to make change. In addition, people choose differential responses to oppression, at different points and times in their lives, depending on a variety of complex reasons. In this next section, I explore the complexity of conformity and resistance by reviewing what the respondents said about why they choose *not* to act. I will also summarize what they identified as barriers to resistance. I have classified their responses into three main areas: a) internal attitudes and beliefs; b) conflicts and dilemmas; and c) external influences.

Internal Attitudes and Beliefs. Some respondents did not resist or stopped resisting because they were pessimistic about the possibility of system and social change. As the following field instructor pointed out:

> There was a time when I started in the system 23 years ago, that one could ultimately take the protest to the highest level and appeal to the person up there dealing with the philosophy and the mandate and the structures and how we operationalize it. Now our system is so middle heavy that the number of managers or authority people that one would need to get through to register a straightforward protest about philosophy or about mission statements is huge. And I suppose I don't have the perseverance that I had before to take something to 20 different levels in an attempt to register a protest. But maybe I'm conceptualizing that to rationalize the fact that I find ways to make my day easier.

Respondents spoke about feeling helpless, powerless, hopeless, and of working within systems, seeing injustice and oppression, and not feeling like they can do anything about it. Field instructors also spoke about their exhaustion and fatigue.

1. I spoke up sometimes. It depends sometimes I was so tired. And one more thing is when the (challenge sic) came, is too many, is impossible to fight it. One to one is easier. But sometimes I get tired. It's just like, "What for"? My job is with my clients as long as I do my job well, done with it. Because it is like you have to be careful because sometimes you becoming like a mission and is exhausting.

2. I don't know. I thought about it many times and I think part of it was that the nature of the job itself requires 100% of you and you are so drained and I think that many people didn't even address it because of that.

Female respondents, in particular, saw personnel and professional safety as paramount and connected with the ability and decision-making to resist:

1. Probably more likely to speak up where there was safety. Probably less likely to speak up where there wasn't safety.

2. Confronting oppression can feel risky, especially when it's an open, public event. There was no violence but there could have been.

3. It's a challenge to maintain your own ideas and your own values, in a situation where you're being paid to do certain things that maybe a supervisor or other powers that be and your career might be in jeopardy if you don't carry them out.

4. There's a fear of certainly women that I know that were in my situation that were the only income. Working for the organization was one of the higher paid positions. You didn't want to put yourself in a situation. And it's highly unlikely that would happen because you do have the union. But the majority of people don't want to get involved in a big battle.

Female field instructors also talked about fear. In my opinion, fear as a topic, particularly given the gendered context of social work practice, has been neglected and treated almost as a taboo subject in social work theory, education, practice, field instruction, and social service agencies (Strega, 2006). Some respondents were fearful of service users and their family members:

> They could be involved with Hell's Angels, they could have very violent boyfriends who aren't in the home. We seem to get many high profile clients and it's dangerous to spend too much time talking to them. They are very volatile people. And they threaten and they can have CHBC at your door. They're going do this, that, and the other thing.

Moreover, it is not surprising that social workers, many who are women, are hesitant to deal with violent men. Indeed, Strega (2006) reports that, in terms of social work practice in child welfare, "the avoidance of men who batter has been well documented" (p. 253). In addition, some of the field instructors were fearful of their colleagues:

> The other thing that you fear happening is that person is gonna lose it. And she did. She did. You can't believe it, it's a shock. And I think there's a fear that well when you watch someone like that, it basically picks people off the fence like birds with a gun. You don't want to be the next one. So you either stay out the line of fire or there's a fear also, because of the people that tried it.

Still others feared reprisals if they ended up standing alone and worried about being viewed as incompetent:

> But the door is shut and you have no proof. And I suppose people were like myself. You are afraid of being made out to be the problem or incompetent.

These reactions and fears are not unusual. Moreau and Leonard (1989) found that social workers tend to choose strategies and actions that they deem as safe and avoid or limit those which feel unsafe.

Conflicts and Dilemmas. Social workers are often faced with conflicts and dilemmas about what to do and how to act. As well, many social workers feel conflicted when they have to choose between loyalty to service users and/or to colleagues, teams, employers, and systems. One respondent described being pulled in two different directions:

> There's a magnetic pull towards to your institution and it's tough at times to maintain that balance. I think that's the conflict that we find ourselves in all the time working particularly in a secondary setting. So you've got the need of an institution that may be at times in conflict with what the desires of the clients that you're serving are. And at that point you have a decision to make. And so that I think that's an uncomfortable place for social work be in…so we're a supporting cast in (work place).

Respondents explained how they attempt to balance these competing interests and needs:

1. Not working through the process with the patient about what they need but rather immediately going to a balancing thing of here's what you have access to, let's make decisions about that versus here's what you need and you won't have access to so let's make some political decisions about how we can advocate or how you can protest or how we can address the basic funding inequities that don't get you what you need. You don't have to do all this stuff because even though the direct service experience is hugely valued by the patients and by their families, it's not valued within the system in such a way that it's going to be promoted or that it's going to be incorporated as a part of basic care. It was seen as an add-on, which could be pulled back under different circumstances. There are times when it's uncomfortably clear to me that I do make assumptions about the unchangeability of the system that I work in and try to help patients adapt to this system, as opposed to providing the information about what's wrong with this system. It's like educating each health-care consumer as they come through the system that they need to expect less, that they need to settle for less, that really what they're getting is better than nothing and that the system kind of needs to keep operating so there needs to be balance by the fiscal and resource realities of the system. I find that I probably am trying to preemptively head off that experience which I think would ultimately be distressing for someone but I'm not really providing the information that they would need to protest that process.

2. I balance what I need to do in the system and then the agency and with all the stakeholders with my personal beliefs and with parental systems and family systems and so basically I determine where all of that is at and I work from there. Particularly most important, where the kid is at.

Indeed, these examples are not unusual, de Montigny (2005) claims that:

> To be a social worker today, as in the past, demands occupying a social location of profound alienation and contradiction while opening the possibility of acting as a witness to the harsh realities of our society, and speaking the truth about human affairs…While succumbing to despair creates the dangers of cynicism, hostility and anger towards oneself and one's clients, social workers, by holding firmly to the loyalties of personal relationships and local places can find a source for resistance (p. 126).

These conflicts create tension which spills over and affects all areas of our lives. Moore (1997) defines this tension as the, "dialectic of struggle where there are complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation which make the field a sort of constant

battlefield" (p. 101). On the battlefield, field instructors juggle their political beliefs with their willingness to personally sacrifice and contemplate how far they are willing to go in terms of their acts of resistance. As the following respondents report:

1. This indicates my own limits which in a sense I create for myself within the context of the environment. How far am I willing to go? To give up in my own life? No one is responsible for those decisions but me, so in that way oppression is self-generated.

2. I think I have done everything possible, given that public protest and political action are forbidden in my organization and I cannot jeopardize my job without jeopardizing my family.

These dilemmas result in social workers paying a high personal, mental, and emotional cost. The following respondents discussed the impact of the continual tension of attempting to make their professional and personal actions and behaviours congruent with their AOP beliefs:

1. For me, I recognized that my awareness and its connected sense of responsibility to actually act upon the awareness created some personal and professional conflict in my life. I seemed in conflict in most areas of my life. Trying to transform but being stuck at a place where nothing else is really transforming and so being changed in my head but maybe not in my heart. You know how they talk about the head heart link so in my head and heart moving maybe if we use left and right in terms of political ideology, moving way left but still having parts of me that are center or right. Trying to move away from that. I'm a work in progress. I think that over time, as I work on my own transformation, I think that split I talked about would get less and less. I'm hoping that my clinical, my colleague, professional, my interpersonal and my family kind of personas will become more congruent. And my lifestyle and my choices. But I don't know, maybe I'll get to a point where I'll get fed up and go, "Oh you know frig it" I'll just buy into it, I'll get co-opted, I don't know, I can't imagine that.

2. I do buy in to the whole status quo thing but at the same time I totally believe how damaging that can be to people including myself being a woman. That whole SHOULD thing or that whole buying into what expectations are external from myself, was going to a bit of a victim place and so I know that there are times when I still go back to that place and so it's sort of an internal struggle, where, realizing what I'm doing and saying, I've got a couple of paths here, I can choose where I'm going to go…I remember going to school and always wanting who I am personally

to be integral or the same as my professional stance and what I have come to realize is that it's not.

Integrating social justice and AOP beliefs in the ways that we live our personal and professional lives is a challenge for all of us. This reaction can be seen as normal given that, "We live in concrete situations that are largely not of our own making and that offer resistance to our projects" (Burstow, 1992, p. 2). The following respondents shared their discomfort about their conflicted states:

1. It creates a bit of dissonance but that's part of who we are. We live in contradictions and so part of that is just becoming okay with not everything has to be exactly the same in all parts of our lives. So I sort of integrated that on a personal level as well.

2. An uncomfortableness around what I should do because I am a social worker and I believe in Karl Marx's whole philosophy around oppression and social inequalities versus what actually happens and who I am and what I do in practice and who I am as a human being. There's differences there and sometimes it's pretty easy to fall into this is what I should be doing versus what I have been doing.

External Influences. However, these conflicts and tensions are not just in our heads, pressure to conform and to be a team player within social work agencies and systems is intense. For example, one field instructor mentions:

> I think I should address my concern to that manager's manager, yet hesitate because I will be attacked for not being a "team player", and not helping solve utilization issues. I believe this problem will get worse.

Rebick (2009) supports this finding stating:

> Once you're inside a system, however, the pressure to conform is tremendous....Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci identified this process of co-option of movements of change as essential feature of capitalism. He used the term hegemony to describe this process and explained it as a way that capitalism maintains its ideological hold (p. 97).

One respondent commented further on the pressure to conform:

> Yeah there's pressure there. I don't think that I'm ever forced in that I have confidence that I'm not ever going to be fired or disciplined for being a good social

> worker for each client that I have an ethical responsibility to. In that sense there's a pressure I don't know if I would call it oppression but there is pressure to be loyal to the immediate team that one's working with. Cause I'm working with these people forever versus working for only several weeks with each particular client.

Not surprisingly, workload distribution and worker over-load were seen by respondents as a significant barriers to resistance practice:

1. I was so overloaded with work, I mean that's part of the oppression of it, is that you have two and three times a caseload that you should have…because part of the problem is, it's so hard to document. You're so busy.

2. There's no way to do front-line clinical work and do that other kind of research. It's huge. And that's a real sadness for me. Because I am so busy doing phone calls and just meetings within the system and then dealing with all of the kinds of supports around the client and then working with the client that it's just a fantasy to have time left over to even think about (whisper) getting a pedicure.

Respondents spoke about being immobilized and compromised by a pattern of systemic oppression, harassment, alienation, ostracism, fatigue, and system constraints and pressure which lead to decisions not to act. The following field instructor noted that:

> Who I am now as a social worker is a very very different person than who I was when I came in especially with my biases quite in place. We had another social work student who came here for her practicum. And it was just not acceptable for her, the kind of labelling that goes on, the kind of language that's used. I mean in the (type sic) system labelling just happens all the time. It's not defined here as labelling. You use codes. You're forced to use codes. Our system won't accept the file unless there's an actual code on it. It has shaped and defined how I practice. If I want to practice within the system and I do because I think I can offer something as a social worker, I have to also be able to accept some of those limits and I have to know where my battles are that I can fight. I know I'm not going to fight a computer system that is provincial wide. I mean I'm not going to win that battle. Or it would take all my energy and I don't want to put it there. I want to put it somewhere. When I saw the other practicum student and we talked many many times and that was so difficult for her. And I thought okay this is what I had to give up. She is holding that line, I'm not. So that's how I think that it's defined me in some ways.

As well, field instructors are not the only people who may be resistant or fearful of making change. Sometimes social workers are blocked from acting because service users disagree with this option:

> I wanted to put a complaint into her supervisor but my client wouldn't agree. She was afraid of repercussions related to her money and future needs. I was appalled at the treatment and at the client's choice- a wise one perhaps- to be silent in the face of oppression. I felt powerless too as I couldn't complain without her consent.

