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UNSETTLING CONCEPTIONS OF POWER THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING CRITICAL REFLECTION ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Article abstract

Social work education is expected to offer students the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for critical self-reflection as it relates to professional practice. In this paper, we will describe how a model of critical reflection is taught and practiced within our MSW program in a Canadian School of Social Work. As a professor and student within the course, we describe our experience of engaging with the incident that the student used to learn the underlying theories and process of critical reflection. Her experience involved recognizing previously taken-for-granted conceptions of power, which she explored in her final paper for the course. We continued to critically reflect together following completion of the course, and our explorations are presented and expanded upon in this paper as an example of the potential of critical reflection, and as a reminder of the importance to continually reflect upon the complexity of power. Although we began with differing conceptions of power, we agree that power is neither solely 'bad' nor 'good,' but rather is complex, fluid, and relational. The paper provides an example of the benefits of incorporating opportunities for sustained critical reflection in social work education and concludes with implications for social work practice.

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Abstract: Social work education is expected to offer students the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for critical self-reflection as it relates to professional practice. In this paper, we will describe how a model of critical reflection is taught and practiced within our MSW program in a Canadian School of Social Work. As a professor and student within the course, we describe our experience of engaging with the incident that the student used to learn the underlying theories and process of critical reflection. Her experience involved recognizing previously taken-for-granted conceptions of power, which she explored in her final paper for the course. We continued to critically reflect together following completion of the course, and our explorations are presented and expanded upon in this paper as an example of the potential of critical reflection, and as a reminder of the importance to continually reflect upon the complexity of power. Although we began with differing conceptions of power, we agree that power is neither solely 'bad' nor 'good,' but rather is complex, fluid, and relational. The paper provides an example of the benefits of incorporating opportunities for sustained critical reflection in social work education and concludes with implications for social work practice.

Keywords: power, critical reflection, social work practice, social work education, critical clinical social work

Abrégé : La formation en travail social se doit d'offrir aux étudiant(e)s la possibilité de développer la capacité d'autoréflexion

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critique sur la pratique professionnelle. Dans cet article, les auteures décrivent l'enseignement et la mise en pratique d'un modèle de réflexion critique dans un programme de maîtrise en travail social dans une école canadienne de travail social. Les auteures, une professeure et une étudiante du cours, décrivent leur expérience d'engagement à analyser un incident vécu par l'étudiante afin d'apprendre les théories sous-jacentes et le processus de réflexion critique. Dans le cadre du travail final du cours, l'étudiante a remis en question des idées préconçues au sujet de la notion de pouvoir. La professeure et l'étudiante ont par la suite poursuivi leur réflexion critique ensemble, et leurs explorations sont présentées et développées dans cet article, comme exemple du potentiel de la réflexion critique et comme rappel de l'importance de réfléchir continuellement à la complexité inhérente au pouvoir. Bien qu'elles aient commencé leur réflexion commune avec des conceptions différentes du pouvoir, elles s'entendent sur le fait que le pouvoir n'est ni « mauvais » ni « bon », mais qu'il est plutôt complexe, fluide et relationnel. Cet article présente des avantages de l'intégration de la réflexion critique soutenue dans la formation en travail social et les implications pour la pratique du travail social.

Mots-clés : pouvoir, réflexion critique, pratique du travail social, formation en travail social, travail social clinique et critique

THIS ARTICLE OFFERS A DESCRIPTION of the critically reflective process we experienced as a professor (Laura) and student (Trehani) within a critical reflection on practice (CRoP) course in a Master of Social Work (MSW) program in a School of Social Work in Ontario. This course was developed as the program transitioned from a generalist to a direct practice focus and responds to the Canadian Association for Social Work Education's (CASWE) *Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS), most recently updated in 2021. For example, a core EPAS learning objective expects "Social work students have opportunities to [. . .] acquire abilities of critical self-reflection as it relates to engaging in professional practice through a comprehensive understanding and consciousness of the complex nature of their own social locations, identities, and assumptions" (Standard 3.4.4, learning objective 1.d). Students' feedback has indicated that, while they have become accustomed to being asked by professors to critically reflect, prior to commencing the CRoP course, they had not been taught *how* to critically reflect.

