**Renewing the Structural Social Work Framework with Althusser's Marxist
Poststructuralism**

by

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Bachelor of Social Work, University of Victoria, 2007

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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“Renewing Structural Social Work with Althusser’s Marxist Poststructuralism”

submitted by Samantha Bailey, B.A., B.S.W.

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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Abstract

“Structural Social Work,” a framework for analysis in the study of social work and social welfare in Canada, is in a quagmire. The framework *inconsistently applies a Marxist concept of ideology, lacks a theoretical concept to explain the complexity of the social work encounter, and confuses the epistemological differences between the concepts of the individual and the subject*. This lack of theoretical robustness undermines efforts by its practitioners to effectively analyze the contemporary social work and welfare fields.

A non-exhaustive examination of Louis Althusser’s Marxist poststructural recasting of the concepts of *ideology, overdetermination, and the subject and its subjectivity* is used to inform a critique of the specified problems with the SSW framework. Suggestions are made as to how the work of Althusser can contribute to resolving these problems, whilst renewing the Marxist roots of the framework and enhancing its capacity to respond to and integrate poststructural thought.

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RENEWING SSW WITH MARXIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Structural Social Work,” a framework for analysis in the study of social work and social welfare in Canada, is in a quagmire. Troubled by theoretical inconsistencies, gaps and epistemological confusion, the framework lacks a theoretical robustness that undermines efforts taken by its practitioners and scholars since its inception to apply Marxist concepts and theory. This looseness of theory has resulted in an atheoretical, ahistorical framework that presents a serious conundrum for structural social workers; this framework is not able to effectively analyze the complexities (social, economic, political, and psychological) of the modern global world.

In addition, this theoretical confusion of tongues attenuates more recent efforts to respond to or incorporate post-structural concepts and theories. A renewal of SSW, particularly its integration of Marxist and poststructural theory, is needed in order to affirm and enhance the relevancy and importance of the framework for contemporary social work practice and education.

Devoid of a Marxist explanation of Nazism, and striving to produce one, French Marxists during the post-war era examined and contested “almost every theoretical problem and practical obstacle debated within or encountered by Marxism” (Lewis, 2005, pp. 9-10). This new post-war theoretical and philosophical body of knowledge renewed

Marxism. One of the main contributors to these endeavours was the philosopher, Louis Althusser. Althusser arguably provides some of the most serious and original reinterpretations of Marx's works (Lewis, 2005, p. 15). This author has been superficially incorporated in the theoretical foundations of SSW in Canada; ergo, the Marxist poststructural concepts put forward by Althusser stand to offer a possible renewal of this theoretical perspective in social work.

Renewing the SSW framework with Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism is approached in this study via three main tasks.¹ The first task, presented in Chapter 2, examines how the framework as understood in Canada is mired by its lack of theoretical robustness. This examination centres on three theoretical concerns:

- *inconsistencies with applying a Marxist concept of ideology for social work analytical purposes;*
- *lack of a theoretical concept to help explain the complexity of issues encountered in social work practice; and,*

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¹ The organization of this thesis differs from the generally taken form of a Master's of Social Work Thesis. Notice there is no methodology or theoretical framework section. This varied form is consistent with a typical structure for a Master's of Philosophy thesis, and which is considered more fitting for the analysis exercised here. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the epistemological coherence and rigour of analyses and concepts applied in the Structural Social Work literature. As well, to examine concepts put forward by Althusser for the purpose of recasting an application of concepts within the Structural Social Work framework. A review of philosophy theses and conversation with Dr. Phillip Wiebe, Professor of Philosophy, helped inform the organization of this thesis.

- *epistemological confusion between the concepts of the individual and the subject.*

These areas of concern raise important questions regarding the framework's capacity to provide Marxist-based analyses and to incorporate poststructuralist analyses. Importantly, these areas of concern ultimately have the greatest failing for the capacity of structural social workers to apply the framework in an effective manner.

The work of Althusser suggests that there is room to contribute to strengthening these areas of concern. Not only for renewing the Marxist roots of the framework, but also for enhancing its capacity to respond to and integrate poststructural theories, and to inform the contemporary social work field in Canada. In order to strengthen the SSW framework with Althusser's reading of Marx, an examination of Althusser's work is required. In Chapter 3, this second task is presented.

This non-exhaustive examination of Althusser's work focuses on his re-formulation of three concepts: *ideology*, *overdetermination*, and *the subject and its subjectivity*. Examination of these concepts offers insight into how Althusser recast Marxist concepts as responses to challenges facing Marxism during the post-war crisis; these challenges in theory are similar with those found in the SSW literature.

Following this limited examination of Althusser's work is the third task, presented in Chapter 4. This task considers how Althusser's work can contribute to renewing Structural Social Work.

The main objective of this study is to strengthen the theoretical integrity of SSW, and promote applying the framework, reinvigorated with Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism to the theoretical and political challenges facing contemporary social workers in Canada.

RENEWING SSW WITH MARXIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Chapter 2

Structural Social Work: Failings to Resolve, Struggles to Advance

This chapter centers on the first task of this research: examining how the Structural Social Work framework as understood in key SSW texts in Canada is mired by a lack of theoretical robustness: That is, the framework's inability to be able to adequately address important elements of the current global environment of which the social work field is a part. The first part of this chapter defines the framework and briefly outlines its evolution. The second part examines three areas in which the SSW literature lacks theoretical clarity and conceptual precision: 1) applying a Marxist concept of ideology, 2) analyzing multiple dimensions, and 3) incorporating the concept of the subject and its subjectivity. The focus of this chapter is on how these areas of concern have developed within the literature and remain problematic for the framework's practitioners. Finally, this chapter discusses the absence of Althusser's work within the SSW literature.

The scholarly body of material I have chosen for this overview of the SSW framework are authors who identified their respective writings as defining and/or applying the SSW framework in Canada. This criterion separates the SSW writings from the broader range of writings in social work that may have commonalities with SSW, such as Marxist or structural analyses, but are pursuing other models or frameworks, e.g.

anti-oppressive practices, and radical social work, also referred to as critical social work. As well, this criterion excludes variations of the SSW framework which have been produced from academic and social welfare contexts outside of Canada, i.e. the structural approach as developed in the United States (see for instance Middleman & Goldberg, 1974; Wood & Middleman, 1989). The exception to this criterion is found in the first cluster sources, some of which were published before the SSW framework was formalized.

My approach to organizing and presenting the SSW literature is unusual and requires explanation. Within the SSW literature I find three distinguishable groupings. Following Professor Taiana's conceptualization of these groupings, I refer to them as first, second, and third clusters. The terminology of clusters is used to convey the idea that the writings can be grouped around certain themes and problems without necessarily exhibiting identical features. As well, the terminology is not to suggest that within the literature these three groupings are entirely separate from each other but that, in fact, these clusters overlap and the groupings could be re-arranged for other analytical purposes. For the purposes of this research, I have organized the SSW literature into three clusters. The distinguishing features of which represent thematic differences in the framework's theoretical influences and/or socio-economic-political contexts. Organizing the literature this way benefits this research because it identifies within its body of

scholarly material, differences that bear directly on the theoretical challenges to be discussed.

Part I – Structural Social Work Literature Overview

2.1 First Cluster

The formal SSW framework in Canada originated at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario in the mid-1970s. It was rooted largely in Marxist thought in response to the dominant ecological systems and ego-psychological theories of the day. It launched structural analyses and social change goals, changed the skills emphasized and formed an eclectic framework within Canadian social welfare and social work fields.

The emergence of the SSW framework during the 1970s was fuelled by the social, political, and economic context of its time. In Canada and other Western nations, the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s profoundly challenged the prevailing post-war ideal of a capitalist-welfare state that could protect citizens from the hazards of capitalism (Bailey & Brake, 1976; Carniol, 1987). The decade of the 1960s and into the 70s was a time of questioning and protest by student groups, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the civil rights movement in the US, Aboriginal protest in Canada, and the anti-war movement, amongst several others. These movements forced issues of poverty, racism, sexism and imperialism to the fore and implicated welfare systems as contributing to the sustained, if not rising, incidences of related social problems (c.f.

Cloward & Piven, 1975). This meant that the substantial funds and resources directed during the post-war era for addressing the needs of lower-income individuals and communities failed to alter “any of the fundamental economic relationships” (Carniol citing Copp, 1987, p. 30) or mitigate a concerning level of social problems. Instead, welfare systems came to be seen during the 1960s and 70s as institutions that “intimidated”, “degraded”, “stigmatized” and alienated the lower classes (Cloward & Piven, 1975, pp. x-xi; Leonard, 1975; Moreau, 1979). These realizations (for some, expositions for others) were sharp contrasts to the helping hand and betterment of society objective that public welfare programs were touted, and believed by many, as delivering.

In addition to the “cracks” appearing in the post-war welfare states, the assumption of infinite economic growth underpinning this model of capitalism was further dismantled by the 1973 recession, the oil crisis, and the “inflation-fuelled Vietnam War” (Mullaly, 1997, p. 4). These economic and political events contributed to setting “in motion a whole set of processes that shattered the ‘grand corporate-labour-state accord’” (*ibid.*). The shattering of the post-war “golden age of social welfare” (Cloward & Piven, 1975, p. x) started a new course for the post-war welfare systems, whose direction would be contested in the following decades by social workers and others. For many social workers and academics in countries such as Canada, United States, and Britain, these events demanded the development of new paradigms with which to reassess, improve, and defend welfare systems and institutions. As well, the events

called for the need to develop new strategies for intervening at the social policy and practice levels.