One could mistakenly make the assumption that these expressed concerns are more about organizational dynamics, family conflict, and individual hurts and inconveniences rather than oppression. However, this narrow view misses the point that family and work, how they are constructed, and our individual experiences within these social and cultural institutions are also mediated, influenced, enhanced, and constrained by the same dominant- subordinate social relations which underlie all oppressions. Indeed, an individual experience of oppression may seem as inconsequential and light as a feather, particularly when viewed from someone else's standpoint (often from a place of privilege), but overtime from the view of oppressed persons, a "ton of feathers" can be overwhelming, exhausting, and debilitating (Caplan, 1994).

Resistance Backlash

The respondents' fears and reasons for choosing not to act are not unrealistic. Besides the gendered realities of social work practice and the exhausting overload that people are expected to manage, we cannot underestimate the power of the dominant group and the system's ability to make resistors' lives in social work very difficult. Personally, I have rarely worked in a social work setting that I have not experienced sexual and personal harassment, where I have not had to defend myself and my practice, teaching, and

supervisory choices (more so I think than my more conventional colleagues), and where I have not been ostracized and scapegoated within the staff and faculty for my radical views. At times, this has been extremely painful for me and when I discuss this with others outside of our profession, they are shocked that this happens within the social work profession- a profession where we claim to hold values like respect, caring, and human dignity. Rebick (2009) cites anti-racist teacher Shakil Choudhury:

> We have these fantastic theories, anti-racist theories, post-colonial theories. If our theories are so good, then shouldn't progressive organizations be the example of how to live in healthy relationship with one another? Shouldn't we be able to see that people are treating one another well and fairly and people are being treated equally and well in these organizations?...But often there is more dysfunction in these organizations than anywhere else (p. 109).

Obviously, change efforts are not always successful and the system reaction to our resistance work can be painful and negative. As this field instructor's example illustrates:

> My first response was, this is working well and I think I can prove it. I think I can demonstrate that this is a good idea and then having that information, received and acknowledged but not dealt with. In other words, the information, the response didn't result in any change as though it wasn't really about the information, as though it wasn't really about the effectiveness, it was simply a way of the director operationalizing his/her distaste for consciousness-raising within a population and doing what he/she needed to do to shut that down. I have probably become less passionate and less zealous about my own protest within the system.

Respondents described other incidents when they experienced backlash and ostracism:

1. It was a set up for me when I got back with the new supervisor. She was watching me like a hawk. And I sensed there was something. But I didn't know what and then finally the one thing she said to me. "(name) said such and such about you and with something to do with court work that you were terrible in court". My mouth just, like it would have fallen in my lap, because that's one of my strong suits. I mean there might've been some other stuff come out but not that one. The funny part is that I knew before I went to that office that there was a problem with her. I mean people talk. So the first time I went there I went into her office and I was straight forward. Cause okay the way to be with these people straightforward, you go in. And I said "How best can we work together. What are your expectations?" And it was all namby pamby, nothing. So that didn't work.

2. If you can even acknowledge, like in my situation with that thing at work. I was desperate for somebody to say, "Hey yeah that's terrible". Instead of everybody scattering to the wind. Yeah. I didn't hear from anyone on my team. I was out of there for (number) months. And no one would speak to me except that person who was also involved and one other person who was trying to be neutral and a friend.

Public Actions: Private Lives

Even in the face of this backlash, pressure, and the high costs of being identified as resistors by hostile teams, students, colleagues, and systems, respondents said that they continue to attempt resistance in their professional and personal lives. In her research, Baines (2007c) also found that:

> Despite these multi-level constraints, social service workers continue- at least in their talk and their dreams- to resist dominant discourses that discourage social caring and resistance. .. They enacted their commitment in a myriad of ways from organizing for expanded democratic control of social services to working unpaid overtime in order to meet the needs of clients and communities. They also regularly undertook workplace advocacy, grassroots organizing around client issues and working with their unions to prevent further the erosion of services (p. 93).

Underneath the rhetoric, I was interested in the connections between these respondents' public identities and actions as field instructors and their private lives and choices. From the findings, it seems clear that the respondents of this study were committed to AOP principles and motivated to act upon their corresponding understandings of oppression both in their personal and professional lives. Indeed, Smith (2007) concludes that, "most social workers are neither revolutionaries nor passive robots. They generally lead complex lives that both reveal and conceal contradictions due to the intersections of power, privilege and oppression" (p. 150). What we say and how we act in our roles as parents, siblings, friends, neighbours, and so on can certainly have a powerful impact on the people and communities

in our lives. For instance, respondents described deliberately choosing to act in opposition to their family of origin experiences:

1. It's an impulse that I have to guard against because my father was fairly black or white about that kind of stuff. If it was about how my father would have handled it, he would have said, "Sit down and do it and don't get up until it's done". There would have been no discussion.

2. I had to encounter and really look at how I'd been raised and how I'd been socialized in a much more traditional family setting where Dad was the worker and after his work was done, he had to have leisure. He had to have some kind of opportunity for a break and the family's responsibility was to contribute so that he could work again the next day. I grew up on a farm and it made absolute sense. I mean the work was sun up to sundown so really there was not afternoon leisure the way we might think of it, it was something quite different. So that the operation of the household defaulted to the women in the household, my contribution to the family when I was growing up was about my ability to be productive, to be physical, to go out and labour all day.

Respondents also spoke about how, after observing their parents' marital relationships, they were motivated to try different relationship and marital skills. For the following field instructor, marriage was presented as being a teaching and learning site about equality and resistance:

> There was a point in my early marital relationship where some of the basic fundamental concepts of equality and justice and democratic action were making incredible sense to me and I was becoming more passionate in my work about operationalizing those concepts but I would go home and find myself irritated if the dishes weren't done. Why on earth is this someone else's job and not my job? So there was a very interesting time where my (spouse sic) and I negotiated very directly about responsibilities and about participation within the relationship and within managing a household which fortunately we'd basically fought that one out before kids came along to complicate the picture. There were many times when I would come back to a conversation having realized how ridiculous my ideas were or how impoverished my ideas were about what democracy in a relationship was actually about or when the rubber hits the pavement, there is all this stuff to be done and there are only two people to do it. You'd have to talk to my (spouse sic) about whether there's still a degree of injustice there. It's a balance that's worked out.

As mentioned earlier, most respondents recognized oppressive impulses that showed up in their parenting styles. On the bright side, how we parent and raise our children can also be viewed as a form of resistance work:

1. Like a daycare person said to me, "You'd be proud of your daughter cause someone said, 'That woman is a (racial slur)' and your daughter said, 'No, that woman is an Aboriginal person'". And my daughter is only nine.

2. I remember when my oldest turned 12 and I found myself wanting to slap him. And I sat down with my spouse at the time and said, "Listen, we gotta write a list here. "What are we going to do when this happens, what are we going to do with this…Cause otherwise I don't want to go on impulse here." And I think it's the same in other situations.

Choices related to ethical shopping and investment were also highlighted as a major area of personal resistance:

1 If I buy something and it's the best possible price from one of the big box stores, there is a part of me that wonders, who made that, because it's pretty cheap for what you get. I mean looking at that saying someone did a lot of time and effort to do this and what I'm paying is fairly small amount of money and what the store is making is probably half of what I'm paying and the trucking company which is fine, people have to make money. But wow what did the guy who actually or the woman or whoever did this ran the machine to do this or package this, what did they get per day or week or month so I guess in a way I becoming more tuned in to choices that I make. I'm not saying that I make the choices that I'm morally talking about now. I have a tendency to want to get the best deal or if there's equivalent quality I'm probably gonna pick the lower price but I'm re- questioning that. How can I continue to justify shopping at Costco when I that they make more on cash money than they do on the product?

2 I try to be anti-consumerist. I try not to buy period. It's very difficult because I believe we vote with our dollars and so what we purchase has impact. If we purchase things with companies that exploit child labour or pollute the world or whatever. But how do you find one that doesn't? I always say that I am a mass of contradictions because I hate spending money on clothes or furniture or any of those things, I buy second-hand. But I think nothing of going out and buying a hundred dollar meal if I want which makes no sense cause it's still consumeristic.

Additionally, respondents spoke about how the systems' reactions, backlash, and the oppression they had experienced in their lives had not defeated them but instead had

motivated them to continue their resistance work and try new strategies of resistance. The field instructors also believed that their experiences of oppression had enriched their lives. Similarly, McIntosh (2007) notes that:

> Those who do not depend on conferred dominance have traits and qualities that may never develop in those that do...those dominated have actually become strong through not having all of these unearned advantages, and this gives them a great deal to teach others (p. 349).

The following respondents shared examples of how oppression had transformed their lives:

1. Some people can thrive or do reasonably well where someone else will just crumble. Someone else can get through it but then be extremely oppressive harmful to other people. Someone else has used it as a source of inspiration for the rest of their life to help others. I mean there's so many different ways in which it affects and there's complexity to it.

2. My own experience of oppression has deepened me, has made me a better person and I don't believe that I would trade that. That's my hope for people that I meet who are experiencing it as well. In some way that they will be able to look back on it and say, "That has deepened me and I wouldn't trade it".

3. It deepened my understanding, it deepened my spirit, it made me stronger, it made me better, it gave me compassion for others who are experiencing that too. Just like our own weaknesses in a way. I mean you look at the human being and how our weaknesses, our conflicts are often times the places where we really build depth and intimacy and either internally or in relationship. I think the experience of oppression for me has made me a strong and active and has given me determination or it's put me in touch with my own determination to overcome, to do better, to ask questions, those kinds of things.

4. So always being very cautious, having those feelers out so I think that that ended up being a gift in a way. Being able to recognize and being able to very intuitively pick up when somebody was being discriminatory or racist. It gave me a real intuitiveness about that. I think that's probably the biggest way it influences and understanding helps me empathize.

Within their roles as teachers and mentors, the field instructors in this study also had advice to share about how to help social work students to resist oppression. Respondents

highlighted the importance of students being positive, taking action, and increasing (self) awareness:

1. You are part of a system, you're part of the change, you're part of the institution. We talked about institutions we're part of it, but I would also try to keep some sense of perspective on that we're a small part and I guess the danger from my perspective is that we can become so embittered by things that we have little influence to change that it can be detrimental to us.

2. Well I think that even one step, one action can make the person feel like they're able to do something. I only relate that because with my own experience. But I waited too long so that you're faced then with two levels of decision-making. Do I participate in trying to make decisions that truly are best for each individual that comes through this institution when that can be in direct conflict with the institutional need to make decisions on the basis of increasing the efficiency of the institution so that more people can be served?

3. Becoming self aware is a powerful tool to contain the abuse of power. Self awareness can bring one to confidently address issues, self advocate and advocate with others. Self awareness comes from open learning about strengths and challenges that one possesses. I have had the "empowering" experience of using my own strengths and abilities to overcome some of the imbalances I see that create barriers in my life. I also know that one person, a client or frontline worker for instance, increasing knowledge of self and world, can have an enormous impact on the rest of the world.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at field instructors as resistance workers and explored their preparation for resistance. Moreover, who these resistors are -their personal qualities and their stories of resistance both in their personal and professional lives- was examined. In addition, resistance within actual social work practices and clinical relationships was highlighted as well as the barriers to resistance including internal attitudes and beliefs, conflicts and dilemmas, and external influences. Respondents reported reacting to and resisting oppression in a variety of different ways and most seemed committed to the AOP goals of resistance and social change. However, from a broader perspective, their resistance

efforts seemed to stop within the relatively safe confines of micro practice from within familiar personal relationships and sites- within the relatively safe confines of friendship networks, family relationships, and their social work agencies- and were not targeted at cultural or structural levels of intervention.

Chapter 7: Research Reflections and Implications for Social Work

This chapter highlights four main themes that emerged from the research and recommendations for social work practice, resistance work and social change, and social work education and field instruction. To this end, I have utilized journal notes, respondents' comments, social work literature, and some of my own practice and educational experiences to highlight key areas from this research. In addition, my reflections about the research and its challenges, limitations, and benefits are discussed. Recommendations for future research are also outlined.

Findings

In this section, the four main themes that emerged from the research findings are highlighted and include: a) understandings of oppression and anti-oppressive practice (AOP); b) limited acknowledgement of privilege and entitlement; c) a conclusion that good intentions are not enough to create social change, and d) a lack of collectivity and social action. An understanding of these themes also informs suggested recommendations for social work practice, resistance and social change, and education and field instruction.