We will describe Fook's model of critical reflection (Béres & Fook, 2021; Fook, 2002), as it is taught in the CRoP course as an approach to ensure students develop skills in critical self-reflection and critical analysis of professional practices. To illustrate CRoP, we include an example of Trehani's experience as she began to critically reflect upon an incident from her past practice, which resulted in her realizing she had previously

not analyzed her conception of power. In so doing, we offer an example of an educational approach to ensuring social work students learn a model of critical reflection on social work practice, while also presenting our critical reflection on power as an example of this process.

Philosophical Framework and Literature Review

As it will become clear as we describe our experiences, I (Laura) situate myself within a postmodern, feminist, and critical social work paradigm (Fawcett et al., 2000; Fook, 2002). In contrast, I (Trehani) rely more on a modern social work paradigm that integrates biological determinants of health, yet also includes a social constructionist lens (Payne, 2020; Zittel et al., 2002).

Due to the combination of this critical social work paradigm and commitment to teaching skills within a direct practice MSW program, I (Laura) believe it is necessary to teach a stand-alone required course in critical reflection, rather than hoping the skills will be gleaned from across several courses, each of which may come with its own distinct philosophical underpinnings. If we don't ensure that the practical skills and contextualization needed for transformative social work are included within the social work curriculum, we risk reducing critical perspectives and social justice to mere rhetoric that we use to look good (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Morgenshtern & Schmid, 2022). Research findings demonstrate students' ongoing experiences with "a hierarchical binary between clinical and social justice skills" (Bhuyan et al., 2017, p. 386) in the curriculum; offering a course that teaches skills in critical reflection on practice ensures that students are supported in learning how to bridge critical perspectives and clinical practice. Although students benefit from this stand-alone CRoP course, there remains a need to support the integration of critical and social justice skills and commitments throughout the social work curriculum (Bhuyan et al., 2017), so that critical skills are not learned in only one course and then left behind. With ongoing integration of skills as our goal, and with support from the field education office, I (Laura) and three colleagues have begun to also facilitate advanced field education seminars to support students in continuing to use critical reflection skills while in field placements. In 2022, we received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)'s Insight grant stream for a three-year period to support our investigation into how to best sustain students' skills in critical reflection.

A lack of critical reflection on power among social workers is also a phenomenon that has been documented in the literature. Taiwo's (2022) research shows social workers in direct practice often do not believe that they need to reflect upon their power and privilege, or — when an incident in practice occurs that suggests it could be beneficial to

reflect upon power — they indicate that they do not have time to reflect or are too fearful of examining their own emotions related to power. Walbam and Howard (2021) suggest that students may be committed to the concept of empowerment, but may not realize the superficial and transactional nature of providing a contact for accessing resources, for example, while not addressing "more complex underlying issues that led to disempowerment of the client to begin with" (p. 7). Bar-On (2002) suggests social workers "have a discordant relationship with power," with some expressing that they have to beg for resources for clients, and others saying that they "believe they are too powerful and so eschew the very idea of having power" (p. 997). Bundy-Fazioli et al.'s (2013) study of graduate social work students' attitudes also found that some students described power as negative, while others described it as difficult to conceptualize, and themselves as ambivalent about using professional power.

I (Trehani) argue that social work students are often being influenced to subscribe to dominant discourses on power — discourses that are most commonly negative — without first critically reflecting upon them and examining their own implicit values. Based on my first-hand experiences, this influence can explicitly or implicitly seep in from various sources, such as through the ideologies and discourses taught within MSW courses, the expressed opinions of professors and field education placement supervisors, and the very culture of social work educational programs and field placement or agency settings in which students are starting to first form their relationship with the social work role, and ultimately with professional power. Without use of critical reflection during this process, this influence can close down any analysis of power and maintain discomfort with acknowledging and using power — even ethically. On the other hand, I (Laura) argue that, despite integrating critical perspectives and discussing the problematization of power within social work curricula, neoliberalism and managerialism, which impact social work organizations (Brown, 2020; Fook, 2021) and practice, can interfere with this reflective work and consequently promote unreflective assumptions about power. It is, therefore, beneficial to support students in deconstructing dominant discourses about power to identify socially constructed ideas before they become unrefuted truths (Béres, 2017).