The first cluster of the SSW framework developed in Canada as part of this broader and growing response. The first cluster's engagement with this response was primarily concerned with shifting the theoretical stance away from the prevailing focus on defining problems as personal difficulties, and directing it towards refurbishing social welfare and social work knowledge with Marxist analyses of systemic and structural causes of problems (Carniol, 1979). First cluster scholars working towards this end, along with others outside of the SSW framework, introduced into the academic and practice domains (with greater emphasis on the academic) questions regarding how to apply Marxist and political economic analyses to social policy and systemic social welfare issues (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Bailey & Lee, 1982; Carniol, 1979; Corrigan & Leonard, 1978; Findlay, 1977; Galper, 1980; George & Wilding, 1976; Gough, 1979; Leonard, 1975; Moreau, 1979; Wharf, 1990).

Maurice Moreau is recognized by social work scholars as a main contributor to the development of the SSW framework in Canada (see for example, Carniol, 1992; Hick & Murray, 2009; Lundy, 2004; Payne, 2005). Moreau noted his work was informed by and developed in close collaboration with Professors at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario – Peter Findlay, Helen Levine, Roland Lecomte, Jim Albert, and Allan Moscovitch – and acknowledged Gisele Legault and Pierre Racine from the University of

Montreal (Moreau, 1979, n. 1). Peter Leonard, who at the time (1975-6) was on sabbatical at Carleton from the University of Warwick, and otherwise involved with the emergence in Great Britain of an approach called radical social work, is recognized in particular by Moreau as contributing to the development of the framework. The work of Canadian structural social work was strongly influenced by the work of both their British and American counterparts particularly those works based in, or influenced by, Marxist theory (see for instance, Bailey & Brake, 1975; Cloward & Piven, 1975; Galper, 1980; George & Wilding, 1976; Gough, 1979; Langan & Lee, 1989).

Leonard's chapter, in the book, *Radical Social Work*, attempts "to sketch some of the features of a paradigm for radical social work based upon three elements – a radical social-systems theory; a unified approach to work with individuals, families, groups, communities, residential institutions and organizations; and an approach to the development of critical consciousness" (1975, p. 47). It was this paradigm for social work practice based on a Marxist approach that Moreau noted influenced his work (Moreau, 1979).

Moreau's (1979) article, "A Structural Approach to Social Work Practice," introduced the key features of the nascent framework. He wrote "the key assessment question is the relationship between a client's 'personal' problems, dominant ideology and his [*sic*] material conditions in the class structure" (1979, p. 78). Furthermore, "the central goal of SSW is to help clients develop social praxis – that is, to help them to

critically reflect on their personal/political situation and to develop consequent political planes of action” (1979, p. 82). Within this publication, it is plain to recognize that the framework’s lineage to Marxist thought with its emphasis on class struggle, power, material conditions, the role of ideology, and the relationship between knowledge and action.

By developing a framework for social work practice based in Marxism, Moreau and others contributed greatly to introducing social change goals in the social welfare and social work fields. The Marxist base of the framework supported scholars and practitioners in analyzing the social nature of problems so as to intervene politically at the societal level, as opposed to prevailing theories that pathologized individuals and directed interventions at the level of the individual (see for instance Moreau, 1979). The first cluster authors (Carniol, 1979, 1984; Findlay, 1977; Leonard, 1975; Wharf, 1990) sought to apply structural analyses for the purposes of addressing humanitarian needs and enacting social change; objectives that remain central to definitions of the SSW framework today (Lundy 2004; Mullaly, 2007).

The overhauled theoretical base and the introduction of explicit social change goals involved a considerable shift in the skills required for structural social workers. Unlike the emphasis on assessment skills previously used, the SSW framework emphasized the importance of structural analyses for defining problems and constructing alternatives. Because of this, writers from the first cluster purposefully did not focus on

developing techniques or specific practices that could be exercised by structural social workers (academics and/or practitioners applying the SSW framework), but rather focused on the importance of developing analytical skills and identifying the political position necessary to bring about the desired social change (see for instance, Carniol, 1979; 1984; Moreau, 1979; Mullaly, 1993; and Findlay, 1977).

This modification in the skill set can also be attributable to changes in the academic backgrounds of scholars who were employed at Carleton in the School of Social Work, and involved with the development of the framework (Jennissen, 2010, personal communication). That is, the turn in requisite skills are representative of an influx of male academics at Carleton who were trained in political science, social administration, and economics (*ibid.*). The entry of “highly trained (Ph.D.) male educators in social work” has been recognized as a trend in social work schools during the later 1960s and 1970s that sought “to enhance the status of the schools in the eyes of the university administrators and in the communities” (Turner cited in Carniol, 1987, p. 33).

However, this influx of male educators with academic backgrounds such as, political economy and social administration was not the only dynamic shaping the direction of the knowledge base informing the SSW framework. Scholars of this first cluster were also pressed by women’s movements and feminist academics for constructing a framework based on feminist epistemology and women’s concerns

(Moreau & Leonard, 1989; Levine & Estable, 1981; Levine, 1982). Levine, for example, argued “there exists a decisive difference in the ideology’s impact upon women” (1982, p. 176) but that the helping professions have not seen women as “a major oppressed grouping which is struggling with the poverty, subservience and indignity built into the very structure of our lives” (1982, p. 180). Moreau & Leonard (1989) and Carniol (2005) commended the work of Helen Levine for significantly impacting the extent to which the SSW literature incorporated feminist epistemology.

Finally, the first cluster scholars faced questions with regard to forming an eclectic framework: they questioned how to make decisions about which epistemologies and theories to choose (Carniol, 1979; 1984; Lecomte, 1976), and they aimed to make it responsive to domination and subordination so that it was not class or gender biased: i.e., taking into concern issues of racism, ageism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism (see for instance Carniol, 1992; Moreau, 1990; 1989; Mullaly, 1993; Wharf, 1990). Carniol’s work, for example, questioned “what knowledge is needed about different ideological perspectives within the social sciences in order to engage in a critical analysis of Canadian society” (1979, p. 107; cf. 1984). In another vein, Moreau wrote that “the plain reality is that most people are multiply oppressed on several grounds” (1990, p. 63). The implication for structural social work practice is that “in social assessments no a priori assumptions should be made about any hierarchy of different forms of domination” (1990, p. 64). However, the extent to which the framework could provide an account of

these various structured relations of domination and subordination remained questionable, and would continue to be addressed, even more so, by authors in the second cluster.

In summary, the first cluster of SSW was influenced by several social movements and the work of a number of academics during the late 1960s through to the 1980s. It is rooted in Marxism. It was formalized in Canada at Carleton University with the specific branding of the framework by Moreau. Structural social work changed the type of social work skills emphasized, introduced structural analyses and social goals as well as responded against the dominant theory to form an eclectic framework. Its limitations involved struggles to incorporate various epistemologies and theories and to analyze multiple dimensions to oppression. Also, as will be noticed in the second and third clusters, the first cluster's overt focus on analyzing structural issues at a broad societal level is limited because it could not take individual agency into account and thereby limited the ways in which workers could potentially help clients.

2.2 Second Cluster

The second cluster, although maintaining the objectives of applying structural analyses and enacting social change, is markedly different from the first cluster because it responds to and engages with a changed economic-political context (globalization), as

well as occasional attempts to incorporate postmodernist critiques² (Mullaly, 2007; see also Carniol, 1995; 2005; Lundy, 2004). This shift in the SSW literature in Canada occurred approximately in the mid-1990s (Mullaly, 1997; 2007).

The economic-political context of the second cluster is dramatically different from the context within which the SSW framework emerged and the first cluster texts were written. Recall that the first cluster texts came to light during the mid-1970s when Canada's welfare system was criticized; but, there was the expectation that the welfare state was a central feature of advanced capitalist societies that would continue to develop through a strong presence of government in the welfare of its citizens. The second cluster texts, in contrast, respond to a substantially eroded welfare system and an increasingly dominant neoliberal ideology that opposes government-funded welfare systems. The gradual shrinking of the welfare system that followed the 1970s oil crisis and recession, and carried on through the 1980s is recognized by second cluster authors as transforming Canada's social welfare field (see for instance, Carniol, 1995; 2005; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 1997, 2007). By the 1990s structural social workers were faced with social

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² The SSW literature from the second cluster primarily uses the term postmodernism to refer to critiques of modernist thought, and typically classifies poststructural theorists (such as Foucault) as postmodernist. I use the term poststructuralist in a narrow and precise way in reference to the theoretical and philosophical works that came out of France in the post-war era (discussed in this essay, Althusser and with mention of Foucault). As will be noticed in the third cluster, the authors use the term poststructuralist in the same sense that I use. I reserve the term postmodernism to refer to "a movement in advanced capitalist culture" representing "incipient or actual dissolution of those social forms associated with modernity" (Sarup, 1993, pp. 130-31).

service programs operating on significantly less expenditures coupled with, for example, higher rates of poverty and unemployment (Mullaly, 1997). There was the realization that the welfare state was not a fixed feature of advanced market economies and this realization required a re-altering of focus for social workers, and several other groups interested in social issues and social justice.

For the social welfare and social work fields, these changes involved a dramatic shift in the delivery of services from a national welfare system to the delivery of services by the free-market (Carniol, 2005). Moreover, these changes involved shifting the delivery of services to a market system that featured deregulation, increasing flexibility for global movement of capital and investments, reduction of government in social affairs, debt and deficit reduction, and the promotion of privatized services that signaled amongst other changes, the “triumph of capitalism” over socialism (Teeple, 2000, p. 133). This transformed market economy is referred to in the second cluster literature by the commonly used term ‘globalization’.