Theme 1- Understandings of oppression and anti-oppressive practice (AOP). As I explained earlier, the idea for this research was based on my experience, both in social work practice and in academia, of noticing confusion and a lack of common understanding and knowledge about what oppression means and how to apply the concept to practice, teaching, and field instruction. Although the field instructors articulated minimal understanding and identification of oppression at cultural and structural levels, they did articulate and identify an understanding of the concept of oppression at the personal level,

their processes of meaning-making and the internalization of oppression, links between power and oppression, and to a varying degree, an ability to explain how they apply their understandings of these concepts to their social work practice, field instruction, and their personal lives. Thus, respondents of this study were able to identify what Ife, Healy, Spratt, and Soloman (2005) describe as commonalities of critical theory:

> larger social relations, whether we call them social structures, large-scale social processes or society, contribute to personal and social dislocation or personal problems; a self reflexive and critical analysis of the social control functions of social work practice, and social policies (p. 21).

One significant finding supported by the field instructors' comments, stories, and actions was a philosophical and practice stance that advocated that:

> the most productive narrative is the one that can interpret with a client or with a patient as being most likely to open up opportunities as opposed to shut down opportunities, the narrative that would be most likely to contribute towards human progress with identity, with opportunities within society.

As a bridge between modernist theories and assumptions and valid postmodern critiques related to privileging dominant narratives, this comment highlights an ethical stance which supports AOP approaches within social work. This definition is also important as it characterizes the way the participants in this study conceptualized oppression. Indeed, the language they tended to use is firmly embedded in the discourse of neo- liberalism: equality; production; equal opportunity; and assumes notions of free will, agency, and progress. As Mullaly (2010) explains:

> language is never politically neutral. It does not simply describe or reflect the reality of inequality and oppression in our society; it is also used to construct and maintain oppression and may be used to resist and challenge it (p. 114).

The use of language to describe service users as clients or patients, as demonstrated throughout the study, seems to indicate a non-critical acceptance of this terminology and perhaps the nature of traditional dominant- subordinate power relationships between social workers and service users. Although there was evidence that field instructors were able to demonstrate, "a recognition that clinical social work knowledge itself is socially produced and may exclude the voices of those with the least power" (Ife et al, 2005, p. 21), they did not seem to recognize or articulate an understanding that their choice of language can also be viewed as constrained and influenced by the social and cultural identities and locations of specific peoples experiencing oppression or that the language of dominant discourses benefits privileged groups.

In terms of clinical social work practice, these particular respondents seemed to be highly reflective about their clinical choices, decisions, and actions. Hick et al (2005) highlight the importance of reflexive materialist practice:

> This is a practice that is rooted in the concrete lives of clients. It is a practice that recognizes the specific and local in the lives of people, while seeing these lives as interwoven with past and present realized courses of action (p. xv).

Furthermore, I found that the respondents were quite thoughtful, critical, and concerned about their use of power in their social work roles and personal lives. This is congruent with what Healy (2005) proposes for social workers:

> Rather than advocate that social workers should seek to reduce or avoid power, as critical practice theorists have often done (see Spicker,1990; Ban ,1992), post-theories challenge us to articulate how such power can be exercised humanely and justly within our service context (p. 224).

In addition, at the personal level, most of the respondents identified specific theoretical understandings and practices consistent with AOP theory and empowerment practices. They also seemed cognizant of the dangers of using a "one size fits all" approach. As Healy (2005) warns:

> We also face the danger of creating totalizing theories that attempt to generalize oppression for all people, based on some causal structural theory. At the other end, we face the risk of seeing everyone's lived reality as unique and without a material base, open always to interpretation depending on one's situated context (p. xviii).

Theme 2- Limited acknowledgement of privilege and entitlement. If we do not want to create totalizing discourses, we need to solicit and encourage the complexity and diversity of multiple voices, stories, and perspectives. Although the research participants remarked on the connection between diversity issues and multiple oppressions, and this was specifically demonstrated in the narratives of the women of colour in this study, for the most part, the respondents did not explicitly acknowledge and identify their positions of privilege and entitlement and how these factors play out in their clinical, field instruction, and personal relationships. Even though there was some limited discussion about middle class privilege and heterosexism, the predominantly Caucasian participants did not acknowledge, at least in the interviews and written assignments, how the white colour of their skins, their middle class upbringing, and their heterosexuality had "over-advantaged" (McIntosh, 2005) them in their personal life and the social work profession. Similarly, four out of the five male respondents, in the interviews and written assignments, did not identify male gender as a privilege issue or a site of entitlement in their lives. McIntosh (2005) says this is common with men, noting that,"I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance" (p. 250). I suggest that

the same can be said of most of the social workers in this study and their various sites of privilege.

Theme 3- Good intentions are not enough to create social change. In this study, I also noticed that these particular field instructors relied on the assumption that awareness and recognition of power and oppression and good intentions were enough to minimize power imbalances between themselves and service users, themselves and students, and to stop them from becoming oppressors in their social work practice, field instruction, and personal lives. But how do we know for certain that, despite our good intentions, we are not still perpetuating oppression? In addition, would service users, students, or our families share the same view of our "harmless" practices? Fook and Morley (2005) remind us that, "the practical distinction between how we intend to operate and how this is actually perceived and experienced by our service users is no less problematic" (p. xiv). AOP social workers need to critically think about how we intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate and reproduce the very social and power relations which we are trying to dismantle.

Theme 4- Lack of collectivity and social action. This study asks interesting questions about what social workers and field instructors actually do in terms of praxis. Although there is evidence that some social workers regularly apply AOP and resistance efforts within their social work practice (Moreau & Leonard, 1989; Baines, 2007b), one could argue that many social workers are better at "talking the talk" than "walking the walk". In this study, although there were several examples given by field instructors about analyzing service user situations based on an AOP lens, using feminist and AOP micro

counselling skills such as validation, normalization, building strengths, reframing, and consciousness-raising, and developing strategic resistance plans from within systems, most of the reported sites and acts of resistance seemed limited to the relatively safe purview of the clinical relationship, the social service agency, and close personal and familial relationships. I also observed that there was very limited discussion of building alliances and networks with the goal of joining broader social movements to make social change with colleagues, service users, other providers, and community members. As well, the respondents agreed that they had limited opportunities to talk to other social workers about the state of current theory, practice, and field instruction. Thus, as a group of social work actors, they did not identify what Ife et al (2005) recommend as essential for critical social work practice, "working with and for oppressed populations to achieve personal liberation and social change" (p. 21). There was also minimal sustained discussion about the collective power and possibilities of unionism, professional associations, cooperative, or grassroots' movements. Despite the AOP rhetoric that was verbalized by these field instructors, the findings seemed to demonstrate that their social work practice still, "seems to be shaped by theories derived from moderate frameworks and conventional assumptions (Shragge, 2003, p. 59).

Recommendations For Social Work Practice, Resistance and Social Change, and Social Work Education and Field Instruction

In the following section, I outline recommendations related to the research themes discussed above for: a) social work practice; b) resistance and social change; and c) social work education and field instruction.

Social Work Practice. The study findings highlight the need in social work for increased critical thinking about privilege, a more sophisticated understanding of oppression at all levels, and improved AOP strategies for successful collective action. By focusing solely on oppression at the personal level, the respondents demonstrate a huge gap in their social work practices and ignore what Shragge (2003) says is the most effective way to resist and make social change:

> through participation in alliances with other organizations at the local level…Alliances contribute to the creation of a base of social power and have the potential of allowing individual organizations to go beyond their specific interests and problems to raise common concerns (p.136).

The problem with this practice decision- to focus our assessments, interventions, and actions on individual local sites and consciousnesses- is that it can not help but lead us in the direction of locating the source of problems within the service user, the only site in which we tend to work. Rebick (2009) acknowledges the limits of this type of radical humanist thinking when she concludes that, "the idea that changing the consciousness of every person, one at a time, will change the world seemed like wishful thinking that permitted too many people to accept injustice" (p. 74).

Recommendations. To further their anti-oppressive practice, respondents indicated that social workers would benefit from concrete solutions, skills, and assistance in translating AOP theory into actual practice skills. As "low power actors", social workers and field instructors need to develop appropriate analytic tools, organizational change methods, and strategizing techniques to better meet service users needs, make change, and facilitate empowerment in their agencies and field placements (Cohen, 2002). Identifying forces that can facilitate or inhibit change goals, determining factors within agencies that

can influence the success of change efforts, as well as choosing appropriate change strategies are also recommended (Cohen, 2002). As part of a thorough knowledge base, Strega (2007) believes that social workers should also become, "familiar with basic theoretical texts as well as work specific to anti-oppressive practice in social work" (p. 72). The literature and findings included in this study are seen as contributing to this specific knowledge base.

Although the following participants' suggestions are not new, it is important to note that they reflect a gap in social work practice that still needs to be addressed. Respondents suggested the need for better self-care methods to alleviate fatigue and worker overload including:

1. Increased interpersonal negotiation skills including assertiveness training, dealing with conflict and anger, setting clear boundaries, "bracketing historical baggage", and compromise.
2. Improved sense of self-esteem, humility, resilience, fairness, optimism, patience, hope, empathy, and creativity.

Because of this study's findings, social workers are also strongly urged to examine Whiteness. Whiteness as a location of structural advantage, as a standpoint from which whites judge themselves and others, and as a set of unnamed and unconscious cultural practices must be analyzed and considered in terms of its impact on social work theory, practice, and field instruction (Yee, 2005). How Whiteness plays out in everyday practices, therapeutic relationships, academic settings, and field agencies needs to become part of clinical practice and dialogues with colleagues, students, service users, and within social work agencies.

In addition, male social workers need to be cognizant of how their gender privileges them within their clinical, collegial, academic, and personal relationships. Social work as a profession also needs to consider what factors within social work agencies and within individual workers make it possible for men to become allies to women seeking gender inequality? As potential anti-sexist leaders and role models, men are urged to challenge men's violence and sexist behaviours, reject pornography and negative stereotypes of women, and support female colleagues, feminist scholarship, and gay and lesbian rights (Overall, 1998). It is also essential to determine what barriers exist to this type of resistance practice and what more can be done to support male social workers to overcome these barriers.

Furthermore, building knowledge and understanding the implications of ignoring our own sites of oppression, privilege, and resistance in social work and in our personal lives is seen as important to building "social empathy"- a skill and an attitude which can be described as the recognition and understanding of the commonalities that we may share with others who are similarly oppressed (Fook, 1993). Carniol (2005 b) believes that developing social empathy may foster a desire for oppressed peoples to act collectively to make social change.

Resistance Work and Social Change. Because respondents reported they usually did not act collectively or direct their resistance efforts at cultural and structural levels of oppression or outside familiar sites and relationships, it seems clear that social workers vary in their beliefs about, commitment to, and actions for social change. In addition, the internal attitudes and beliefs, conflicts and dilemmas, and external influences mentioned

previously, such as loyalty to the institution versus our own or service users' needs, the fear of risk-taking and of negative system response, worker overload and fatigue, and the potential of conflict with our colleagues and teams tend to inhibit resistance. Within a hostile political climate, organizations tend to be resistant to progressive change and have forced activists to go on the defensive (Shaw, 1996). It is vital that the social work profession be proactive in assisting social workers to move from thinking about and discussing the challenges related to assisting service users to resist systemic oppression and its consequences to actually acting to dismantle our own privileges and oppressive structures.

Recommendations. Carniol (2005a), Gil (2002), and Mullaly (2010) argue that, instead of simply micro counselling, we need to consider how to resist and transform oppressive systems, policies, and practices that are part of the normative experiences of mainstream social work practice and education. For me, the need for building alliances- networks, support groups, unions, professional associations and such- to increase the potential of collective action is essential as the system is very effective in dividing and conquering resistors so that we are left to individually struggle in our own micro-practices, feeling alone and isolated, while dealing with similar issues. Finding allies, who share our AOP experiences and understandings and who are willing to do something about it with us, strikes me as a better solution than localized micro actions. As Shaw (1996) says, "Don't mourn, organize" (p. 5). Furthermore, Shaw (1996) makes the case for what he calls "tactical activism" which he suggests increases the potential for success. He recommends: creating proactive agendas; seeking coalitions with like-minded constituencies; aligning with the media; pursuing court action; and organizing discussions, conventions, campaigns,

and community forums. Rebick (2009) also proposes transforming the ways we organize and act in organizations to reflect liberatory and emancipatory processes and methods. She advocates building power non-violently, horizontally, and from the bottom up. Rebick (2009) outlines Starhawk's strategies for resisting from within current systems and traditional institutions, suggesting that we should be:

> withdrawing consent in a way that directly interferes with the operation of the systems, that raises its costs of operating -its economic costs, its political costs, its social costs- that de-legitimizes it in the eyes of a larger public, even beyond that little minority. That minority can do things, you know, can create crises- like in Seattle or other places -that have larger reverberations (p. 76).