Methodological Approach

The critical reflection process we are describing and demonstrating is influenced by postmodern feminist perspectives (Fawcett et al., 2000), and shares commonalties with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In CRoP, the social worker's written description of an incident from practice is used similarly to research data, as peers assist with exploring the social worker's underlying assumptions and meaning-making contained within the written description. The process unfolds inductively as issues

arise and are explored in stage one and two of the process and are then linked to the academic literature.

The Critical Reflection on Practice (CRoP) Model and Process

"Reflection," "self-reflection," "reflexivity" and "critical reflection" are terms that are often used interchangeably in academic and practice contexts, but that can be quite different from one another in nuance and underlying discourses. Schön's (1983) work heavily influences the concept of reflection, as he distinguishes between "reflecting-in-practice" and "reflecting-on-practice" to assist with the transition from learning theory in the classroom to applying it in practice. "Self-reflection" is similar to the concept of "reflexivity," and the process of reflecting about the impact of the self on our views of others and our resulting practice with them. The "use of self" (Mandell, 2007) can also be related to "self-reflection" and "reflexivity," as the practitioner is better able to increase self-awareness and make more conscious and informed decisions about how they might use elements of themselves in practice. This intentionality also might lead into awareness of when self-care is required. "Critical reflection" is used at times interchangeably with "critique," as students are required to, for example, critically reflect upon and analyze an article as an element of an assignment in an academic course. However, we are using the term "critical reflection" in the same manner as Brookfield (1995, 2016) and Fook (2002), meaning that this form of reflection is also influenced by critical social theory. Reflection becomes *critical* reflection due to the commitment to also consider structures of power through the reflection process. In addition, Kolb's (1984) classic reflection and learning model is often relied upon in social work practice courses that encourage reflection; his process is represented by a cycle with four stages over time: doing/actual experience; observing and reflecting on experience; analyzing reflections for general ideas; and planning for improved action based on new ideas. Kolb's model represents a classic cycle of reflecting on practice, and may assist with efficiency and some forms of effectiveness, but it does not ensure the inclusion of the crucial element of critical social theory or critical perspectives for analyzing structural and contextual issues related to power.

The model that is used in our CRoP course is based upon Fook's extensive work on critical reflection and critical social work, which contains elements of Schön's reflection, reflexivity and critical social theory as described above, as well as poststructural and social constructionist theory (Fook, 2002, 2012, 2021). However, this model has evolved over time. Having worked with her to research experiences within the CRoP course during the first year it was taught in this university context, Fook and I (Laura) have expanded her original two-stage model of critical reflection with four theoretical lenses (Fook & Gardner, 2007) to include a fifth lens

(Béres & Fook, 2020). The process involves critically reflecting upon an incident from professional practice to learn from that incident. In this course, students are placed into groups of five. Each student writes a 1–2-page description of an incident that they have continued to think about, since ruminating can suggest that there might be something further to learn from a structured critical reflection of the incident. The incident is usually described as a "critical incident" for this process, but does not need to be a negative or distressing incident, as this term would imply when related to the process of "critical debriefing." For the CRoP process, it merely needs to be something that happened that the person continues to think about — it could continue to niggle them for some reason, or could be a positive experience that they feel proud of and reflect upon from time to time. As Ferguson (2003) has pointed out, reflecting upon successful practice can inform best practices.

For stage one of the process, students take turns over three weeks presenting their incident to their small group of peers who assist in the process of deconstruction by asking questions informed by CRoP's five theoretical lenses: *reflective practice; reflexivity; social constructionism and postmodern narrative practice; critical perspectives;* and *spirituality*. Since students are learning the theory and process as they are attempting to practice it, I (Laura) circulate between the groups to offer assistance as required. Stage two involves reconvening in the small groups for students to reconstruct their understanding of the incident. Stage one thus has a focus on past and present understandings, whereas stage two has more of a forward orientation that includes an articulation of values and commitments that have arisen, as well as new theoretical understandings or developments and a consideration of how to apply these to future practice. Fook and Gardner (2007) describe the process for practicing social workers in workshop settings and suggest that there needs to be sufficient time left between stage one and two for people to begin independently contemplating what their most significant insights have been. While facilitating CRoP within the university setting, I (Laura) require students to complete a final project that links their new insights to the academic literature, but I also provide space and time away from group work between stages one and two. Extending the space and time between stage one and two primarily evolved from learning from another former student's final paper on the concept of "ma": "ma" is a Japanese term that describes the space and time in between two elements that allow each to be seen more clearly (Greve, 2013). As the CRoP course has evolved, I (Laura) have further ensured inclusion of decolonization and critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995) as elements of the critical perspectives' lens. Both of these alterations have resulted from continuously reflecting on what could improve the course and gathering feedback from students during and after the course. Decolonization and critical race theory have been included to respond to the calls to action