Consequently, the first cluster analyses and strategies for enhancing Canada’s welfare state were recognized by second cluster writers as in need of renewal in order to meet the changed social welfare and social work fields (Mullaly, 1997; 2007; see also Lundy, 2004). For instance, second cluster authors found social workers in Canada increasingly likely to be working in environments dominated by a neoliberal ideology; an ideology that opposes universal welfare programs and criticizes such systems for unjustly

imposing a restrictive order on economic activity and personal choice. In such working environments, the SSW framework is criticized as irrelevant, if not grievous, due to the framework's reliance on modernist structural analyses and Marxist ideology. In face of these challenges, second cluster authors expanded their analyses to rebuff neoliberal ideology and to mitigate the changing social problems produced by the globalized economic-political landscape (Carniol, 2000; 2005; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 1997; 2007).

Another key change in the second cluster writings is engagement by these authors with postmodernist ideas. This shift was not isolated to the SSW literature. It was a trend that appeared throughout the broader social work literature (and several other disciplines) during the mid-1990s and continues today to shape the development of social work knowledge (see for instance, Baines [2007], Dominelli [2002], Gray & Webb [2009], Leonard [1997]). The postmodernist critiques of structural analyses and ideologies that universalize, homogenize and essentialize social problems and individuals are of special concern in the second cluster writings (see for instance, Carniol [2005], Lundy [2004], Mullaly [1997, 2007]). These critiques resound the questions asked by Marxists in the post-war era: How to abandon an overarching narrative of truth and yet maintain a Marxist understanding of history and the subject? How to account for culture, race and gender within a Marxist understanding of class conflict? How to account for the subject's political choosing of interests contrary to his/her class position? How to explain racist practices among groups who belong to the working classes?

Throughout the second cluster there are attempts by structural social workers (scholars and/or practitioners applying the SSW framework) to revise earlier constructions of the framework to meet these critiques, while adhering to the structural analyses and objectives understood as originally defining the SSW framework in Canada (see for instance Carniol, 2005; Mullaly, 1997, 2007; Lundy, 2004). For example, Mullaly wrote:

The contribution of post-modernism to a structural analysis is to help us recognize that although oppression and exploitation may be universal phenomena, they will be experienced differently by different people living in different places in different contexts ... An understanding of these differences, along with their meanings for people, would be obtained by the structural social worker through dialogue with those experiencing oppression and used to inform the larger structural analysis to determine what action should be taken to combat this oppression. (1997, pp. 115-116)

Mullaly's comments represent the general approach by second cluster authors to incorporate postmodernist analyses into the structural approach.

The second cluster of the SSW literature is also notable for its efforts to apply the SSW framework in front-line practice. Whereas the first cluster scholars were primarily preoccupied with socio-economic analyses that countered ego-psychological models, the second cluster was more attentive to developing specific front-line practices, such as interviewing or group facilitation skills. The writings of the second cluster include a focus on practicing SSW at an interpersonal level between the worker-client, and with particular attention to suggesting ways that structural social workers can make sense of a

client's "personal/subjective reality" (Lundy, 2004, p. 131; Mullaly, 1997, 2007).³ In other words, the second cluster's focus on developing knowledge for front-line practice demonstrates a greater concern with understanding a client's consciousness in comparison to the first cluster focus on developing knowledge of societal, structural determinants.

This shift in focus can be attributed to the differing discipline and vocational backgrounds of the second cluster authors from that of the first cluster authors (Jennissen, 2010, personal communication). The main authors of the second cluster have backgrounds in the front-line delivery of social and health services, and as such, they bring to the SSW literature attention to developing the framework's applicability in front-line practice settings (*ibid.*). Hence, the economics, political science and public administration backgrounds of many of the first cluster's authors are noticeable in their respective writings which target economic and political analyses of the social welfare system; meanwhile, the second cluster author's professional backgrounds in front-line delivery is apparent in their suggestions of strategies for assessing a client's feelings and connecting their thoughts with structural analyses.

The added focus on front-line practices is also likely in part a response to the absence in the first cluster literature of techniques or skills fitting the SSW framework.

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³ See also George, Coleman, & Barnoff (2000) for an evaluation of practices based upon an application of the SSW framework fitting with the second cluster focus on interpersonal dynamics at the front-line of service delivery.

As well, it can be attributed to incorporation of the postmodern critiques that the framework's original reliance on analyses of over-arching and universal systems (such as the welfare state or ideologies) precluded the framework's potential for analyzing the nuances and complex dynamics involved within the client-worker encounter; such as, power inequalities, culture, gender, age, and sexual orientation to name a few. The second cluster attempts to incorporate analyses and practices for working with the multiple dynamics active in the client-worker encounter are however critiqued by third cluster authors, and other scholars, as insufficient (see Section 2.5).

In addition to the added focus on front-line practices and working with the complexity of the social work encounter, the second cluster of writings maintain an emphasis on systemic issues and a commitment to social change as a goal for social work practice. This sustained emphasis was recognized by Gray and Webb, non-SSW scholars, and inferred as important for the second cluster authors' sustained emphasis on the "necessity of widespread structural change" (2009, p. 78).

In sum, the second cluster of Structural Social Work writings shifted with globalization and engaged with critiques raised by postmodernism, such as a rejection of a "single reality", emphasis on differences, and disbelief that "power is ultimately located within the state" (Mullaly, 1997, p. 113). The second cluster thus engaged with critiques of the modernist grand-narratives and analyses that were originally incorporated within the framework. As well, the second cluster included a focus on practices for the front-

line encounter with clients. However, the second cluster attempts to incorporate postmodernist thought and suggest strategies for implementing the SSW framework in the front-line practice is limited. The third cluster literature demonstrates attempts to further the SSW framework particularly in these regards.

2.3 Third Cluster

Distinguishing the third cluster from the previous two clusters is a less clear-cut undertaking. For one, there is no direct indication by SSW authors that a third cluster exists and represents a categorical divergence from the other clusters (as second cluster authors noted their differences from the first cluster writings.) Moreover, the third cluster variations reflect changes in emphases, as opposed to complete shifts in the theoretical base or context. Nonetheless, the third cluster writings share some features with one another, as well as share some differences from the first and second clusters.

One of the distinguishing features of the third cluster is the lack of reference to the economic and political contexts shaping the social work field. This feature differs from the first and second clusters whose authors stressed the importance of situating their texts and social work practices according to an economic-political landscape. The third cluster is arguably active in a context similar to that of the second cluster (i.e., the contemporary Canadian social welfare field), which leaves room to consider that the third cluster is also operating within the context of globalization. But more importantly, this lack of reference to the economic-political landscape by third cluster authors implies that

the economic analysis integral to the first and second clusters has been considerably dissipated. This is a dissimilarity that suggests there are applications of the SSW framework which are fundamentally different. It raises questions about what could be pulling the SSW literature in such a divergent direction, as well as what tendency within the first and second cluster understanding of the framework could lend in the direction that third cluster developments have pursued. These are questions which my study attempts to offer a partial response.

The third cluster is also a distinguishable grouping within the SSW literature by its greater emphasis on integrating poststructural concepts and analyses for the improvement of social work practices; such as, “bodily knowledge” (Todd & Burns, 2007, p. 23), subjectivity, deconstruction, and local sites of power (see also, Hillock & Profitt, 2007; Weinberg, 2008). These practices, while not necessarily excluding structural dimensions, focus on the power dynamics in the interaction between service provider and service user. These practices also stress the importance of analyzing the “values, feelings, attitudes” (Todd & Burns, 2007, p. 35) of the social worker. In this regard, the third cluster potentially represents an unambiguous return to humanistic approaches within the SSW literature.

In the same vein that the differences in the requisite knowledge and skills between the first and second clusters were attributed to a general difference in the disciplines of the respective authors, the third cluster’s shift in emphasis can also be attributed to a

change in the academic and professional backgrounds of its authors. Whereas several of the first cluster authors were influenced by disciplines of political science, sociology, and political economy, and the second cluster authors were influenced by their front-line social work experiences, the third cluster authors appear to be influenced by a training in post-secondary education. This educational training can be identified by a theme that runs through the third cluster, which is a focus on the education of the social worker. In particular, it is a focus on developing a social worker's ability to reflect on and develop their personal knowledge. The third cluster writings advocate that a greater awareness and understanding of the thoughts and emotions which the social worker constructs within the worker-client encounter will consequently enhance the social worker's ability to respond effectively and act ethically (see Bellefeuille & Hemingway, 2006; Todd & Burns, 2007; Weinberg, 2008). This focus is not found in the writings of the first and second cluster authors.

There are not many writings in Canada that represent this third cluster of the SSW literature (i.e., Todd & Burns [2007], Bellefeuille & Hemingway [2006], Hillock & Profitt [2007], and Weinberg [2008]). Each writer is presented to show how their work is representative of the third cluster and therefore included in this study.

In the article "Post-structural Possibilities: Beyond Structural Practice in Child Protection," Todd & Burns suggested that integration of the following terms as conceived by Foucault's poststructuralism – uncertainty, deconstruction, power, and bodily

knowledge – will “provide pragmatic and ethical ways to enhance a structural approach” (2007, p. 24). In doing so, the authors affirmed the importance of structural approaches for providing a “clear foundation for making sense of the pressures poor families must endure” (2007, p. 35). However, they also aimed to expand the ethical interventions of SSW from its limited reliance on “consciousness-raising and advocacy” with post-structural “micro-practices” (*ibid.*). They suggested that such micro-practices would direct structural social workers to look at how their own “values, feelings, and attitudes” shape their practice, and “are equally as ethical and oriented to justice” (*ibid.*) as the structural analyses guiding the SSW framework.