In successful social movements, what has worked before to change people is, "realizing they must act in the world to make it a better place" (Rebick, 2009, p. 75). The findings from this study also suggest that the exercise of visioning seems key to motivating people to act, resist, and attempt local, social, and global change. Respondents suggested that social workers and field instructors:

> Tend to be the type of people who do not even advocate for themselves. We need knowledge and education. We lack opportunity, skills, tools, and voice. We have to introduce a paradigm shift, worldview, individualism to collectivism, and decide where we are going.

Ginden (2002) adds that:

> Social justice demands reviving the determination to dream. It is not just that dreaming is essential for maintaining any resistance, but because today, if we do not think big -as big as the globalizers themselves think, we will not even win small (p. 2).

The challenge for the social work profession then is that we need dialogue, education, action, and further research about how to help social workers make their visions about society come true. Finally, Whitaker (2007) believes that, for oppressed peoples:

> Each of us has within the power and the ability to disrupt and transform some of the barriers we have overcome. But to do so, we each must recognize the privilege of our positions, we must not only fulfill our own potential but also actively work to foster the potential of our neighbours…We can also look to the work of philosopher-activist Angela Davis, who writes that 'the process of empowerment cannot be simplistically defined in accordance with our own particular class interest. We must learn to lift as we climb' (pp. 138-141).

Social Work Education and Field Instruction. Education, particularly social work education, was mentioned several times by the participants as central to their development and identities as social workers, field instructors, and resistors. This next section expands on some of the themes highlighted in the following field instructor's comment:

> How do you teach a course on this? I certainly couldn't stress enough the importance of my experience in learning about this through college. I think if nothing else, I give social work credit for allowing me to become aware and naming the things that I need to name that I knew already but I didn't know what they were. And social work really did that for me. I've said that since the day I graduated so again another piece of a puzzle needs to be there in terms of looking at oppression. Not everybody gets the education for instance that I did in terms of racism and understanding what that's about and the institutional part of it the personal part of it. Some people get that but other people get the feminist. I didn't get a whole lot of the feminist part but I did understand what the power imbalance was at. So bringing all that together and putting it into a social work piece is of prime importance I believe and teaching resistance through collective action and enabling students to learn, develop, create, and experience ways to resist.

To explore some of the above mentioned themes, I have chosen to share personal and professional academic experiences and examples to illustrate some of the challenges inherent in applying AOP educational theory and methods within current social work education and field instruction.

Teaching and applying AOP in social work programs, classrooms, and field practicums: The challenges. As summarized in the literature review, much of the social work literature recommends using AOP theory and education methods to transform social work education. As a social work educator and field supervisor for the last ten years,

teaching courses with mostly White and middle class students, I have been interested in and attempted to apply my experiences and understandings of oppression and resistance through AOP educational theory and methodology in social work classrooms and in field practicum settings. At times, this, "collision, then, of radical questions and liberal solutions, of anti-oppressive practice and a world naturally resistant to its critique..." (Jeffery, 2007, p. 128) has been difficult for me, students, agency field instructors, and I daresay, my academic colleagues, especially as my resistance enterprise has been housed inside traditional "liberal" universities, social service organizations, and field placement agencies. However, even though I make a point of using teaching methodologies consistent with AOP theories, these efforts are not met without difficulty. According to Razack (1999), "many articles tell us what to teach but tend not to deal with the major challenges the teacher and students face in the classroom" (p.234). In addition, students, field instructors, and academics are sometimes caught in the "crossfire" when they attempt to introduce and apply AOP critical analysis, ideas, and practices to traditional agencies and conventional social work colleagues. The following sections outline some of my experiences and reflections about using AOP analysis, teaching, and field instruction.

Hostile student reactions. Although some students flourish when exposed to AOP ideas, theory, and educational methods, others have extreme reactions to AOP ideas, teaching, and learning. Indeed, Schick (2005) hypothesizes that the resistance of students to AOP ideas and practices is really about how the privileging and entitlements of Whiteness and classism are entrenched and maintained in the classroom and academic institutions. She argues that:

> Cross-cultural, multicultural initiatives - also called anti-racist or oppositional- frequently meet with resistance. Difficulty in implementing and teaching such courses suggest that they pose some kind of threat in the spaces where they are introduced (p.210).

I would also hypothesize that the privileging and entrenchment of male gender and heterosexism are also implicit in this process. Leondar- Wright (2005) also proposes that, "Diversity training on college campuses is problematic without classism, because education itself functions as a primary access channel for transitioning across class" (p.154). I had never considered that while I was struggling to dismantle privilege and power in the classroom and in the field, some students may be simultaneously trying to access that very same power, status, and privilege. These experiences and reactions to AOP teaching methods may also vary depending on the multiple identities and subjectivities of differentially located students.

In addition, Baines (2007a) suggests that many educators and field instructors present AOP teaching and concepts such as social location and identity in contradictory ways:

> ...for example, when students or social workers are encouraged to more or less confess external identifiers such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation in order to determine who is an oppressor and who is oppressed. These confessional practices often hide more about oppression than they reveal, and more importantly from a political perspective, they demobilize people by making them feel that their fate has been sealed and that there is little that can be done beyond feeling bad and guilty, or by simply repeating a string of identifiers without actually understanding how any of these factors relate to power, privilege and oppression...This routinistic, depoliticizing approach neither identifies nor analyzes power and privilege, nor does it ally the power and privilege, one might hold (by virtue of race, gender, class or other attributes) with any particular cause or strategy other than getting AOP enthusiasts off their case. In this instance, social location and identity are used as unchanging labels rather than as tools for understanding how everyone is influenced by and cannot live outside oppressive social relations- although if we choose to, we can make positive changes in them.... it is equally important to understand, critique

and improve how one uses that privilege to challenge oppression in everyday life (pp. 24-25).

In consideration of Baines' critique, I *am* likely unconscious of some of the ways I act out various negative "isms", be it my White privilege or my class power, in the classroom or in my role as field supervisor. As well, there may be validity to students' criticisms in terms of the contradictions they see between social work educators' professed beliefs in egalitarianism, our role as gatekeepers, and the institution's insistence that we evaluate and grade their efforts. As Davies & Leonard (2004) point out, there can be, "a contradiction between the liberatory goals of the critical tradition and the actual oppressive practices that we, as educators and social workers, find ourselves engaging in" (p.xiii). Indeed, social work educators and field instructors interested in transformation and social change struggle to balance these competing interests.

Gender Backlash in the Academy: Although Baines' (2007a) ideas are intriguing, the intensity and viciousness of some students' reactions lead me to suspect very strongly that their reactions are not so much about my AOP teaching methods but instead are about gender. Because the use of self in therapeutic relationships is vital, I do invite students to reflect, use critical thinking, deconstruct their world views, social locations, and identities, and challenge the status quo. I recognize that this examination of self can be very difficult for some students. However, I believe that their negative reactions are less about my challenging their ideas and worldviews than it is about being a woman and doing so.

In addition, I cannot ignore the reality of my lived experience as a female in academia. Overall (1998) discussed the sexist experiences and consequences for women in the academy:

> There is much evidence -ranging from the dangers of sexual assault and harassment and the contempt for feminist scholarship, to women's higher workload in student counselling and committees and the paucity of women who are full professors or hold significant administrative positions (p. 38).

For instance, from my perspective, I am often the sole voice in social work faculty meetings, continually arguing a feminist standpoint and pointing out the gender politics of leadership, decision-making, and power. Overall (1998) describes a similar situation writing that, "...these role muddles about my position as a feminist teacher are exacerbated by my complicated and touchy relationship with my institution" (p. 7). As difficult as this can be, within my own faculty and university, it becomes even more hazardous when I work as a field representative with multiple agencies and settings, numerous practicum students and field instructors, and various communities and populations. The combination of me not performing my gender appropriately and propounding alternative social work paradigms often results in my theoretical approaches and expertise being invalidated and minimized by faculty and social work colleagues. Indeed, Keller & Moglen (1987) found that:

> many women faculty themselves do not actually experience themselves as powerful. Over the years they have internalized the patronizing judgements made by scornful male teachers and colleagues. Thus, even when they achieve positions of authority, they continue to feel the oppression of past struggles and the ongoing burdens of tokenism. How can they effectively assert power if they actually feel impotent" (p.26)?

One might argue that it is not surprising that traditional institutions and their employees reflect the oppressive structures and dynamics of racist, classist, and patriarchal capitalist society. Although Schick (2005) does not analyze gender, race, or class, she hypothesizes that:

> When this intrusion happens- when an issue becomes too personal for comfort- participants use their indignation to re-establish the dominant identities and central positions. The space must be maintained; the identities- those who are in control and those who are not-cannot be confused (p. 214).

This study's research findings and the discussion about dominant identities make me wonder:1) are AOP social work educators primarily people who are already identified and visible as "other"; 2) are we specifically drawn to teach and use AOP methods *because* of our particular social and cultural identities and locations; or 3) is it possible that, because many of us identify and are already visible as "other", we experience more backlash (than our colleagues) because of our race, gender, class, physical abilities, sexual orientation, and so on?

Recommendations. For those of us experiencing the highs, lows, and challenges of teaching AOP approaches, we need to create dialogues about, research, and scholarship into how to facilitate and optimize student learning through classroom and field practicum moments of "stress and uncertainty" (Jeffery, 2007, p. 130). According to Jeffery (2007), teaching from an AOP framework necessitates an "identity crisis, then offers partiality and incompleteness by way of assisting students to explore professional selves without settling on a stable solution" (p. 135). This means, at the program level and within field instruction, we need to find more effective ways to support students (and colleagues) as they work through this transitional state related to learning and applying alternative discourses.

In addition, Razack (1999) recommends organizing classroom (and I would suggest field) coalitions dedicated to discussing, exploring, and resolving particular social issues. The aims of these coalitions are through class readings, experiential formats, exercises, dyad, journal work, small group discussion, and role plays to provide "a space where

students can learn to talk respectfully about experiences of oppression and oppressive forces and can take this discussion outside of the classroom to disrupt and begin to challenge their world" (Jeffery, 2007, p. 243). The challenge becomes one of creating space, within the classroom, field practicum, university, and social service agency to dialogue respectfully about difference, power, and privilege, identify and explore unequal social and power relations in society, and act together to dismantle oppression. However, this recommendation also assumes that the "well-intended critically conscious" (Ellsworth, 1989) social work educator "can somehow minimize/ dismantle the power imbalances and systemic oppressions that permeate the classroom" and the field practicum (Hillock & Profitt, 2007, p. 39). In reality, this seems very difficult to achieve. Thus, research and scholarship are necessary to determine what strategies are most effective to identify, dismantle, and /or creatively use the substantial power differences that exist between various individuals and groups within classrooms, faculties, and field practicum settings to act collectively inside and outside these "safe" sites to make social change.

Creating these types of coalitions and spaces also require that social work educators value the knowledge and wisdom that field instructors bring to the table. It is essential that field instructors share their practice wisdom with both students and educators. When I asked the field instructors in this study to tell me what advice they would give social work students to resist oppression, they emphasized the need for students to be positive, take action, and increase (self) awareness. We also need to promote solidarity, dialogue, and collectivity amongst and between academics, students, and field instructors who are attempting AOP approaches within social work. Regular AOP academic and practice conferences, support groups for resistance workers, AOP integrative field seminars, and an

interactive website dedicated to AOP practitioners which allow them opportunities to discuss issues related to their theory, practice, field instruction, and research would be useful in supporting AOP practitioners. Furthermore, a Canadian Association of AOP social workers and programs, community and academic coalitions for interested AOP professionals, and trans-disciplinarian networking across universities, faculties, and social service organizations might be helpful in terms of building alliances with others who share our philosophy and views.