of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Morgenshtern & Schmid, 2022), in addition to concerns further highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement (Diverlus et al., 2020).

Uncovering our Positions in Relation to Power through the CRoP Process

It was through our particular experience of teaching and learning CRoP together that we came to realize that we held very different positions regarding our taken-for-granted assumptions about power, which became evident to us as we progressed through the CRoP process.

As a racialized, cisgender, early-stage social work graduate student, I (Trehani) started to become aware of the importance of examining professional power while critically reflecting on a past incident from my previous work in psychiatric research, which I chose for the CRoP process. In brief, the incident I focused on involved me facilitating a workshop that brought together professionals and persons with lived experience of mental illness to develop healthcare resources. Following the workshop, I received a suggestion for improvement from one of the attendees, which I unreflectively registered as a point of criticism instead of perhaps a supportive gesture. This event may not appear to others as a highly emotional "critical incident," yet it stirred up thoughts and emotions within me that were valuable for me to reflect on and learn from as part of the CRoP process. By acknowledging this as an experience that continued to bother me, and upon which I had not previously reflected, I determined that I would take steps toward uncovering why it continued to unsettle me so much. As I moved through the different theoretical lenses of CRoP in stages one and two of the process, I particularly resonated with the reflexivity lens, which encouraged an examination of how my past personal experiences were impacting my interpretation of the incident. Since these reflections pertained to experiences that had shaped my understanding of power, they further resonated with the critical perspectives' theoretical lens of CRoP, and also the postmodern lens, once I realized a dichotomy had been set up in how I considered power — that is, power was often presented as 'bad,' in contrast to my own understanding of it as having the potential to be leveraged for good.

Within the medical science field, I (Trehani) observed a heavy reliance on power within routine practice: power was not avoided, but rather was idealized and sought after. Although there were evident circumstances in which power was used over others to dominate or control, there were also more positive ways of interacting with power (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2007) to promote equitable relationships (such as between colleagues) and increase client capacity. Notwithstanding the importance and prestige of accessing power, critical reflection on power was not something that I personally encountered within the field.

To situate my last point within more of a personal context, I have been immersed in the health and medical science field for more than a decade, having encountered both professional and training opportunities that have moved me across various institutions, teams, supervisors, job roles, and cities, none of which introduced critical discussions around use of power or encouraged reflections on power relations.

In considering this, the emergence of a focus on power during my engagement in the CRoP process made sense to me, especially since my experiences and understanding of professional power differed greatly from how I was beginning to experience it within the School of Social Work. Through the CRoP process, I became more aware of this dichotomy — particularly the status assigned to power in one professional field and the problematization of power in the other. Within social work, it felt as though power was often conceptualized as limiting, with ongoing concern expressed over how it can be used to yield oppressive or collusive outcomes in which people work alone or together to exploit or cause harm to others (Tew, 2006). Some of my fellow students shared that they held a similar impression of the social work field and, like myself, were questioning why more beneficial and productive expressions of power (Akhtar, 2013; Tew, 2006) were not discussed as often. For instance, we wondered why we weren't discussing how power can be harnessed to protect and improve the lives of others, obtain needed resources for service-users, support increased service-user capacity and resilience, influence agency policies, or achieve collaborative action towards social justice initiatives. However, it is important to further note that not all social work students held this view, as some conceptualized power in a manner that aligned with the dominant discourses presented within the field. For example, some of my fellow students held the perspective that acquiring professional power can interfere with creating positive relationships with service-users, as based on the belief that impactful therapeutic connections are best forged through shared experiences of oppression, which ultimately enhance one's empathy towards and understanding of service-user struggles. Through discussions within the two stages of the CRoP process (Béres & Fook, 2020; Fook & Gardner, 2007), I became more cognizant of the factors that had shaped my attitude towards power — often without my awareness — and also how similar factors had, in different ways, been influencing the views of fellow students.