A similar concern for enhancing practices to support structural social workers with ethical decision making is expressed in Bellefeuille & Hemingway’s (2006) article, “A Co-operative Inquiry into Structural Social Work Students’ Ethical Decision-Making in Field Education.” However, they primarily point to the need for ongoing research and curriculum development in this direction rather than undertake the work to advance the ethical practices available within the SSW framework.

Hillock & Profitt (2007) represent the third cluster in their concern for developing SSW education to better equip its students and practitioners with attending to complex, contradictory, and multiple power dynamics that are inherent in social work practice and education settings. They wrote that “we need not only a framework for conceptualizing change, but also concrete analytical and practical skills to pursue social justice” (2007, p.

41). They suggested a number of strategies for creating classrooms that will teach and provide practice for students in analyzing and working with “multiple and differing social locations of power, privilege, and penalty” (2007, p. 47). The practices encouraged by Hillock & Profitt embody the critiques raised by poststructuralism that modernist structural analyses can homogenize and essentialize identities.

Finally, I include Weinberg’s (2008) article, “Structural Social Work: A Moral Compass for Ethics in Practice” with the third cluster. Like other third cluster authors, Weinberg argued that poststructuralist theory is vital for providing structural social workers with practice-knowledge as well as analyses of how values and knowledge are produced. Weinberg pressed the issue of why the structural analyses of the SSW framework remains relevant and necessary to support social workers with integrating poststructural theory into their SSW practice. In doing so, she voiced an argument befitting the third cluster writings that claim to similarly uphold the SSW framework’s structural analyses as important, yet focus on poststructural analyses.

Weinberg asserted that structural analyses “provide clear direction in moral values” (2008, “Necessary but Not Sufficient,” para. 2). She argued that without structuralism, “the relativism of post-structuralism ... would leave practitioners without a path to navigate the shoals of ethical dilemmas” (*ibid.*). However, by looking outside of the poststructural questions of production, she brings about a discussion of values that have meanings determined by human beings, as individual agents. That is, Weinberg

invokes a discussion of values in humanistic terms outside a material history. This is problematic for the Structural Social Work framework's theoretical base in Marxism which emphasizes how perceptions about what is socially valued are produced in processes of conflicting social relations, rather than individually determined. It demonstrates an application of the SSW framework's structural analyses outside of its Marxist theoretical base, and hints at weaknesses within the first and second cluster writings to circumvent this inconsistent application.

In summary, there is a decreased emphasis on analysis of the economic-political context shaping the social work and social welfare fields in the third cluster writings. The third cluster emphasizes to a greater degree than other clusters the importance of poststructural analyses and critiques for SSW. These writings advocate that despite the importance of revising the SSW framework with post-structuralism, the structural analyses foundational to the SSW framework should nonetheless be maintained. The third cluster's consideration of the social worker or client as individual agent, and its invoking of values as individually determined, demonstrates a return to humanistic approaches. This is remarkable, because the SSW framework is based upon Marxist theory specifically to oppose humanistic approaches in the social welfare and social work fields. This contradiction prompts questions about what has changed in the social welfare and social work fields in Canada so that the framework would be pulled in such a diverging direction. As well, prompts questions about whether or not the third cluster

advances the first and second cluster struggle to enact social change, or if the third cluster indicates an abandonment of this objective.

Before turning to an examination of a few problematic areas within the SSW framework's theoretical base, I wish to comment on the contributions that this study hopes to offer the SSW literature. One contribution is to strengthen the framework's engagement with poststructuralism. The efforts by second and third cluster writers to critique and/or incorporate poststructural critiques into the SSW framework are highly relevant for contemporary social work practice and academia. These efforts are representative of a current and considerable trend within the 'progressive' social work literature. This trend can be found outside the SSW literature in Baines (2007); Dominelli (2002); Fook (2002); Harris (2001); Healy (2001); Hick, Pozzuto & Fook (2005); Hughman (2001); Leonard (1997, 2001)⁴; Rossiter (2006); and Webb (2000).⁵ These authors variously identify their work as contributing to anti-oppressive practice approaches, critical social work, and radical social work, among other identifying terms. The advent of the journal, *Critical Social Work* out of the University of Windsor, Canada in 2000 is also evidence of the substantial number of social workers pursuing, or at a

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⁴ While Leonard was closely involved with the dialogues and scholars at Carleton during the framework's formative years, his publications (1984, 1997, 2001) subsequent to his sabbatical are not treated here as representative of the Structural Social Work framework in Canada, because he does not identify his work as developing or implementing the SSW framework.

⁵ Cf. Gray & Webb (2009) and Payne (2005) for discussions of the broad critical social work trend and associated key sources.

minimum, taking into consideration a framework for social work practice and knowledge-development that is identified as ‘critical’ (and thus not specifically labeled SSW). Part of what the following research aims to strengthen is the contributions as well as challenges from Structural Social Work scholars in Canada to this growing body of social work literature.

The primary contribution of the present study to the SSW literature is its reworking of concepts and analyses central to the SSW framework with the Marxist poststructuralist work of Louis Althusser. To do so, the study will first examine how the SSW framework as applied in Canada: uses the concept of ideology, accounts for multiple dimensions in the social work encounter, and uses the concept of the subject and its subjectivity. This examination identifies some of the theoretical gaps, inconsistencies and confusion within these areas; and, in the hope that this examination of the SSW framework in Canada will support its practitioners and scholars with promoting the importance and relevancy of the framework, as well as target a few of the framework’s limitations.

Part II – Theoretical Challenges

2.4 Ideology: A Humanistic Turn

A Marxist concept of ideology has been central to the SSW framework since the early years of the framework’s development. In the first cluster writings, ideological

analysis was considered a vital component that could contribute to pushing social work and social welfare fields beyond reformist practices (Findlay, 1977; Leonard, 1975; Moreau, 1979). However, the concept of ideology soon became defined in various ways that sustained a humanistic approach, and countered the framework's original intention to apply materialist analyses of ideology. Two ways this inconsistency appears in the SSW literature are through applications of ideological analyses to the concept of the individual and within a rationalist frame. That is, ideological systems are analyzed with respect to the concept of the individual, despite that a Marxist concept of ideology is established within an epistemology that counters rather than supports use of the concept 'individual'. Secondly, systems of ideology are conceptualized within a rationalist frame that characterizes ideological notions as false, thereby impeding Marxist analyses of the real, material force of ideological systems. As well, this rationalist conceptualization contributes to SSW practices which challenge the ideological notions believed by a client as a case of false-consciousness. Due to the latter misuse, the SSW practices are criticized in the social work literature for reinforcing power imbalances between service providers and users. The importance of ideological analysis as a component of SSW appears to have diminished for third cluster writers.

First cluster analysis shows that the SSW framework was developed with the view that social work practice and education are situated in "a history of massive ideological distortion" (Leonard, 1975, p. 46). This was "seen as the outcome of a deep

contradiction within social-work systems under capitalism which enhance human welfare and negate it within the same process” (*ibid.*). Humanist values, such as individual-determination and individual dignity, were conceptualized as social products that serve the oppressive functions of social work institutions and the interests of the ruling class, and furthermore, had negative implications for social work practice (*ibid.*). Two major negative implications of this humanistic approach and ideological distortion were:

- putting undue blame on individuals
- misdirecting attention away from the societal source of problems (Moreau & Leonard, 1989).

To develop an alternative practice, first cluster writers emphasized that the ideological distortion to which social work and social welfare fields were subject, needed to be analyzed so that an alternative for practice could be developed (Carniol, 1979, 1984; Findlay, 1977; Leonard, 1975). Similarly, this concern is found in the second cluster literature. To support these objectives, scholars looked to Marxist theory from the outset to analyze “how ideology is, in Marx’s words, ‘a material force’” (Moreau & Leonard, 1989, p. 1) – that is, a social product reflecting the particular socio-economic base (Leonard, 1975). This examination focuses on how the SSW has applied ideological analysis over the course of the framework’s history. It does not concern the first and second cluster preoccupation with the role of ideology in social change, though it will lead to suggestions for future research concerning this issue in Chapter 5.

Individualism sustained: Despite the SSW framework's resting on a Marxist materialist analysis of ideology, SSW incongruously maintains a humanistic approach in its ideological analyses; this approach sustains the individualism which the framework supposes to oppose. Rather than focusing on the structured relations and material conditions as determining factors of an ideology, ideological analysis in the SSW framework maintains the concept of the individual as a determinant and agent. This inconsistency can be found in definitions within the SSW literature that describe ideology as determined by an individual, as well as efforts to analyze ideology with respect to the concept of the individual.

For example, in his article "Clash of Ideologies in Social Work Education," Carniol defined ideology as "referring to our *individual world-views* [emphasis added], which provide us with explanations and justifications for our personal as well as our political behaviour" (1984, p. 184). Defined this way, Carniol affirms that ideology is a subjective view originating from an individual's consciousness. Since Carniol's definition of ideology starts with an individual's personal, subjective view, his work does not contribute to the literature a theorizing of ideology that is consistent with the SSW framework's Marxist-base, which defines ideology as a social product (see Leonard, 1975; Moreau, 1979). This lack of theoretical consistency and the lack of theoretical argument to support his alternative definition adds to the "jumble of confusion" that

Carniol claimed in his article troubled the literature regarding how ideological analyses can be applied in the social work field (1984, p. 185).