In this study, respondents also identified the need for optimism and patience on the part of resistance workers and also acknowledged that, at times, they feel hopeless. Similarly, I am always surprised to find that many social work students seem more embittered, cynical, and hopeless going into the profession than I am after 20 years of practice. As social work educators and field instructors, we need to demonstrate that the global situation is not hopeless. In fact, Rebick (2009) optimistically forecasts that, "the combination of the environmental crisis, globalization and new technologies is producing profound new ideas about social and political change" (p. 9). Social work educators and field instructors then, need to do a better job of finding, teaching, and modelling successful examples of social movements, resistance strategies, and social action. We also need courses in the social work curriculum that actually teach the practical skills necessary to "trouble" society (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 9). For example, I would love to develop and teach a course on "Theories and Strategies of Civil Disobedience".

Challenges, Limitations, and Benefits

In this section, I will as human research instrument offer my thoughts and feelings about this study's research process, findings, strengths, and challenges (Rodwell, 1998). I will also discuss my thoughts about the research sample, gender differences and diversity, and the interviewing process and reactions. To do this, I will share excerpts from the field instructors' comments and my journal notes as these highlight the issues that most excited, challenged, or perplexed me.

Sample

As mentioned previously, the sample used in this research study is not very diverse but is fairly consistent with the demographics of most of the social work professionals who live and work in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. As mentioned, in the methodology section, I struggled with trying to make the sample more diverse. I was fortunate to be able to include two women of colour. My assumption was that ensuring that these particular women were included in the research study would deepen the discussion about experiences and understandings of oppression. I think that this was accurate. Although many of the stories I heard were sometimes emotionally difficult to hear and read about, I was definitely more impacted by these women's narratives. I found their stories to be particularly useful in illuminating the complex discussion of the internalization of oppression, the intersectionality of the "matrix of oppression", and White entitlement. They also offered a different perspective of Canadian society, one to which, I do not always have easy access.

I had similar concerns about attempting to stratify the sample based on gender. Despite the small size of the sample and its limited diversity, I was struck at how similar the respondents' comments were and how often the respondents' comments resonated with me. Because the sample was very similar demographically, it is not surprising that this group of field instructors had fairly similar views of oppression. The fact that the majority of the research sample was made up of Caucasian middle class people with similar backgrounds and education may also account for the similarity in expressed views. One could also conclude that this similarity reflected a general consensus about definitions, understandings, and conceptualizations of oppression at least in this particular group of field instructors.

Gender Differences

I definitely noticed gender differences in the way males and females experienced, conceptualized, strategized, articulated, and acted upon their understandings of oppression. The following journal excerpts describe what I was feeling and thinking about the gender differences I noticed throughout the research process.

About the men. The following example demonstrates some of these gender differences.

> I am struck at how little the male participants have talked about male gender or patriarchy as oppression or even their whiteness. Perhaps this strikes me as I try to be explicitly aware of these issues. It is like they give lip service to feminist ideals but have not quite incorporated the luxury of their privilege. Obviously, this is based on my own lens, as I am so aware of my own oppression as a woman.

As I explored earlier, perhaps we cannot see, understand, or really be aware of oppressions that have not impacted our own lives and experiences. For instance, can I really claim to be truly anti-racist, completely conscious so to speak, if I have White privilege?

About male managers. The following journal example illustrates how I struggled with my reactions to my interviews with male social work managers:

> This interview should be interesting as this person is in management and a clinical role. I found myself being a bit bored in this session. Have I reached saturation or is this sample so homogeneous that I am not hearing much new? Or is it that all of these males sound the same? This participant seemed pretty unaware, of his possible role as oppressor, based on White, male, management privilege. Unlike other participants, he did not share much from his personal life and always kept the conversation about professional issues.

I wondered if my reactions to these particular interviews were about how these specific men communicated in the interviews or was what I was sensing a reflection of a gender gap between what these men said and how I heard and understood them? It would have been interesting to see if these respondents would have communicated differently if a male had interviewed them. I also pondered if my reactions were actually about gender or instead, about the professional management roles that these particular field instructors held? Are certain types of social workers drawn to or promoted to management? The following interview excerpt again demonstrates my questions about these particular interviews:

> Interviewed another male manager. I again found myself being a bit bored with this interview. Is it because I sense the males swimming at the surface of this topic versus the women diving into it? Is it because the males may communicate in a different way using non- feeling/sensory language? Or do they truly not get it or experience it? They seem so detached and distanced from past and present experiences, preferring to talk about others, rather than their own experiences. Is this a gender difference or a difference in experience?

About the women. In contrast, the women in this sample, whether in management roles or not, seemed to me much more conversant with the idea of personal struggles, related to being oppressed and avoiding oppressive behaviors. Is this because, as women, we live with varying degrees of gender oppression every day so it is the ocean we swim in? In the following journal notes, I contrasted what I saw as very different male and female perspectives in the interviews:

1. Lived experience of females different than male participants. Women talk about their own oppression, men talk about imagining or hearing others' experiences.
2. The interview went well. Actually we could have talked for hours. She was very enthusiastic and shared a lot of my own interests, background, and literature. I felt that we were speaking the same language. So, do I really only connect with those who I think are just like me? It has been clear at an emotional and cognitive level, that I have "clicked" with White women first (especially those with similar professional experiences, hospital and protection), women of color next, then men who are comfortable discussing personal and emotional experiences, and last, men in management who to me, seem distant and very cerebral.

From this research experience, I questioned whether my reaction to the male interviews reflected my bias, in other words, my own way of structuring people into levels? Was I automatically setting up my own hierarchical pyramid, indeed, my own oppressive way of measuring and valuing people? Am I repeating oppressive structures, the master's way of thinking and conceptualization, simply in the way I automatically categorized these field instructors?

Interviewing

In the following section, I will outline the research participants' expectations about the interviews and their reactions to the interviews. In each interview, I explicitly asked the

field instructors about their understandings and expectations for the interviews. One person summed up his or her understanding of the research goals of this study as:

> One is to reflect something about the process of that thought construction in the first place. How it's informed by theory or informed by experience. Second, to look at how that construction then is passed on to students and how students may or may not be able to balance that with their own experience, with their academic experience, and then with their field experience.

Respondents' reactions to interviews. Overall, respondents seemed clear and consistent about what the research study was about. This was reassuring as it gave me the sense that my invitation to participate and written explanation of the research had been thorough. The following respondents shared their expectations of the research interviews:

1. To discuss my understanding about the implications and impact of oppression in the social work field basically in the front lines.
2. You want to have more knowledge about social workers and about oppression. What I understand is how we understand oppression and maybe how we are part of the system when we oppress the population that we deal with.
3. It's around my theoretical concepts or how I can conceptualize certain aspects of my work most specifically the aspect of oppression.

I also made a point to explain to participants that I was not just interested in their thinking about oppression, but I also wanted to explore how their understandings of oppression, played out in their personal and professional lives as well.

The respondents seemed to enjoy the interview process. In terms of the interview and dialogue, there was almost a sense that there was a "game afoot". The notion of intellectual sparring and the mental challenge of "figuring out" were seen as attractive by the following respondent:

> I prefer the conversations where there is a challenge, because it appeals to the part of me that's still after truth, even though I can embrace postmodernism I can look at

> but maybe somewhere unified field theory does exist, there is a level of truth so it's fun.

This same respondent actually gave me the feedback that I was not challenging him or her enough in the interview. I found this amusing as I have never been described as "not challenging enough". He or she stated that:

> It's unfair in a sense because I haven't necessarily been challenged, you haven't been approaching me as though there's something about my conceptualizing that needs to be changed which makes it more comfortable to just spout off.

Interview style. The question of interview style is important. As described previously, I had my academic colleague interview me before the rest of the interviews to test the interview questions and format. His or her style was very different than mine. He or she was much more confrontational than I chose to be in the interview process. Here are my journal notes describing my thinking about out different interview styles:

> Had colleague interview me with the questions. I told him/her to go in whatever direction she/he wanted to. It was very interesting to see where he/she went in terms of probes. She/he was much more leading and confrontational in his/her questions than I would be. However, this could be due to our professional relationship, which has created a trusting environment, for her/him to challenge me. I appreciated him/her pointing out contradictions or inconsistencies in my words and thinking. I do not think that I would use that approach with my participants though because the same level of trust would not be there.

Because of my colleague's modelling, I did choose to make the interview process less formal with a much more conversational tone than I had previously planned. In my journal notes, I remarked, "My style was much more conversational based on my colleague's model of interviewing me. I think that it went much better when I was less stilted".

Interview process. The interviewing process was dynamic, changing slightly and moving in different directions, depending on the person, setting, relationship, and richness

of new learnings and insights from other interviews. The following respondent understood why each conversation was so unique:

> You're going after measuring something that is so dynamic and so changeable that the concepts and constructs of that would be different depending on what the level of conversation is and who you're talking with.

Lack of opportunity to discuss social work theory and practice. The response to the interviews was overwhelmingly positive and reflected a gap in the social work community. As mentioned previously, respondents reported a lack of opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue about how they understand social work theory, practice, and field instruction and how they apply their understandings in their everyday lives. The following respondent appreciated the interview process as an opportunity to dialogue about social work:

> It was a great process to go through because, we don't often get an opportunity to sit down and have someone sort of guide you, through really deep thinking on such a topic.

Benefits to Research Participants

Part of the use of resistance and AOP research is that one hopes to promote changes in the research participants' thinking and lives in ways that are seen as beneficial to them. The interview process and dialogues did encourage respondents to be more reflective and critical about their social work thinking and practices as demonstrated in the following comments:

1. One of the interesting things about these interviews, it's making me really think about my own practice and how I frame things.
2. Certainly it's helped me name something that I carry with me, realizing my approach. I mean I know what my approach is but it's been good in terms of really

> recognizing that and actually put into a form what I do so it's good to recognize that again.

For two field instructors, the research process triggered painful memories of self-doubt and trauma. One respondent said that the interview brought up her or his old pattern of second-guessing:

> It's interesting that I brought up that situation again just recent, well you did ask for something recent, but framing it as oppression. Because I really wasn't looking at it that way at the time that it was all happening. I saw it as being very insensitive and biases coming up and lack of self awareness…And still that self doubt, did I do the right thing or was I overreacting?

Another respondent commented on the interview process:

> This was incredibly difficult. I don't think I'm alone, with people who tend not to want to look at oppression too deeply. It's a scary place to go and that's scary, it can be scary for multiple, multiple reasons for different people.

She or he also "enjoyed the challenge, that it was a great process, but difficult". She or he also said that the, "interview brought up feelings she or he would rather not experience". I offered the person my personal support and referral for counselling of which she or he chose not to avail her or himself.

Written Assignments

I had chosen to include the written assignments as an exercise that the field instructors could complete after the interview was finished. The reasons I chose to include written assignments were that I wanted the field instructors to think about what we had discussed in the interview process and apply their understandings and insights to their written examples and to give them a time period, between the interview and written assignment, to reflect about our dialogue and perhaps think more deeply about the concepts. I also wanted to give them an opportunity to share stories that might have been

too personal or too painful to share in an interview with someone they might not know well. One field instructor's story of sexual assault would never have been captured solely by the interview process. She or he reiterated this by writing that:

> This example is one that was too close to talk about in the face-to-face interview. This additional method in exploring oppression, for me, was very effective.

Thus, I think that it was essential to give these research participants multiple opportunities to share their stories in ways that potentially increased their sense of personal safety. The written assignments also provided further triangulation of the findings by providing an additional rich source of data to explore and analyze the respondents' thinking and understandings about oppression.

Recommendations for Future Research

The goals of this research were to open up dialogue, reflection, and thinking about the concept of oppression, increase our knowledge base and understandings of oppression within social work practice, education, and field instruction, and stimulate ideas for future research. As a result of this study, I suggest the following areas of study related to oppression for future researchers: a) service users experiences of oppression and the clinical relationship; b) congruency between social workers' AOP rhetoric and actual clinical behaviours; and c) social work educational and field instruction theory and methods, student learnings, and outcome measurement, within classrooms and field practicums.

Service User Research. Exploring various groups of service users' conceptualizations of oppression (i.e., process, concerns, examples, experiences, and suggestions) and then comparing their responses to the findings in this study would help to develop a more complete understanding of the application of the concept of oppression in

social work. In addition, it is important to determine if service users' experiences within the AOP clinical relationship and associated interventions are perceived as empowering. As well, we need to measure if AOP clinical approaches are more empowering than traditional therapeutic approaches. Studies comparing service users' perceptions of oppression and power within AOP clinical and field practicum relationships to their experiences and perceptions within other forms of social work practice are also needed.