I (Laura), as a white, cisgender, older tenured faculty member who facilitated the CRoP course, was in a position that holds a significant amount of power relative to my students. Having completed a PhD in Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Studies over 20 years ago, my academic career has been influenced by Foucault's conceptions of power (1980) and Freire's descriptions about how to work with people experiencing oppression (1974). Having then completed training with Michael White at the Dulwich Centre and having taken on the narrative practitioner's

stance of being decentred but influential (White, 2007), I have continually attempted to refine how I effectively operationalize these commitments in the classroom. With 30+ years of experience of direct social work practice, shaped by postmodern and critical perspectives, I ask students to deconstruct their previous assumptions about what it means to be a helpful social worker and the ways in which power intersects with 'helping.' Nonetheless, I also believe that any unreflective stance on any idea — even one that problematizes the use of power — can be experienced as coming from a position of power, which may then inadvertently reinforce that power position. Alternatively, the postmodern narrative practice lens, which is part of the CRoP model, suggests that nothing should go without question, rather than allowing everything to go without question (Béres, 2014; Béres & Fook, 2020). This narrative therapy stance leads me to ask questions of students to prompt further critical reflection while attempting to not impose my own opinions. With this in mind, Trehani and I started to engage in a purposeful and nuanced conversation about power, in which our differing positions were exchanged and reflected upon. I hoped Trehani was willing to *tentatively* hold on to her previous assumptions about power to consider other points of view. As part of this process, I also needed to model the same vulnerability (Béres, 2019, 2020, 2021) that is involved in unsettling certainties. It is clearly important to engage in discussion with students — perhaps particularly when we do not begin that discussion in agreement — to model an openness to critical reflection.

Having described the CRoP model and process that was taught and learned within the classroom and how Trehani came to realize she held previously taken-for-granted assumptions regarding power, we now turn to further considerations of the concept of power in social work. These considerations only came about following Trehani's critical reflection on her practice incident as she began to link her reflections to the academic literature, which demonstrates that rich and complex learning can come from focusing this process on events that have stayed in a person's mind, regardless of how "critical" such events may appear to someone else. It is through this process that the person who is critically reflecting may improve their practice or engage in, and contribute to, theory development. Trehani's critical reflection led her to explore the theory of power further (Fonseka & Béres, 2023), and together we have discussed these explorations and also considered what these ideas imply for direct practice.

Considerations of Power in Social Work Following the CRoP Process

Despite having started in different positions vis-à-vis power, we are both comfortable with Foucault's analysis of power, since he describes power

as nuanced and resulting in productive as well as controlling effects. Foucault (1991) proposes that power is connected in complex manners to knowledge and truth. In applying this concept to the field, the idea of power's connection to knowledge suggests that social workers hold the ability to increase their positions of professional power by acting as field experts and thus making truth claims. This form and use of power may partly contribute to some of the negative views that are held against professional power, as it introduces the potential for a service-user's lived experience and insider knowledge to become devalued. Personal authority (Wrong, 1979), which can lead to a social worker's personal qualities garnering service-user compliance, can also influence power dynamics if social workers do not recognize that service-users may forfeit their agency within the therapeutic relationship to maintain that relationship or gain favour. It is therefore useful to consider the benefits of a decentered but influential stance (White, 2007), which serves to shift social workers out of the role of experts who have the power to diagnose or prescribe solutions, toward instead supporting service-users with uncovering their insider knowledge (Béres, 2014; White, 2007).