In addition, Carniol aimed to address the confusion within the literature by adapting for social work education purposes a framework originally developed by sociologists, Burrell and Morgan (See Figure 1). This framework serves to compare various ideological perspectives, and to classify social work theories within the framework based upon a similarity between assumptions inherent in a theory and assumptions inherent in an ideology. A key intention of Carniol's in developing this framework is to further understanding by social work students of how ideological analyses can be applied to individuals; Carniol claimed this was needed because the few efforts within the social work literature (his two SSW examples are Leonard [1975] and Moreau [1979]) are insufficient when considered by themselves. It is an effort though, like Leonard's (1975) & Moreau's (1979), unlikely to bear positive results and lead to epistemological confusion, though. For as Althusser's work demonstrates in Section 3.1, applying ideological analysis at the level of individuals requires use of the concept of the subject, and not the individual. Carniol's work however maintains the concept of the individual. Due to his definition of ideology as an individual's worldview, Carniol's (1984) work falls short of resolving, if not contributes to, the theoretical confusion.

Carniol's article proved to be influential within the SSW literature. In her book (2004), *Social Work and Social Justice: A Structural Approach to Practice*, Lundy relies

upon his framework (including additions by Whittington and Holland that are inconsequential for purposes here) to situate the structural approach and also to identify how the eclectic theory base of SSW can be incorporated complementarily within the structural approach. Lundy does not define (as Carniol does) ideology as an individual's worldview, but as a result of her reliance upon his framework, and her classification of the SSW framework as bridging the subjective/individual and objective/structural quadrants of the transformative half of the schema, her work shares with Carniol a dependency upon the concept of the individual. For SSW then, this sustains the individual as a determinant of ideology, even if only partially.

**Figure 1. Framework for Comparing Ideologies
& Organizing Social Work Approaches**

(Adapted from Carniol, 1984; cf. Lundy, 2004)

Furthermore, Lundy's work does not resolve the theoretical confusion regarding how an ideology can be determined by individuals in addition to structured relations. Her definition of ideology begins not with a source or determinant – such as the individual in Carniol's (1984) definition or social relations in Leonard's (1975) use – but is defined as “a set of beliefs, assumptions and values” (2004, p. 55). She does not ask the question of how is ideology produced. This silence, when taken in consideration with Carniol's framework, has two negative consequences for the theoretical robustness of the SSW framework: a defining of ideology that is inconsistent with the framework's base in Marxist theory, as well as a use of the concept of ideology that is seemingly not supported in theory. The work of Althusser will be used to argue the first criticism, as well, will suggest a differing concept of ideology that is supported in theory and is relevant for SSW purposes.

Mullaly's work also emphasizes that ideology is determined by the individual, particularly the individual's rational agency. His work is possibly the most overt demonstration of this in the second cluster literature, though he reaches this conclusion by way of a slightly different route. In the 2nd and 3rd editions of his textbook series (1997; 2007), Mullaly used the concept of paradigm in addition to the concept of ideology: defining a paradigm as representing “a ‘taken-for-granted reality’ (Ford, 1975) or world view that consists of the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by a scientific community (Tornebohm, 1977)” (2007, p. 33). Mullaly wrote that

a paradigm is “comprised of a reasonably consistent set of social, political, and economic ideas, beliefs, and values (in other words, an ideology) that provides an explanation of the world” (2007, p. 34). Mullaly did not clearly define how the concept of paradigm is distinguishable from that of ideology.⁶ He used both ‘paradigm’ and ‘ideology’ to identify sets of ideas, beliefs and values that give meaning to events and conditions. It is in this respect that my criticism of his use of the term ‘paradigm’ is equivalent to his use of the term ‘ideology’.

Mullaly insisted that the “shape of events is determined by people, all of us, and by our willingness to understand and seek to change the world for the better” (2007, p. 41; citing Burghardt). He argued that it is the vision of the world that human beings imagine they want to live in that is the “prerequisite” for action (2007, p. 41). What this demonstrates is that the meanings given to events and conditions that are contained within the ideas, beliefs and values of ideologies and paradigms are produced by the personal, subjective imagination of ahistorical human beings. Hence, Mullaly can be said to employ ideology as a product of individual consciousness and not a social product.

Rationalist Conceptualization: The second misuse of the concept of ideology within the SSW literature examined here is its conceptualization within a rationalist framework. This misuse results in a conceptualization of ideology as false-

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⁶ Mullaly’s (1997; 2007) use suggests ‘paradigm’ provides a dominating category with which a variety of ideologies may correspond, and ‘ideology’ refers only to sets of ideas associated with political action and positions (i.e., state politics).

consciousness, and has been criticized within the social work literature for leading to practices which reinforce unequal power dynamics.

Framing of ideology within a rationalist framework has in the SSW literature rendered ideology false. To contest the false ideological notions that can “impair a client’s capacities to accurately construe reality” (Moreau, 1990, p. 54), structural social workers would employ the practice of consciousness-raising (for other examples of the importance of consciousness-raising as a strategy incorporated into the SSW framework, see Carniol, 1984; Findlay, 1976; Leonard, 1975; Lundy, 2004; Moreau, 1979; Moreau & Leonard, 1989; Mullaly, 1992, 1997, 2007). The key in consciousness-raising is to help “clients recognize and modify any ideas, values, feelings and behaviours that contribute to their own oppressive situation or to that of others” so to “reverse the process of self-disempowerment or of internalized oppression” (Moreau, 1990, p. 54). The objective inherent in this task assumes that clients potentially do not have an accurate representation of reality due to ideologically distorted ideas, and importantly, does *not* assume like Middlemen & Goldberg’s (1974) structural approach that clients *are* “adequate people who accurately construe reality” (Moreau, 1990, p. 54).

For example, Moreau stressed that structural social workers are concerned with those who “suffer psychological damage because they are victims of or resist an ideology that supports, maintains and legitimates the present social order” (1979, p. 79). Carrying on, he wrote structural social workers would oppose such “myths” (*ibid.*).

As noticeable in the above example, the conceptualization of ideology within a rationalist frame predisposes the strategy of consciousness-raising to designate the insights of the social worker as correct, while that of the client as possibly misguided and illusory. Implemented this way, the practice of consciousness-raising reinforces unequal power dynamics between the social workers and client. This concern has been raised by first (Leonard, 1975) and second cluster authors (Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 1997; 2007). It appears to have increasing importance for third cluster authors, Todd & Burns (2007) as well as critical social work scholars, such as Fook (2002) and Leonard (2001).

Examination of Althusser's work suggests a conceptualization of ideology in a non-rationalist framework that can assist with developing ideological analyses that do not invoke the true/false dichotomous approach which has been criticized for reinforcing unequal power dynamics between clients and workers.

Downplayed Role of Ideology within Third Cluster: Lastly, there is an absence of ideological analysis in the third cluster literature. Mullaly has suggested that the postmodernist critiques of grand narratives have contributed to a decreased emphasis on ideological analyses in the social work literature (Mullaly, 2007). This likely explains the absence of ideological analyses in the third cluster, given the cluster's emphasis on poststructuralism. Althusser's Marxist-poststructuralist work suggests interesting possibilities for ideological analyses that are fitting with these critiques central to the third cluster literature.

In conclusion, given the centrality of ideology to the framework, the various definitions of its concept, its misapplication to the concept of the individual and the criticized strategy of consciousness-raising that stems from a conceptualization of ideology within a rationalist frame, examination of ideology with respect to the SSW framework is warranted. Calls for a renewed consideration of ideology, specifically a Marxist analysis of ideology, are supported by several scholars, including Lundy (2004), Gray & Webb (2009), and Leonard (1997).

2.5 Multiple Dimensions: Complexity Simplified

The SSW framework has consistently recognized the complexity in the lives of individuals, the social welfare field, and social problems. However, its theoretical capacity for analyzing the complexities of the social work encounter has been consistently questioned and critiqued as unnecessarily and hazardously simplified; critiques raised increasingly within the second and third cluster literature. Various responses have been made to address these critiques and improve the framework in this regard, however, the framework remains limited for dealing with complex issues of multiple dimensions.

Literature from the first cluster demonstrates that scholars were sensitive to the need to develop a framework that took into consideration a broad range of dimensions of analysis that included socio-economic issues, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion. For instance, Leonard wrote “there is no doubt that radical social work

needs an overall framework within which to grapple with an enormous range of individual, group and wider environmental variables ... asserting the dialectical relationship between a range of variables” (1975, p. 48). Likewise, Moreau’s (1979) article shows an intention to develop an approach for social work practice that despite a “paramount concern” (1979, p. 78) for the injustices from economic inequality, there is also concern for those who suffer as a result of ideologies that discriminate and marginalize people on basis of the colour of their skin, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, ability, and religion. These examples demonstrate that scholars sought to produce a framework that would not reduce all social problems and experiences to the simple economic contradiction between capital and labour. It also points to SSW scholars’ idealist and reductionist reading of Marx’s works; a reading that finds Marxist theory as explaining all phenomena of society and history as determined by the simple economic contradiction.

However, despite these intentions for recognizing and analyzing multiple dimensions and forms of marginalization, the first cluster literature continues to give greater emphasis to the role of class structures. For example, Leonard wrote, “this interaction, although a mutually influencing one, is *weighted in favour* [emphasis added] on the economic infrastructure. Thus in any social-systems analysis based on a Marxist perspective we would expect to find that economic variables have a *preponderant influence* [emphasis added] on the system” (Leonard, 1975, p. 48). Similarly, Findlay

emphasized that critical examination of “sex roles, the family, formal organizations, opportunity and mobility...requires some understanding of the social structure which shapes and constrains perception *and the economic forms which determine* [emphasis added] the social structure” (1977, p. 50).