Congruency research. Another important step in further research would be to analyze if AOP social workers' verbal reports of what they say they do in practice are congruent with their actual behaviours, actions, decisions, and clinical outcomes. In addition, researching congruency across service user' groups, within various social work agencies, multiple levels of intervention, and different social work roles is necessary to achieve a fuller understanding of conceptualizations of oppression of differently located individuals and groups.

Educational and field instruction theories, methods, and learning outcomes research. Social workers, field instructors, and social work programs would benefit from research into the following areas:

1. Partnerships between social work academics and field instructors to explore how they teach AOP in the classroom and field including theory, content, curriculum, challenges, and methods.
2. Use of the classroom and field practicums as resistance laboratories, studying actual AOP methods in the classroom and in the field, to measure learning outcomes to determine how best to support transformational learning and paradigm shifting.

Summary

This section highlighted major themes from the data including the respondents' understandings of oppression and AOP, their limited acknowledgement of privilege and entitlement, a conclusion that good intentions are not enough to minimize power imbalances and create social change, and a lack of collectivity and social action. I also outlined recommendations for social work practice, resistance and social change, and social work education and field instruction. I also explored some of the challenges of applying and teaching an AOP framework and summarized my reflections about the research and its challenges, limitations, and benefits. In addition, suggestions for future social work research were made.

Conclusion

This dissertation is based on research that explored the constructions, conceptualizations, and understandings of oppression in social work practice, field instruction, and in real life as articulated and storied by a group of ten social work field instructors. Interviews, written assignments, and journal and methodological notes were the primary documents used to analyze these participants' constructions. This exploratory qualitative study emphasized grounded theory data collection and analysis and was informed by a constructivist paradigm and the principles of resistance and AOP research. Research questions highlighted three main areas of the respondents' thinking and action: 1) the concept of oppression; 2) personal and professional identity; and 3) social change, action, and resistance. The research findings were then presented in three major categories:

1. The participants' discourses, experiences, and narratives of oppression were explored including an analysis of their cognitive understandings of the word oppression and definitions, reviewing the respondents' conceptualization processes with emphasis on the subjective processes of the internalization of oppression and the use of metaphor in meaning-making (including eight major metaphor themes), and analyzing gender, class, race, and cultural differences in perceptions, experiences, articulations, and understandings of oppression.
2. The field instructors' representational narratives and constructions about the concept of oppression within social work practice including issues related to looking at practice with and without an understanding of oppression, decision-making, and the need for productive narratives were reviewed. The interconnections of participants' social and cultural locations, privileges, entitlement, and power, the process of becoming an oppressor, and participant' suggestions on how to avoid becoming an oppressor were highlighted.
3. The respondents' resistance work was discussed featuring how their understandings of the concept of oppression constructed their resistance including definitions of resistance, the personal qualities of resistance, successful resistance strategies within social work practice, and the challenges and barriers of working within systems, teams, and non-social work settings. In addition, if and how they identified and confronted their privilege, entitlement, and power, personal lifestyle choices for resistance, and the joys, challenges, and dilemmas of resistance practice were presented.

A significant finding supported by the field instructors' comments, stories, and actions was a philosophical and practice stance that advocated that:

> the most productive narrative is the one that can interpret with a client or with a patient as being most likely to open up opportunities as opposed to shut down opportunities, the narrative that would be most likely to contribute towards human progress with identity, with opportunities within society.

As a bridge between modernist theories and assumptions and valid postmodern critiques related to privileging dominant narratives, this comment highlights an ethical stance which supports AOP approaches within social work. This definition also characterizes the way the participants in this study conceptualized oppression. Indeed, the language they use throughout the study is firmly embedded in the language of neo- liberalism: equality; production; equal opportunity; and assumes notions of free will, agency, and progress. In addition, the use of language by respondents throughout the study that described service users as clients or patients seemed to indicate a non-critical acceptance of this terminology and perhaps the nature of traditional dominant- subordinate relationships between social workers and service users. Participants did not seem to recognize or articulate an understanding that this choice of language and these notions can be viewed as constrained and influenced by the social and cultural identities and locations of specific peoples experiencing oppression and as well as benefiting privileged groups.

Respondents demonstrated: an understanding of the concept of oppression, particularly at the level of personal oppression; their processes of meaning-making and the internalization of oppression; the links between power and oppression; and to a varying degree, an ability to explain how they apply their understandings of these concepts to their social work practice and their personal lives. Although they presented as highly reflective

of their practice approaches, it was recommended that as low- power actors, they develop more effective AOP and resistance analytic skills and strategies. The need for organizational change, better self-care, increased assertiveness and negotiation skills, and the development of optimism and patience were emphasized.

For the most part, the respondents did not explicitly acknowledge and identify their positions of privilege and entitlement and how these factors might play out and possibly over-advantage them in their clinical, academic, and personal relationships. Thus, social workers were strongly urged to examine Whiteness and its impact on social work practice, education, and field instruction. In addition, strategies for male social workers were suggested and social workers, in general, were encouraged to develop social empathy as this may offer potential for collective action.

In this study, I found that this particular group of field instructors relied on the assumption that awareness, recognition, sensitivity, and good intentions were enough to minimize power imbalances between themselves and service users and to stop them from becoming oppressors in their practice and lives. From these findings, I suggest that good intentions and limited social work micro practices are not enough to create the conditions for social change. Thus, as a group of social work actors, respondents did not identify building alliances and coalitions, developing and supporting Indigenous community organizations, and mobilizing and working within and for oppressed populations to dismantle oppressive structures.

Moreover, it was determined that, if social workers are going to be successful at resistance work, they need practical skills related to connecting AOP vision, values, and beliefs with material conditions and actual practices. Social workers were encouraged to

organize, develop dialogues, communities of resistance, and support groups, strategize about creative social conflict, and reconsider and (re)construct the profession's relationships with union, cooperative, professional associations, and grassroots movements. In addition, community development approaches, finding allies, and promoting tactical activism were advocated. Changing the methods, processes, and structures of how we organize to reflect bottom up and horizontal operations of power and decision-making was also recommended.

In addition, AOP social work educators and field instructors must create dialogues about, research, and scholarship into strategies to facilitate and optimize student learning through classroom and field practicum moments of transformation, identity challenge, and "stress and uncertainty". They also need to promote solidarity, dialogue, support, and collectivity amongst educators, students, and field instructors who are attempting AOP approaches within social work. It was also suggested that educators and field instructors need to find, teach, and model successful resistance and social change strategies, skills, and outcomes, develop and support curriculum related to AOP and resistance approaches, and emphasize the teaching of hope.

On a final note, I offer hope to all social workers engaged in this non-violent revolutionary struggle. We are not alone. There are many people across the planet sharing our vision. Rebick (2009) sums up novelist Arundhati Roy's 2003 World Social Forum inspiring speech:

We can re-invent civil disobedience in a million different ways…becoming a collective pain in the ass. Our strategy should be not only to confront empire but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling- their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons and their notion of inevitability. Remember this, we be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing (pp. 20- 21).

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Appendix 1 Invitation to Participate

(The following is a copy of the notice which will be sent to all social workers in the Okanagan University College's (OUC) School of Social Work's field placement instructor list).

I am currently conducting research for my doctoral dissertation in social work education from Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am currently working as an assistant professor of social work at Okanagan University College (OUC), north Kelowna campus. The title of my research proposal is, "How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression in their personal and professional lives"?

I am interested in interviewing experienced social workers, who are presently working in a social work capacity/ role, in the Okanagan Valley (specifically the Penticton, Kelowna, or Vernon areas). I have defined "experienced" as those social workers who have a minimum of 5 years of social work experience and possess either a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or a Masters of Social Work (MSW) degree.

I am recruiting 10 social workers, who meet this criteria, and asking them to meet with me to participate in a tape recorded interview of approximately 2 hours. Participants will be asked to share their views, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the concept of oppression. Participants will be asked to complete a form detailing demographic information. Participants will also be asked to describe and reflect upon, in writing, one event when they have experienced or witnessed oppression. Total participant time to complete all research activities will be approximately 4 hours.

The confidentiality of all participants will be respected throughout the process. This research has received both MUN and OUC ethics approval. Research results will be shared upon completion of the research process, if requested.

If you would like to participate or if you know of others who might like to do so, please call Susan Hillock at 250- 762-5445 *7924 or email me at shillock@ouc.bc.ca.. Interested social workers must reply to this invitation by (date). My dissertation supervisor, Dr. Donna Hardy Cox can also be contacted at 709- 737- 3057 or at dhardy@mun.ca.

Appendix 2 Informed Consent

I, _____, voluntarily give consent to participate, as one of ten social workers, in the research project titled "How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression in their personal and professional lives"?

This research will be conducted by doctoral student and social worker, Susan Hillock, and carried out under the auspices of Memorial University of Newfoundland. I have read the "Information to Participants" form and understand the nature and purpose of the variety of data collection methods. I understand that I am consenting to an audio-taped interview and will be asked to provide demographic information and a written example of an experience with oppression. I understand the procedures that are in place to ensure confidentiality and informed consent.

I further understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time during the interview and data collection process. I also understand that non-identifying quotes may be used in the final dissertation report and future publications. I understand that I have the right to review the transcripts of my taped interview and will have the right to withdraw any aspect of the transcript which causes me discomfort.

I understand that I will have the opportunity to read the final report once it has been approved by the external examiners and I will request this if I want. I have been given ample opportunity to ask questions about this research, informed consent, confidentiality, the research process, and data collection methods and am aware of the procedure for voicing my concerns or withdrawing my consent.

Signature_____

Date_____

Participant ID Number/ Name _____

Appendix 3 Information for Participants

Research Question: How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression?

Principal Researcher: Susan Hillock, BA, BSW, MEd.
Social Work Doctoral Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Assistant Professor, Okanagan University College,
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Associate Professor, School of Social Work & Education
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Research Purpose: The primary purpose of this doctoral research is explore how the concept of oppression is constructed, thought about, conceptualized, and understood by social work field instructors. It is hoped that this research will lend itself to a clearer, more in depth understanding of oppression in social work and thus, assist social workers to better recognize, understand, and respond to oppression in their personal and professional lives.

Research Design: This will be an exploratory qualitative study, emphasizing grounded theory data collection and analysis methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), informed by a constructivist paradigm (Rodwell, 1998). Ten field instructors will be asked to respond to a series of questions about their conceptualization of oppression in semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be audio-taped. Participants will also be asked to provide demographic information and a written description of an experience they have had with oppression.

Expected Results: Participants may benefit from the research process by having the opportunity to critically think about and reflect upon their constructions and understandings of the concept of oppression. They may also enjoy sharing their thoughts and feelings with a colleague, knowing that they are contributing to building the social work knowledge base. The social work profession, service users, and the broader community may benefit from the research results as it is hoped that a greater understanding of oppression will assist social workers to better recognize/ understand oppression, carry out anti-oppressive social work practice, and attempt social change.

What you will asked to do? You will be asked to read the "Information to Participants" form and the "Informed Consent" forms. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions and or express concerns about any aspect of the research process, before signing the "Informed Consent" form. You will be expected to participate in one interview, which will be approximately two hours in length. During this interview, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions about your conceptualization of oppression. This interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. You will have the right to request to see the completed transcript and to change any parts that you feel uncomfortable with or think may have been misinterpreted. You will have the right to terminate the interview at any time and to refuse to answer specific questions. You will be asked to complete a form outlining specific personal and professional demographic information. You will also be asked to write about an experience you have had with oppression. Your responses and input will be analyzed and a doctoral dissertation, as well as possible future publications will be produced. You will have the right to request to see the dissertation and any future publications.

Risk and Benefits: In terms of risk, no material or physical risks to participants are anticipated. However, the nature of the questions about oppression, particularly about experiencing or witnessing oppression may cause you some emotional, psychological, and/ or social discomfort. Every effort will be made to offer you support, throughout the interview and the research project, if you are feeling uncomfortable. This support will include personal support from the researcher and the opportunity to be referred to community agencies if necessary. Participants will also have the right to request to review the interview transcripts and change things which they are uncomfortable with or think have been misinterpreted. As researcher, my role is not to judge what you think, feel, or do, but to try to understand, through, the interview process, how you "make-meaning" of the concept of oppression in your personal and professional life. It is hoped that the benefits of discussing and exploring your conceptualization of oppression in social work will outweigh any discomfort you may feel.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research project and future publications. Although direct quotes may appear in the dissertation, your name will not appear, and only non-identifying information will be used, throughout the research project. In addition, you are invited to use a pseudonym or an identification number throughout the research process. As well, raw data, including audiotapes, will be stored in a locked cabinet (to which only I have the key), identifying and non-identifying information will be kept in separate locked drawers, and all data will be destroyed by me in four years.