Despite these descriptions, social workers are not the only ones who hold power; power is also held by service-users, collaborators (like the person in Trehani's incident who provided feedback), and the social work context itself. This movement of power within the social work role aligns with Foucault's (1978/1988) description of power, in which he characterized it as moving in all directions. In fact, Foucault (1954–1984/2000) rejected limiting and repressive models that considered power to only move in a top-down manner (i.e., from a person with power onto others, to limit their behaviour by imposing rules). Foucault instead described power as relational, productive, complex, and generative of ideas, further suggesting a bottom-up movement of power, which supports the argument that service-users are not powerless in the therapeutic relationship. Viewing power in these ways creates opportunity to allow it to be critically reflected upon with service-users as internalized discourses are deconstructed, yielding insights into values, preferences, and new potentials (Cooper, 1994; Foucault, 1972–1977/1980; Hearn, 2012; McLaren, 2002). In addition to service-users, there are several other factors that impact the power of social workers, while neoliberal and managerial influences provide the — perhaps greatest — milieu within which social work organizations and practitioners operate. Sociopolitical and cultural environments determine funding and policies and affect how resources are used. Social workers are further bound by the Code of Ethics (CASW–ACTS, 2005), which has been criticized for limiting the power of social workers to protect the best interests of those they work with (Mullaly, 2006).

Moreover, although we have been arguing that access to power is inherent within the professional role, the degree of power available

to each social worker is not the same. The theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1990, 2019) describes how all people hold simultaneous positions in relation to power across multiple social identities, such as race or gender, and that these identities intersect to influence a person's experiences with social constructions of privilege and oppression, which includes their access to power (Bubar et al., 2016). Critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995) adds to this knowledge base by examining how social constructions of race can limit access to power (Stovall, 2010). Indeed, racialized students within the CRoP course have described incidents with white service-users, sharing their perceptions that these service-users possess greater power relative to their own within the therapeutic relationship. Similar accounts have been raised by other racialized social workers within the literature, such as within clinical exchanges in which social workers can become the target of racist comments, behaviours, or threats from service-users (Badwall, 2014).

Social workers can further experience a loss of power at the hands of their colleagues or systemically within the institutions and agencies in which they operate. For example, cases of gendered racism highlight how female social workers can feel invalidated by their colleagues and thus fear being deemed incompetent (Ashley et al., 2016). Racialized faculty and students, who are typically underrepresented within academic institutions, report similar microaggressions and microinvalidations, which can reinforce oppressive ideologies about who is qualified to participate within academia (Nakaoka & Ortiz, 2018; Razack & Jeffrey, 2002). Perhaps this partly contributes to further understanding why Trehani, as a younger racialized student, was interested in accessing more power, while it was safer and easier for Laura, as an older white professor, to problematize power.

Despite these documented experiences, there is a gap in the supports that are available to racialized social workers to navigate racism and loss of power within professional settings. Within workplaces, social workers are often instructed to refrain from questioning intolerant service-user behaviours to avoid damaging the therapeutic relationship (Badwall, 2014; Lee, 2005), which can consequently make them more vulnerable to microaggressions and lead to further loss of power. Social work educational programs have also been shown to contribute to these oppressive cultures by promoting a knowledge base that favours white students, such as in respect to educating non-racialized students on how to work with diverse populations (Badwall, 2014; Nakaoka & Ortiz, 2018), rather than preparing racialized students to manage oppression in the workplace.

Power clearly exists in the social work role and within therapeutic relationships. Gaps between social workers' intentions and actual practice can be examined to ensure that the use of power is negotiated and remains transparent and ethical. Without critical reflection, we risk participating

in maintaining one set of assumptions about power as a 'truth' while silencing alternative perspectives and voices. CRoP, particularly through the critical perspectives and postmodern lenses — but also through the reflexivity lens for Trehani — suggests that, without the exploration of hegemonic discourses, we may be drawn into thinking and behaving in a manner that seems obviously good but that, in reality, keeps us closed down to alternative views and causes us to become powerless in our lives (Brookfield, 2016).