Over the following decade as the SSW field of practice and education were more influenced by feminist and to a lesser extent anti-racist analyses, the weight initially ascribed to class as a determinant over other structured relations was critiqued. The result was a framework that maintained an emphasis on class conditions but attempted to integrate analyses of various structures (see for instance, Carniol, 1987; Moreau, 1990; Wharf, 1990). Thus, a decade following the institutionalization of the SSW framework at Carleton, the framework came to be defined as resting on a:

contemporary marxist [*sic*] analysis profoundly influenced by feminism. This ‘feminized’ marxism [*sic*] *does not prioritize class over all other* [emphasis added] exploitative social divisions, as orthodox marxism [*sic*] argued. Rather, it is an analysis which *places alongside each other* [emphasis added] the divisions of class, gender, race, age, ability/disability and sexuality as the most significant social relations of advanced patriarchal capitalism. (Moreau & Leonard, 1989, p. vi)

From an Althusserian Marxist-poststructural perspective, this non-prioritizing approach loses sight of the unequal balance between the dimensions shaping the social work encounter.

While the literature demonstrates increased inclusion of other dimensions, the SSW framework's suitability for analyzing the complexity of the social work encounter continued to receive criticism for a pre-determined hierarchy between dimensions, and limited explanatory power when it comes to the particularities of local and personal factors. An important demonstration of this comes from Moreau & Leonard's (1989) study, *Empowerment Through a Structural Approach to Social Work: A Report from Practice*. Two of Moreau & Leonard's key findings are: 1) a majority of respondents recalled the approach emphasizing macro level factors associated with the concept of structures as "over determining"⁷ (1989, p. vii) micro level factors; and 2) a significant portion of these respondents considered the framework to "overstate the role of structures" (1989, p. 201). These findings suggest that the framework's understanding of structural analyses was limited to "macro-level factors", such as, "social, political and economic factors", or "government"; and, conversely, that the framework failed to present materialist structural analyses for explaining "micro-level factors", such as local power dynamics, familial relationships and circumstances unique to particular clients (1989, p. 61). Moreover, the framework failed to account for how materialist structural analyses could explain these 'micro-level' factors without pre-determining them as less

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⁷ Moreau & Leonard (1989) do not associate their use of the term 'over determining' with the use of the concept 'overdetermination' put forward by Althusser (see Section 3.2). Moreau & Leonard also do not use the term in a sense consistent with Althusser's conceptualization of overdetermination (see Section 4.2). Moreau & Leonard describe macro-level factors as having greater influence and political importance than micro-level factors.

important than 'macro-level' factors. The work of Althusser suggests that these limitations can possibly be resolved in a manner that reaffirms the framework's Marxist base, rather than rejects its original base as reductive, and static.

The introduction of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories into the social work field further resourced critiques of the framework's theoretical limitations to include and be informed by multiple dimension and shifting subject positions. These theories supported more recent calls within the social work literature for the rejection of grand-narratives that reduced experiences and problems to a single dimension of analysis. Furthermore, these theories supported calls for the rejection of pre-defined relationships between multiple dimensions.

Second cluster texts, namely subsequent editions of Carniol's *Case Critical* series (1995; 2005), Mullaly's second and third editions of his *Structural Social Work* series (1997, 2007), and Lundy's (2004) book, *Social Work and Social Justice* explicitly aimed to incorporate marginalized voices through adding postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of racism, colonialism, imperialism, ageism and ableism. Yet these more recent additions have not resolved the critiques and "concerns that such theoretical analyses have 'oversimplified the realities...'" with the consequence that marginalized populations are still "'disregarded'" (Healy 1998 cited in Todd & Burns, 2007, pp. 23-4). Todd & Burns, incorporating poststructural thought and reflecting on the epistemological limitations of the SSW framework for practice wrote, "Structural social workers view the

experience of marginalization as shared among individuals within an oppressed group ... this suggests that there exists a 'singular underlying truth' ... we wonder whether the assumption of a common experience of oppression is always helpful" (2007, p. 25).

In addition, Baines critiques Mullaly's second edition (1997) for failing "to generate a model for talking about or understanding the dynamics of multiple oppressors" (1999, p. 457). Baines wrote in her review that Mullaly has "difficulty incorporating multiple axes of social injustice into his analysis in a way that helps us to understand how numerous oppressors collude, collide, cooperate and contest at the theoretical and everyday levels" (1999, p. 458).

In a third cluster critique of the framework's capacity for working with complexities and contradictions of everyday life, Weinberg wrote "SSW does not provide the analytic tools to examine these issues" (2008, "Critiques of Structural Social Work Theory," para. 2). Similarly, Jeffrey, in her critique of the structural approach, suggested that a better approach would "offer a complex and sophisticated understanding of human behaviour that accounts for the impact of structural factors, personal uniqueness, and community differences in interpreting and assessing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals" (2003, p. 123).

Finally, as a third cluster response to these continuing challenges, Todd & Burns wrote that they "are concerned that SSW may not adequately acknowledge that people's lives are always more complex than the structures that shape them", that their lives "may

exceed or disrupt the structural relations”; and that SSW failing to account for these non-structural elements is “reductive” (2007, p. 25). They also argued that a structural analysis is insufficient “in which local power relations are as central as those at the structural level” (*ibid.*). Todd & Burns’ statements indicate an interpretation of the SSW framework’s structural analyses as totalizable system, non-responsive to changing conditions of existence as well as a conceptualization of power relations as potentially existing outside of structured, historical, social relations.

These comments demonstrate that the framework’s capacity to theoretically work with complexity remains highly criticized. The primary theme throughout these critiques is that the framework’s theoretical base in structural and materialist analyses are reductionist, pre-determined, and incapable of accounting for micro-level factors such as local community or family dynamics. An additional critique raised at various points (Jeffrey, 2003; Moreau & Leonard, 1989; Todd & Burns, 2007) is the framework fails to account for individual dynamics and the individual’s role in creating change. This signals a sustained struggle between analyses of encounters and problems as determined by historical, social relations, with analyses of problems as determined by the individual. This suggests that the SSW framework needs to develop and strengthen its position on what dimensions of analysis are of concern, how these are to be integrated, and how they relate to a structural analysis. In the following chapters, an examination of the concept of

overdetermination as put forward by Althusser is used to suggest how the SSW response to these criticisms can be advanced.

2.6 The Subject & its Subjectivity: Apolitical & Individual

The third and final theoretical weakness of the SSW framework addressed in this research is with regard to the confusion over the concept of the subject and its subjectivity. Use of this vital concept is limited, is at times inaccurately conflated with the concept of the individual and with the philosophical category of subjective knowledge as opposite of objective, and it is absent in SSW conceptualizations of the dialectical relationship between individuals and society. These misuses are inconsistent with the poststructuralist meaning of the concept, and thus welcome greater confusion when it comes to attempts by second and third cluster authors to incorporate poststructural critiques and analyses into the framework's theoretical base. These misuses encumber Marxist practice and theory, as argued by Althusser. This contributes greatly to the theoretical quagmire that the Structural Social Work framework as applied in Canada finds itself in.

The concept of the subject can be found in one instance in the first cluster in the report by Moreau & Leonard (1989). Moreau & Leonard used the concept of the subject in the following way:

In the Structural Approach, human beings are considered to be social subjects who are divided, unique and on several

points similar (Mispelbolm, 1982): Social subjects, *because they are simultaneously subjected* [emphasis added] to material social structures (political, economic and ideological) that shape them, *all the while being potentially capable of acting as subjects, rather than being acted on as objects* [emphasis added] (Leonard, 1984). (1989, p. 26)

Defined this way, the concept's ambiguity offers little direction in social work practice settings which ultimately require decisions to be made regarding interventions. For example, how does this definition of the concept help structural social workers in a practice setting involving a youth in conflict with the law: To what extent does the social worker define the problem as a result of structured social relations which have subjected the youth into activities, relationships, and attitudes, leading the youth into conflict with the law? To what extent does the social worker consider the situation as a result of ideas and actions that the youth conjured up independently and who driven by their own rational agency to serve their personal interests, acted outside of the law? The framework's Marxist-based analyses and first and second cluster objectives for attending to the social nature of problems can potentially be diverted by the humanistic questioning of individual agency, which is encouraged by the ambiguous definition of the concept of the subject.

Other texts from the first cluster, including those which were influential to SSW framework during the first years of the framework's development (Corrigan & Leonard, 1978), however do not use the term (for instance, Carniol [1979], Findlay [1977], Moreau [1979]).

I suspect that the limited use of the concept of the subject was primarily because its use in the SSW literature is treated as politically akin to the concept of the individual. In the process, the literature ignores the theoretical and philosophical differences between these two concepts. The notion of individual consciousness is a product of the Enlightenment from the era of modernity (see for instance, Althusser 1970/1984a; Foucault, 2001). The concept of the subject and its subjectivity has been radically recast in counters to the rationalist idealism of the Enlightenment, such as that found in Marxist and poststructuralist thought (*ibid.*). Contrary to concerns that it is apolitical, the subject is produced by structures; it is a *product* of social relations, and therefore inherently political and historical (Althusser, 1970/1984a; see also, Section 3.3). The concept of the individual is a priori (see for instance, Foucault, 2001) and as such, is apolitical (at least in the sense of being shaped by political practices; it does have political implications and use). They are distinct concepts which, when used accurately, will lend needed clarification to the SSW framework.