Anonymity: Because of the type of snowball, convenience sampling methods used, the small number of interviews, and the geographical and employment nature of this community, it may be difficult to guarantee anonymity. Indeed, participants who refer other social workers, for the research project, may be aware of who is being interviewed and may discuss the interviews, research process, or results with other known participants. However, this researcher will ensure that anyone involved in this research project including the thesis committee members, thesis supervisor, interview transcriber, and myself, will not reveal your identity to anyone.

Incentives: No incentives or compensation, financial or otherwise, will be provided to participants, other than the opportunity to assist in building the social work knowledge and theoretical base.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the "Information to

Participants' form:

Signature _____

Date _____

Participant ID Number/ Name _____

Appendix 4 Demographic Information

Demographic Information

Please take the time to complete the following by circling or filling all responses which fit your personal and professional circumstances:

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Age: Under 25, 26-30, 31-35, 36- 40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60, 61-65.

3. Language/s Spoken in Family of Origin: _____

Language/s Currently Spoken at Home: _____

Language Spoken in Workplace: _____

4. Completed Degrees: BSW (year of completion, university) _____

MSW (year of completion, university)_____

Any Other? (degree, year of completion, and university) _____

5. Family of Origin Income:

Under 20,000, 21,000-40,000, 41,000-60,000, 61,000-80,000, Over 80,000.

6. Current Family Income: 21,000-40,000, 41,000-60,000, 61,000-80,000, Over 80,000.

7. Sexual Identity: Gay, Lesbian, Transgendered, Bisexual, Heterosexual, Any Other?:_____

8. Race/ ethnic Origin: British Isles, French, European, Arab, Asian, African, Pacific Islands, Latin/ Central/ South American, Caribbean, North American First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Other? _____

9. Physical/ Mental Status: Ablebodied, Living with a Disability (if willing, please describe) _____

10. Religion of Family of Origin: _____

11. Current Religious/ Spiritual Affiliation: _____

12. Current Social Work Position: Title- _____

13. Type of Social Work Role: Clinical, Management/ administration, Social Policy Analysis/ development, Program Planning/ development/ evaluation, Social Action, Union, Private Practice. Any Other?_____

14. How Long Have You Been in this Role? _____

15. Total Years of Social Work Practice: _____

16. Primary Social Work Theoretical Framework Used:_____

Participant ID Number/ Name: _____

Appendix 5 Interview Questions

1. The concept of oppression:

a. What comes to mind when you think about the word oppression? (Probes- What do you think, feel, see, or believe when you hear or see this word?)

2. Personal and Professional Identity-Social/Cultural Location:

a. What do you think has influenced your recognition and understanding of oppression? (Probes- personally, educationally, and professionally)?

B. Considering a recent example when you have witnessed or experienced oppression, can you describe the situation, how you felt, and what you thought?

C. How did you respond to this situation?

D. Have you experienced situations in which you have been more oppressor than oppressed?

Can you tell me about this?

3. Social Change/ Action/Resistance

a. Based on the above mentioned experiences, what have you learned about oppression?

B. How does this knowledge influence your personal and professional life? (Probes- relationships, social work practice with clients, resistance, and social action).

4. Additional Comments

Any comments, thoughts, or feelings about this interview, the questions, your answers, or the research process?

Appendix 6 Oppression Example

I am asking you to write about an interaction, experience, or event when you experienced or witnessed oppression. Please pick an event that you have not discussed during the interview process. (Feel free to write on the back of these pages if necessary). Please complete this form and return it to me, in the stamped and addressed envelope which you have previously been given, no later than 1 week after your interview.

1) Describe the event or interaction in as much detail as possible (Please use non-identifying information).

2) What did you think, feel, and believe about oppression during this event?

3) How did you respond to the situation?

4) Looking back, what are your feeling, thoughts, and beliefs about the event now?

5) What, if anything, would you have done differently? Why?

6) From this experience, what did you learn about oppression?

7) Any other comments?

Thank you for your participation.

Participant ID/ Name:_____

Appendix 7 Human Subjects Ethical Review Protocol

Human Subjects Ethical Review Protocol

1. **Research Question**: How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression in their personal and professional lives?

2. **Principal Researcher**: Susan Hillock, BA, BSW, MEd.
Social Work Doctoral Student
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Assistant Professor, Okanagan University College,
Kelowna. B.C.
shillock@ouc.bc.ca

3. **Thesis Supervisor**: Dr. Donna Hardy Cox, RSW.,
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5. **Purpose of Research**: The primary purpose of this doctoral research is explore how the concept of oppression is constructed, thought about, conceptualized, and understood by social work field instructors. It is hoped that this research will lend itself to a clearer, more in depth understanding of oppression in social work and thus, assist social workers to better resist oppression in their personal and professional lives.

6. **Research Design**: This will be an exploratory qualitative study, emphasizing grounded theory data collection and analysis methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), informed by a constructivist paradigm (Rodwell, 1998). Ten field instructors will be asked to respond to a series of questions about their conceptualization of oppression in semi-structured interviews. They will also be asked to provide demographic information and a written description of an experience they may have had with oppression.

7. **Sample Population**: I have chosen to use a snowball convenience sampling method for this research project. I plan to interview ten OUC field instructors, who live and work in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, who have a minimum of five years of social work employment experience and possess either a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or a Masters of Social Work degree (MSW).

8. **Expected Results of Study**: Participants may benefit from the research process by having the opportunity to critically think about and reflect upon their constructions and understandings of the concept of oppression. They may also enjoy sharing their thoughts and feelings with a colleague, knowing that they are contributing to building the social work knowledge base. The social work profession, service users, and the broader community may benefit from the research results as it is hoped that a greater understanding of oppression will assist social workers to better resist oppression, carry out anti-oppressive social work practice, and attempt social change.

9. **Investigator's Relationship with Subjects**: It is likely that because of the sampling method, I may have both personal and professional relationships with some of the participants. This may be useful in terms of logistical convenience. In addition, the participants may feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts with someone they know. However, there is a risk that, because of these dual relationships, some potential interviewees will choose not to participate.

10. **Possible Risks and Benefits**: In terms of risk, no material or physical risks to participants are anticipated. However, the nature of the questions about oppression, particularly about experiencing, witnessing, or perpetuating oppression may cause some emotional, psychological, and/ or social discomfort. Every effort will be made to offer support, throughout the interview and the research project, to any individuals who are feeling discomfort. If necessary, support will include personal support and referrals to community agencies. Participants will also be given the opportunity to request to review the interview transcripts and change things which they are uncomfortable with or think have been misinterpreted. As researcher, I will stress to participants that my role is not to judge what they think, feel, or do, but to try to understand, through the interview process,

how they "make-meaning" of the concept of oppression in their personal and professional lives. It is hoped that the benefits of discussing and exploring their conceptualization of oppression in social work will outweigh any discomfort participants may feel.

11. **Informed Consent**: It is understood that all potential participants will be asked to read the "Information for Participants" form, prior to reading and signing the "Informed Consent" form. Both of these forms clearly outline the research process, what is expected of participants, and discuss ethical considerations including confidentiality, information sharing, data collection, expected results, benefits, and risks. These issues will again be addressed and discussed with each potential participant before he/she signs the consent form.

12. **Confidentiality**: Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research project and subsequent publications. Participants will be informed that although direct quotes may appear in the final dissertation report, their names will not appear, and every effort will be made to use only non-identifying information, throughout the research project. In addition, participants will be invited to use a pseudonym or an identification number throughout the research process. As well, raw data, including audiotapes, will be stored in a locked cabinet, identifying and non-identifying information will be kept in separate locked drawers, and all data will be destroyed in four years.

13. **Anonymity**: Because of the type of snowball, convenience sampling methods used, the small number of interviews, and the geographical and employment nature of this community, it may be difficult to guarantee anonymity. Indeed, participants who refer other social workers, for the research project, may be well aware of who is being interviewed and may discuss the interviews, research process, or results with other known participants. However, this researcher will ensure that anyone involved in this research project including the thesis committee members, thesis supervisor, interview transcriber, and myself, do not reveal anyone's identity.

14. **Incentives**: No incentives or compensation, financial or otherwise, will be provided to participants, other than the opportunity to assist in building the social work knowledge and theoretical base and review the dissertation findings.

Appendix 8 Continuing Ethics Approval

Ms. Hillock:

Thank you for your response to our request for an annual status report on ICEHR Proposal No. 2002/03-039-SW entitled *"How do social work field instructors conceptualize oppression?"* advising that your project will continue without any changes that would affect ethical relations with human participants.

On behalf of the Chair of ICEHR, I wish to advise that the ethics clearance for this project is extended until *August 2011*. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS) requires that you submit an annual status report to ICEHR on your project, should the research carry on beyond July 2011. Also, to comply with the TCPS, **please notify us upon completion of your project**.

We wish you well with the continuation of your research.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Noseworthy
Secretary, ICEHR
E-mail: elizaben@mun.ca

Appendix 9 Data Analysis Themes

Categories:

1) <u>The Concept of Oppression</u>

Key Concepts:

a. ***What is oppression*- (key ideas)** cause of oppression, character of oppression, existence of oppression, experience, external oppression, lack of opportunity, lack of power, lack of services, singular oppressive event and response, situation, strategies of oppression, roots of oppression, strategies to compete in capitalism.
b. ***First time*- (key ideas)** I understood oppression, first time I heard the word oppression,
c. ***Other words for oppression* - (key ideas)**, discrimination, harmful environment, isms, inequality, marginalization, part-time marginalization, patriarchy, poverty, power imbalance, power over, sexism.
d. ***Analysis of the word oppression*- (key ideas)** concretize word to help understand it, dialectic, language changing over time, developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression, language of oppression, meaning making, not using the word oppression clinically, politicized language, sensed understanding before language, stories/conversations as a way of understanding, the word oppression in social work, use of other words might stimulate different results, using word oppression to understand client's experience, other words for oppression, concretize word to help understand it, help clients put words to experience.
e. ***Definitions of oppression*- (key ideas)** Expanding from individual to group, democratic capitalism on third world, distribution of wealth, divide and conquer, economic hardship, entitlement, condescending, first world vs. third world, freedom to purchase and consume, gender roles, generalization as oppression, exploitation of cheap labour, haves and have nots, hierarchy, if I have, others have less, labelling, peer pressure, privilege, silenced, single women asking permission, stressors, top down, what people hold onto and carry, who's the judge?, gossip.

2) <u>Sources, Forms, and Types of Oppression</u>:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Forms of oppression* - (key ideas)** matrix of oppressions, hierarchy of oppressions, age, ageism, caregiving, older siblings as oppression, male oppression, worker oppression, own female oppression, gender roles, global oppression, homophobia, lateral violence and oppression, male vs. female experience, nonverbal oppression, older siblings as oppression 101, violence as oppression, women's oppression.
b. ***Duality* - (key ideas)** conscious and unconscious internalization, covert vs. overt oppression, overt oppression, dual client and social worker oppression, oppressed and oppressors, social control vs. social change, why some people accept bad treatment and others don't?, nature vs. nurture.

c. ***Consciousness*** - **(key ideas)** unconscious oppression, unintentional oppression, unknown oppression, unthought known, subtle oppression, conscious and unconscious internalization.