Implications for Direct Practice and Critical Clinical Social Work

Since power is neither all good nor all bad, and is rather complex and negotiated across numerous identities and positions, it is also a complex concept to address in direct practice settings. We agree with the argument that social justice and clinical social work skills need to be united rather than kept separate within social work (Baines, 2020; Bhuyan et al., 2017). Just as we have needed to move away from a binary of 'power – good' versus 'power – bad,' it is also beneficial to resist the tendency to set up a binary between social justice, which could be considered more aligned with a critical social theory lens and the problematization of power, and clinical social work, which traditionally has been considered as less concerned with structural power issues. Baines (2020) points out the need to critically reflect upon the concept of 'skills' as it applies to social work practice, since the skills of social justice (and arguably critical reflection) and the skills of clinical practice have been set up as being in opposition of one another. Deconstructing discourses and binaries, like those related to skills, is consistent with the postmodern lens within CRoP and is a major element of feminist and narrative practices, which are practices that can assist in the process of engaging in critical clinical social work in which reflections upon power are fully integrated.

Brown (2020) describes how social workers and Schools of Social Work that are committed to social justice and anti-oppressive practice often receive feedback from "neoliberal social work agencies and government that [their] students need more clinical skills" (p. 19), thus highlighting a need to translate these areas into critical clinical practice. The shift from theory to practice is not always straightforward, as Schön (1983) has indicated, but it is crucial that critical clinical practice skills are situated within a theoretical critical understanding. She argues,

> the most well-established and elaborated forms of critical clinical practice rooted in critical theory are empowerment/harm reduction-based feminist and narrative therapies. These approaches are rooted in social constructionism and understand that social work practice/therapy is always political. They are purposively on the side of social change and social justice. Rooted in radical critique and analysis, they offer alternative critical approaches to practice. (Brown, 2020, p. 19)

Brown strengthens her argument by providing an example of the difficulties translating critical theory into practice when working with women with disordered eating. A feminist analysis of the social contexts and power of discourses that perpetuate women's self-surveillance of their bodies has not always transitioned into feminist clinical practices. She states, "radical critique or analysis in and of itself is not enough when we are engaged in critical clinical practice with clients. We also need intentional practices that reflect radical critiques and that provide consistent alternative approaches" (p. 20). We agree with Brown that narrative and feminist narrative approaches provide a form of critical clinical social work that includes a critique of the power of discourses and supports service-users' insider knowledge. Within feminist narrative approaches, expertise may be reconceptualized as being related to developing the skill to pose engaging questions that prompt service-user curiosity towards their alternative and preferred storylines. Moving away from professional positions that diagnose and prescribe solutions involves becoming a little more decentered as the social worker or narrative therapist, while maintaining an ethical commitment to being influential rather than neutral, since a neutral stance may inadvertently reinforce dominant power relations (Béres, 2014; White, 2007). This reconceptualization of expertise provides an example of the ethical use of power. Indeed, Foucault's analysis of power is interwoven in White and Epston's (1990) development of narrative therapy.

Accordingly, rather than imposing their own views or using their professional power to influence service-user choices, narrative practitioners attempt to instead privilege service-user knowledge (Béres, 2014; Freire, 1974; White, 2007). Moreover, the use of appropriate disclosures and knowledge-sharing by social workers can help to equalize power dynamics with service-users (Freire & Faundez, 1989; Nimmon & Stenfors-Hayes, 2016), which may specifically include integrating discussions around the multidimensional nature of power and how it will be used within the therapeutic relationship (Bundy-Fazioli et al., 2013; Giroux, 1991; Nimmon & Stenfors-Hayes, 2016). These discussions can create greater opportunities for transparent collaborations with service-users where power can start to be renegotiated.

Conclusion

We have described and demonstrated the process of ensuring social work students learn a comprehensive approach to critical reflection on their practice, which can assist them in deconstructing a range of discourses that have influenced them, such as — in our example — the discourse of power. Social workers need sufficient and sustained opportunities to learn to critically reflect on their practice and on professional power, beginning within educational and learning environments and continuing into direct

practice settings. By continuously reflecting upon various discourses of power, social workers have the potential to shift away from merely accepting socially constructed discourses to instead engage in a more nuanced view of their practice. This expanded view can further support ongoing engagement in critical discussions where their perspectives on a range of assumptions can be mindfully deconstructed and reconstructed. Critical reflection on practice can provide a process of bridging what often is experienced by students as a disconnect between clinical practice and a commitment to critical and social justice perspectives. Indeed, feminist and narrative approaches to clinical social work, grounded in critical analysis of power, offer practices that take into account the complexity of power relations we all navigate.

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