One of the most evident ways in which this inaccuracy can be recognized is in both first and second cluster works that render the concept of the subject and its subjectivity as apolitical, astructural, and conceived only as the opposite of objective (see Carniol, 1984; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 1997; 2007). For example, in Carniol's (1984) article, he introduced a framework (based on the work of Burrell & Morgan) for comparing ideologies and classifying theories that places individual/subjective at one

continuum and structural/objective at the other. It is clear in Carniol's framework that social reality is conceived as either a construction of the individual's consciousness or is external to the individual and "waiting to be discovered through objective observation" (Carniol, 1984, p. 186). What is missing from this framework, (and what Althusser's reading of the subject in Marx's work offers,) is a conceptualization of a social reality that is structured and therefore not constructed by an individual's consciousness, but is nevertheless subjective. In other words, Carniol's framework fails to support analyses outside of this subjective/objective opposition in order to conceive of social reality as subjective and structured. As previously mentioned, this piece of work continued to inform his subsequent editions in the second cluster, as well as Lundy's (2004) and Mullaly's (1997, 2007) second cluster works.

Carniol's (1984) schema, and similar interpretations found in the first and second cluster writings (Carniol 1995; 2005; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 1997; 2007), does not support Marxist poststructuralist analyses of how the subject is produced. As well, it muddles analyses of how individual clients, workers, family members, etc. experience and participate in structured social relations. The analyses are muddled because the schema separates structures and conditions of existence from subjective knowledge, and since the concept of the subject and its subjectivity is treated as synonymous with the individual and subjective knowledge, the schemas effectively dismiss consideration of how a subjectivity-effect is inextricably, not separable from structured social relations

and conditions for existence. Examination of Althusser's work will support this critique of readings of the subject as individualist and separable from structured social relations and material conditions (see Sections 3.1 & 3.3 for further discussion).

The political reception of the concept of the subject and its subjectivity supported by this framework is clear in the words of Lundy when she wrote that "a focus on our subjectivities while retreating from broader structures will neither serve our profession nor the people whom we serve" (2004, p. 43). Lundy used additional schematics in her book, but these still place subjective with "personal reality and thoughts/emotions" (2004, p. 131) and treats social conditions as structures and objective reality. The polarity encouraged by this schema, along with her comment that analyses of the subject and its subjectivity veers away from structures, implies that Lundy sustains a modernist conceptualization of subjective knowledge and the individual as a pre-given entity. That is, as described by Foucault (2001, Chapter 1), knowledge of truth is recognized by an individual who has no transformations or demands on his/her being as subject. Lundy's understanding of the concept of the subject and its subjectivity, as demonstrated in her 2004 book, is inconsistent with the poststructural meaning of the term (at least that found in the work of Althusser and Foucault [2001]).

With the 'subject' confused with the 'individual', i.e., a pre-given entity, what is present in these instances of the SSW literature is a conceptualization of the subject and its subjectivity as apolitical. This puts the first and second cluster works of the SSW

literature at odds with third cluster works and other social work scholars who give considerable weight to the poststructural subject as a concept that is political and important for developing social work practices.

Use of the subject and its subjectivity as politically equal to that of the individual agent as a priori to the social is also evident in the framing of the dialectic in the second and third clusters (Mullaly, 1997; 2007; Weinberg, 2008; see also Hick & Murray, 2009). Lundy wrote “a structural approach to social work attempts to bridge the duality of the personal and the social, the individual and the community” (2004, p. 57). What is missing in her work, as well as Carniol, and other SSW authors such as Mullaly, is a theoretical category that can provide a means to conceptualize this ‘bridging’. That is, a concept with which to support analyses of a subjective social reality that is not in opposition to objective knowledge, is not astructural or apolitical. Without a concept to think the result of this ‘bridging’, the SSW literature remains at the ambiguous definition of the subject. It appears as though the declaration of the dialectic is considered to resolve the ambiguity, regardless that a concept with which to think the product of the dialectical relationship has not been posed.

In the third cluster the framing of the dichotomy between the determining forces of individual agents and structures remains, despite the respective authors’ emphases on using the concept and its subjectivity for SSW practice. For example, Weinberg stated she is looking at “the interplay between the agency of individuals and structures,

particularly the broad structural barriers which influence and limit the material circumstances of service users” (2008, “What is Structural Social Work Theory”, para. 1). When she wrote “the agency of individuals”, she invokes a concept which implies that action can solely be taken at the behest of and on behalf of the individual, as though the individual precedes the structural. Second, she makes clear this divide in her (2008) article that individual actions and meanings can be external to structures or social relationships when she wrote “by structures I am referring to ‘social regularities and objective patterns *external to individual action, intentions, and meanings, and not reducible to the sum of those meanings or actions*’ (Kondrat, 2002, p. 458) [emphasis added]” (*ibid.*). Despite her use of the individual agency as dialectically related with structures, she criticizes structural theory for failing to “provide the apparatus for a fine grained analysis of how subject positions are constructed” (2008, “Critiques of Structural Social Work Theory”, para. 6). It is apparent here how clarification and consistent use of the subject rather than the individual would be very helpful. SSW will continue to be limited with analyzing the dialectic between structured relations and actions performed by individuals until it addresses the confusion caused by the incorrect posing of the dialectic.

It is important to mend this theoretical confusion because the confusion contributes to an incomplete use of the Marxist concept of the subject and creates a disconnect between SSW’s theoretical base and attempts to integrate and critique

poststructural concepts. This also has ramifications for the previously discussed areas of the frameworks' troubled applications: ideological analysis, and working with complexity. Greater clarification of the subject and its subjectivity will contribute to a clearer, more theoretically rigorous framework as well as contribute to efforts by third cluster writers to use these concepts within the SSW framework. In the coming chapters, Althusser's writings regarding the subject and its subjectivity will be used to contribute to addressing these problems.

2.7 Althusser's Absence

This review of the SSW literature shows that some important pieces of the work of Althusser have been only cursorily applied in Moreau & Leonard's (1989) report, with only his 1969 and 1977 publications referenced, overlooking other important pieces of his that were available at the time the first cluster authors were writing. Additionally, a number of Althusser's writings have only more recently been translated into English (2003a; 2006a). These more recent publications have likewise not informed the Structural Social Work literature. The content of these newly translated writings further develop Althusser's Marxist-poststructuralist ideas and can contribute to strengthening the SSW framework's use of Marxist and poststructural theory.

Examination of Althusser's work is not justified though simply on the grounds that his work has not yet been used to inform the SSW literature. His work is also highly relevant. He engaged with questions and challenges to modernist and idealist readings of

Marx that resonate with those found in the social work literature. Acting during the post-war crisis in Marxism, he encountered profound theoretical and philosophical problems posed by the rise in power of Nazism and the events of the Holocaust which Marxist thought was unable to explain. These problems included:

- How to explain working class labourers acting against the interests of their class of origin? That is, working class labourers acting in direct opposition to the Marxist theory of revolution which understood the working class labourers to rise up together with their class against an exploitative system (Kellner, n.d.).
- How to account for power wielded through ideological and political means rather than economic (*ibid.*; cf. Benton, 1984)?
- How to abandon grand-narratives and yet maintain a Marxist understanding of history and the subject?

In considering these problems, Althusser profoundly impacted the theoretical and philosophical responses to the post-war crisis in Marxism. He is a main author of the unique and important responses by French intellectuals to the crisis.⁸ His 1965

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⁸ While similar to other intellectuals in the West with respect to a labouring to redress Marxist theory – e.g., Gramsci, Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas (some of whom the SSW literature has more actively engaged with (see for instance, Findlay [1977], Hick et al. [2005], Leonard [1975]) – the conjunctures which French Marxists engaged with the crisis in Marxism and the body of work they produced

publications, *Lire le Capital* (with Étienne Balibar) and *Pour Marx* garnered him international reputation and a leading role amidst the contentious struggles over the theoretical direction of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and within the international communist movement (Benton, 1984; Lewis, 2005). He has been recognized as a “progenitor of intellectual developments” (Elliott, 1994, p. viii) and for having a “huge effect upon the phase of thinkers we now call poststructuralist” (Peters, 2001, p. 12).

Althusser’s contributions to carrying Marxism beyond this crisis were however not without controversies, theoretically and politically.⁹ Althusser argued that the competing humanist and Stalinist (mechanical materialist) versions of Marxism currently

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was unique (Lewis, 2005). The responses from French intellectuals – i.e., Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Althusser, and Foucault (although they identified variously with Marxist theory and practice) – provide an extensive and important body of work for gaining insight into the obstacles within Marxist theory and philosophy, as well as attempted avenues for resolution during the post-war crisis (*ibid.*). In addition, the crisis in Marxism during the post-war period was compounded by major events such as the Hungarian Revolt and the publicization of Stalin’s crimes against humanity by Khrushchev in 1956, making the political implications of French intellectual attempts to resolve the crisis in Marxism of further importance (Lewis, 2005; cf. Benton, 1984; Elliott, 1987). The French poststructuralist responses of this post-war period have relevance for theoretical challenges encountered by the SSW framework as they entail considerable tensions between tendencies of Marxist theorizing that can be found in the tendencies between humanism and materialism within the SSW literature.