3) **Conceptualization Processes**

Key Concepts:

a. ***Processes to understand oppression***- **(key ideas)** oppression as memory, oppression constructed and perpetuated, common sense, deconstructing oppression, conceptualization as dynamic, concretize word to help understand it, identifying oppression, imagining oppression, institutionalization of oppression, language changing over time, developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression, language of oppression, levels of oppression, meaning making, privileged vs. oppressed ways of knowing, process to overcome oppression, recognizing oppression, retrospective understanding, roots of oppression, sequential process, subjective reality, thought construction, transformation, truth, understanding of oppression, sounds, visual image, ways of being, differences in awareness, reaction to client oppression, reaction to dissonance, reaction to own oppression, reality, resonate, retrospective, shifts, situational, acculturation.
b. ***Metaphors*** - **(key ideas)** pressure, earth, quest, nature of society, seeing, building, dancing, water.
c. ***Internalization of oppression***- **(key ideas)** conscious and unconscious internalization, defensive internalization, internalization of relationships, process of internalization, process of overcoming internalization, process of uncovering the internal by not focusing, changing internalization.
d. ***Morality*** - **(key ideas)** necessary evil, right or wrong dialectic, shoulds, the greater good, understanding of oppression reduces harm, what feels good or bad?, ethics.
e. ***Understanding oppression***- **(key ideas)** understanding through others experiences, understanding through lived experience, understanding through research, knowing about oppression as a way of not denying privilege, witness on TV or vicariously, clinical practice as a way of understanding.
f. ***Challenges to understanding***- **(key ideas)** inability to quantify, is bracketing possible?, not oppression, not quantifiable, not using the word oppression clinically, politicized language, pretending to learn/change, proving existence of oppression, simplistic breakdown, substituting our truth for theirs?, who's the judge?

4) **Diversity:**

Key Concepts:

a. ***Social and cultural identities and locations***- **(key ideas)** age, acculturation, male oppression, worker oppression, own female oppression, acculturation, changing internalization, cultural backdrop, discrimination, first nations values, first nations values vs. dominant culture, homophobia, lateral violence and oppression, matriarchy, men's movement, men's retreats, Metis, multiple truths and narratives,

people who are other, racial integration, racism, women's rights, women's work as invisible, younger generation making different choices.

b. ***Privilege*** **- (key ideas)** as buffer, trumping.

5) Articulating Theory:

Key Concepts:

a) ***Types of theory*** **- (key ideas)** constructivism, clinical theory, counselling, definition of theory, developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression, AOP, developmental perspectives, feminism, field instruction, lack of socialist models, Marxism, Maslow's hierarchy, medical model as dominant paradigm, narrative approach, person in environment, postmodernism, strengths perspective, structural social work, transactional analysis.

6) Service Users:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Service users stories*** **- (key ideas)** all clients experience oppression, client advocacy, client centered, client differences, client request, clients sometimes use and understand the word, context, practice example.

b. ***Symptoms of service users' oppression*** **- (key ideas)** alienation, barriers, blaming the individual, physical response , posttraumatic stress, residual effects, resilience, self-destructive behaviours, shame, silenced, splitting, survival mode, triggers, victimization.

c. ***Presenting problems*** **- (key ideas)** addictions, context, sex trade workers, working poor.

7) System Challenges:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Clinical resistance*** **-(key ideas)** client advocacy, client centered, client differences, client request, clinical practice, clinical theory, collaboration, collectivization, community development, consciousness raising, consultation, counselling, decision making, do we oppress by guiding?, empowerment, evidence based, exploration of power, gatekeeper, healing, leadership, management, micro vs. macro, multiple roles, normalization, social control vs. social change, social policy, social work as oppressor namers, social work as oppression reducer, strengths perspective, team relationships, traditional social work practice, validation, values, ethics, and social work, vision.

b. ***Resistance work in the agency and personal life*** **- (key ideas)** anti-oppressive practice in traditional institutions, are good intentions enough?, challenges to anti-oppressive practice, collaboration, collectivization, community development, consciousness raising, consultation, context, context as guide, social work roles, counselling, critical filters, critical thinking, dealing with conflict/anger, deconstructing oppression, desire to do social change, decreasing oppression,

developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression, effectiveness, equality, ethical shopping and investment, exposing structures, handling power, help clients put words to experience, is bracketing possible?, multiple truths and narratives.

c. ***Coping for social work*- (key ideas)** assertiveness, balance, being heard, boundaries, change over time, bracketing our historical baggage, caregiving, choice, collaboration, collectivization, compromise, coping, creativity, dealing with conflict/anger, effectiveness, efficiency, empathy, ethics, fairness, gratitude, hope, humility, intuition, optimism and patience, resilience, self-esteem.
d. ***Systems* - (key ideas)** agency workers as agents of oppression, frequency of agency oppression of clients, case meetings as oppressive, policy as oppressive, changing policy affecting clients, policy, externalization of oppressive policies, interdisciplinary conflict, team relationships, perceived difference between me and my colleague, divide and conquer, loyalty to system vs. client, serving clients vs. institution, organizational concepts, resistance from within systems, supervisor inaction, top down, system as identity shaper, system as oppressor, system response to challenges, system shaping process, system strengths, work within 2 systems, working within non social work systems, working with non social workers.
e. ***Workplaces* - (key ideas)** oppression in medicine not always white or male, oppression at the workplace.
f. ***Challenges*- (key ideas)** alienation, contradictions between professional values and personal choice, dealing with conflict/anger, despair, fatigue, difference with colleagues, disconnect, effects of trying to change oppression, interdisciplinary conflict, isolation/ostracism, not validated, pros and cons of not accepting the status quo, lack of opportunity to talk with social workers about our work .
g. ***Social work roles*- (key ideas)** agency workers as agents of oppression, do we oppress by guiding?, professional status, freedom to oppress?, protector and caregiver as oppressor, social work as oppressive, substituting our truth for theirs?, system as oppressor, teachers as oppressors, oppressor, are oppressors aware of their oppression?, becoming an oppressor, can you give oppression?

8) <u>Becoming Oppressors</u>:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Social work roles*- (key ideas)** agency workers as agents of oppression, do we oppress by guiding?, professional status, freedom to oppress?, protector and caregiver as oppressor, social work as oppressive, substituting our truth for theirs?, system as oppressor, teachers as oppressors, oppressor, are oppressors aware of their oppression?, becoming an oppressor, can you give oppression?
b. ***Oppressor qualities*- (key ideas)** defensive internalization, disowning self, access and opportunity, focus on individual maintaining oppression, entitlement, condescending, gossip, limiting information, person's characteristic as reason for oppression, personality, self serving, silence protecting the oppressor, why people don't change, women as oppressors.

c. ***Parenting as oppression*- (key ideas)** oppressing own children, parenting as oppressor 101.
d. ***Power*- (key ideas)** power imbalance, power over.
e. ***Avoid oppressing*- (key ideas)** conscious identification of own power, factors to avoid oppression, handling power, humility, not acting on impulse, owning, power over as last resort, refusing to oppress, self awareness, stop self from being oppressor, stopping own oppressive instincts, try not to jump to conclusions, understanding of oppression reduces harm.

9) **Resisting and Responding to Oppression**:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Deconstructing oppression*- (key ideas)** developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression identifying oppression, bracketing our historical baggage, deconstructing oppression, exploration of power, exposing structures, help clients put words to experience cultural backdrop, historical overview, filtering messages, desire to do social change, getting past oppression, context as guide, feeling strong enough to act.
b. ***Suggested actions*- (key ideas)** differential response to intentional and unintentional oppression, exposure to alternate ways, acting on own oppression, link own oppression and work with clients, reaction to own oppression, reaction to client oppression, action and consciousness raising, can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, changing policy affecting clients, consciousness raising, dealing with conflict/anger, dialogue as a means to stop oppression, finding allies, collectivism, mobilizing people, own experience as part of a larger picture, personal is political, finding balance, head and heart, healing, power of authority or knowledge, prevention, resolution, response to no opportunity, response to oppression, response to power over, serenity prayer, sharing info, social work intervention, solution to oppression, spirituality, strategic planning, strategies to pick battles, successful action, suggested response, think globally, act locally, teaching concepts, validation, documentation, influence of social work over time, most productive narrative, no formula, not assuming, do differently next time?
c. ***Seeing oppression*- (key ideas)** abstract to concrete, action as a way of understanding oppression, aha moment, awareness then action, clinical practice as a way of understanding, clinical theory, cognition which changes affect, cognitive process vs. deeper knowing, cohort expectations, consciousness raising, creativity, critical filters, developing a framework or language to understand/describe oppression, cultural backdrop, dealing with conflict/anger, dissonance as motivator, double think, exploration of power , emotional intensity as memory prompt, ethics, experience, experiential learning, experiential workshops, exposure to alternate ways, filtering messages, how to make others see oppression?, identify, knowledge, language used to consciousness-raise, laying bricks, listening to others stories, literature as a source of understanding and concept introduction, looking at other cultures, own experience as part of a larger picture, physical response, raising awareness, reaction to client oppression, reaction to dissonance, recognizing

oppression, reasons to act, safety of children, seeing by looking under the external, seeing oppression, sensitization, socialization, thinking about concepts.

d. ***Not seeing/ acting*- (key ideas)** barriers, behaviour constraints, being heard, being judgemental, beliefs vs. actions, blaming the individual, boundaries, can't dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, challenges to anti-oppressive practice, change over time, choice, cohort expectations, compartmentalized, competition, constraints to deal with oppression, construction of limits, consumerism, context, contradictions between professional values and personal choice, cultural backdrop, dealing with conflict/anger, defensive internalization, despair, difference with colleagues, dissonance as barrier to action, divide and conquer, experience, fatigue, fear, feeling strong enough to act, interdisciplinary conflict, immobilized, inability to quantify, interpersonal, lack of power, lack of services, lack of support, loyalty to system vs. client, no opportunity to talk, not oppression, not quantifiable, not validated, obedience, peer pressure, reasons not to act, predictability of others response, pros and cons of not accepting the status quo, respecting authority, safety, safety of children, separation between role as social worker and own life, side effect, social work intervention, social work practice without an understanding of oppression, splitting, survival mode, volunteer vs. mandated clients, why people don't change, being judgemental, beliefs vs. actions, blaming the individual, boundaries, bracketing our historical baggage, cultural backdrop, default position is not neutrality, differences in awareness, lack of awareness, lack of awareness of oppression, lack of opportunity, lack of socialist models, limiting information, minimizing or no sense of oppression?, no experience of oppression male, not caring, not conscious, not seeing external structures of oppression, not seeing or naming privilege, personality, refusal to see the external, social work lack of awareness about their agenda, socialization.

10) <u>Those who act:</u>

Key Concepts:

a. ***Preradicalization*- (key ideas)** critical filters, critical thinking, cultural backdrop, desire to do social change, life messages, maturity, experiences, readings, and training, moral obligation, ethics, more aware, more sophisticated understanding of oppression, own lens, personal choices for social change, personal focus, personality, philosophy, reasons for being different, seeing oppression, sensitization, ways of being.

b. ***Identity*- (key ideas)** critical filters, critical thinking, cultural backdrop, desire to do social change, my identity, reasons to go into social work, social work as a political process, separation between role as social worker and own life, social work educator identity, social work identity, social work peers, social work using the concept of oppression, social worker as client, social workers as change agents, social control vs. social change, social policy, social work as oppression namers, social work as oppression reducer, system as identity shaper.

c. ***Beliefs*- (key ideas)** human rights, equality, socialism, opportunity.

d. ***Education*- (key ideas)** education, education and experience, experiential learning, experiential workshops, key influences, family, school, media, and peers, knowledge base, literature as a source of understanding and concept introduction, maturity, experiences, readings, and training, mentors.
e. ***Family*- (key ideas)** caregiving, critical filters, critical thinking, cultural backdrop, family background and values, family history of parenting, key influences, family, school, media, and peers, life messages, marital relationship, mom as social worker, oppressing own children, parenting, parenting as oppressor 101.
f. ***Vision* - (key ideas)** equality, fairness, justice, meeting basic needs, pendulum swing of political thought.
g. ***Qualities of resistance*- (key ideas)** creativity, thinking, fairness, not knowing stance, resilience, resistance, vision, assertiveness, critical thinking, effectiveness.

11) <u>Social Work Education</u>:

Key Concepts:

a. ***Field instruction* (key idea)**- harm to client vs. student learning, education and experience, readings, and training, mentors, knowledge base, literature as a source of understanding and concept introduction, role models.
b. ***Challenges* (key ideas)**- how to teach this?, response to anti-oppressive education, shift from clinical to teaching, social work educator identity, social work students, students, students vs. clients, teachers as oppressors, teaching concepts.

12) <u>Research:</u>

Key Concepts:

a. ***Thoughts on research*- (key ideas)** future research ideas, looking at other cultures, methodology triangulation, no time for clinical research, ostracism, research sample, understanding through research.
b. ***Response to interviews* - (key ideas)** preparation for interview, response to interview, benefits to participants.

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