⁹ A key controversy was an interpretation of his work as Stalinism: this, despite Althusser’s claims to be providing a left-wing critique of Stalin (Benton, 1984). For further discussion of this controversy surrounding Althusser’s work, as well as arguments supporting the reading of Althusser as non-Stalinist, suggested reading is Callinicos (1976), Benton (1984), and Elliott (1987). In addition to his controversial ideas, Althusser’s absence from the monumental labour strike of May 1968 and his self-confessed murdering of his wife in 1980 only compounded the controversies surrounding his work; if not most seriously, by the dismissal of his work (Benton, 1984; Elliott, 1987; Hamilton, n.d.).

dominating the crisis, especially in France, were merely different sides of the same coin – idealism. Althusser argued that both of these attempts were idealistic, and that they were both perilous to resolving the crisis in Marxism. He wrote:

To go straight to the point: the form that holds the greatest threat for Marxist theory today is the pair ‘*humanism/technicism*’. It appears in broad daylight in the capitalist countries...It also makes itself felt even within the Communist parties, and in both capitalist and socialist countries, in the form of a tendency to interpret Marxist philosophy as a *theoretical humanism*, and also in the form of a tendency to put uncritical, mechanistic faith in the development of the *sciences and technology*, while underestimating the role of politics, ideology, and philosophy. (2003e, p. 184)

His positions and arguments put him against the proponents of a humanist understanding of Marxism, such as the Existential Marxists in France and socialist humanism supporters in France and in the West. It also meant that while remaining a member, he did not tout the Moscow-directed line of the PCF, openly criticizing the party’s leadership and its theoretical direction (Lewis, 2005; cf. Benton, 1984; Elliott, 1987).

For Althusser, the theoretical means to resolving the crisis in Marxism was to recognize an epistemological break within Marx’s works that breaks with idealism and sets Marxism within a materialist philosophy and theory.¹⁰ The backbone of Althusser’s

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¹⁰ In his later work (late 1970s onwards) he ceased identifying the break as complete, and instead spoke of an ongoing break between idealism and materialism, with the latter being the overriding tendency within Marx’s work (1974/1976b; 2006).

positions and philosophical project involved defining and defending this epistemological split. He sought to separate a science and philosophy of materialism from “the ideology of the philosophies of the Enlightenment, i.e., a teleology and idealist rationalism” (Althusser, 1968/1970a, p. 14). Showing this break was argued by Althusser as necessary to save Marxism from being understood and practiced as dogmatic idealism – humanistic or mechanistic.

It is through his struggle to confer this break and recast Marxist theory and concepts within a different, materialist problematic that Althusser would draw on various theoretical works from psychoanalysis and philosophy. In doing so, Althusser re-cast Marxist concepts within a materialist philosophy that was a-idealistic and a-teleological. It is this work that Althusser is recognized for renewing and helping to rescue Marxism from the crisis. From this interpretation of Marxism by Althusser, the SSW framework can draw on, and benefit in order to advance its struggle with the theoretical and practical challenges and obstacles of today.

Chapter 3

Marxist Poststructuralism: Althusser's Reading of Marx

This chapter examines how Althusser contributed to a renewal of Marxism during its post-war crisis by recasting the concepts, amongst others, *ideology*, *overdetermination*, and *the subject and its subjectivity*. This is a non-exhaustive examination of Althusser's works regarding these three concepts. This examination concentrates on aspects of his theoretical developments that directly address the gaps, confusion and inconsistencies found in the Structural Social Work literature's use of Marxist and poststructuralist theories, and discussed in the preceding chapter.

3.1 Ideology: 'System of Social Relations'

Introduction: Althusser produced a distinctive corpus of writings that developed Marxist theses on ideology within a materialist philosophy. In order to benefit my study's objective for applying components of Althusser's work to the previously identified problems within the SSW literature, i.e., ideological analyses using the concept of the individual and within a rationalist philosophy, a targeted examination of how he puts forward a Marxist concept of ideology will proceed by: first, identifying some of Althusser's definitive statements of the concept; then, examining in light of these

statements, Althusser's work regarding the concept of ideology's system of ideas, mechanism, structure, social function, and material existence.¹¹

Definitions: Throughout Althusser's extensive writings on ideology, several definitions of the concept appear. As his theoretical work on this concept was approached at more than one point in time and from more than one angle, a collection of his statements from the text, *Philosophy & Marxism* is useful for defining and opening-up an examination of Althusser's reformulation of ideology.

Ideology is necessarily a distortive representation of reality.
It is the imaginary representation that men make of their
real conditions of existence.

Ideology is a system of unified ideas that act on men's
consciousness.

Ideology performs a social function: that of ensuring the
cohesion of the members of a society. (1988/2006d, p. 280)

Constituted by System of Ideas that Refers to System of Social Relations:

Althusser stressed that it is important to acknowledge when considering his use of the concept of ideology that ideology is constituted by a "system of ideas" and representations that "refers to a system of social relations" (1988/2006d, p. 281).

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¹¹ Organization of the first few of these components is adapted from the text (Althusser, 1988/2006d), *Philosophy and Marxism: Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984-7*.

First, Althusser took as a premise, “man is so constituted that no human action is possible without language and thought” (1988/2006d, p. 281). The consequence of this is that “there can be no human practice without a system of ideas”, which Althusser preferred to call “a system of *notions* inscribed in words (1988/2006d, p. 281; emphasis in original). This system “constitutes the ideology of the corresponding practice” (1988/2006d, p. 281).

Second, a clarification that Althusser “insists” on is “the fact that an ideology is a *system of notions* only to the extent that it refers to a system of *social relations*” (1988/2006d, p. 281; emphasis in original). He added this point in order to make clear that: “It is not a question of an idea produced by an individual imagination, but of a system of notions that can be projected socially, a projection that can constitute a corpus of socially established notions. Ideology begins only at this point” (1988/2006d, p. 281).

In short, he argued that ideology involves a system of notions that is socially projected and that human beings practice correspondingly with the system of social relations which the ideological notions refer to. From the outset, Althusser rejects the possibility of considering ideology as ideas constructed by an individual’s consciousness, or in the words of Carniol, “individual world-views” (1984, p. 184).

Ideology’s Mechanism: Althusser accounted for this action by theorizing the mechanism with which ideological systems operate. He used the concept of interpellation for describing the mechanism with which ideology “*acts* [emphasis added]

on men's consciousness" and "*performs* [emphasis added] a social function" (1988/2006d, p. 280).

Althusser described ideology's operation in, *Philosophy & Marxism*:

I could begin by responding that this mechanism operates whenever a consciousness 'recognizes' these ideological notions to be 'true.' But how does this recognition come about? We already know that it is not the mere presence of the true which causes it to be perceived as true. There is a paradox here. It is as if, when I believe in a notion (or a system of notions), I were not the one who recognizes it and, confronted by it, could say: 'That's it, there it is, and it's true.' On the contrary, it is 'as if', when I believe in an idea, it were the idea that dominated me and obliged me to recognize its existence and truth, through its presence. It is 'as if' – the roles having been reversed – it were the idea that interpellated me, in person, and obliged me to recognize its truth. This is how the ideas that make up an ideology impose themselves violently, abruptly, on the 'free consciousness' of men: *by interpellating* individuals in such a way that they find themselves compelled 'freely' to recognize that these ideas are *true – compelled* to constitute themselves as 'free' 'subjects' who are capable of recognizing the true wherever it is present, and of *saying* so, inwardly or outwardly, in the very form and content of the ideas constitutive of the ideology in question. (1988/2006d, p. 281; emphasis in original)

In the opening lines of this description, Althusser asked "how does this recognition come about" (*ibid.*)? In doing so, he indicated that he presumes there to be a mechanism for the production of knowledge in ideological form. Althusser stressed in *Reading Capital* that it is necessary to ask "*by what mechanism does the production of the object of knowledge produce the cognitive appropriation of the real object, which*

exists outside thought in the real world” (1968/1970a, p. 56; emphasis in original)?

Moreover, he stressed that this crucial question is not raised within a philosophy of idealism that approaches knowledge as a matter of recognizing self-evident truth (see 1968/1970a; 2006a). As such, idealist philosophies fail to lead to an examination of ideology that sheds light on its mechanism, structure, and material existence. This is a gap noticeable within the SSW literature discussions on ideology.

Structure Specific to Ideology & its Mechanism: In answering this materialist line of questioning, Althusser argued that the mechanism by which the system of ideology operates is produced by a “mirror-structure” that is “*doubly* specular” (1970/1984a, p. 54; emphasis in original) and centres on an infinity of individuals.

The mirror structure of ideological systems duplicates the specular relationship between an individual and an ideology. One of the specular relationships is that the individual “must recognize itself as a subject in ideological discourse” (2003c, p. 52). This is necessary “in order for the individual to be constituted as an interpellated subject” (*ibid.*).¹² A second specular relationship is that the ideological discourse must also

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¹² ‘Ideological discourse’ is a term that Althusser used in his earlier investigations (ending in mid-1960s) for the differences between the effects, particularly the subjectivity-effect, produced by different discourses; an examination based on the presumption that different subject-effects would be produced by different structured discourses (See 2003b). His investigations led him to find that ideology was distinct from other discourses (scientific, aesthetic) in that it was the only one that produced a subject-effect. Following this investigation, Althusser does not continue referring to ideology as ‘ideological discourse’, but just as ideology.

figure the subject in it: “the subject must appear in person among the signifiers of ideological discourse” (*ibid.*).

By way of this duplicative mirror-structure, the system of ideology can “*provide its own guarantees*” so “that it contains the subject it interpellates (and ‘produces’ as an effect) in its discourse” (*ibid.*). This provision of guarantees is how the ideas that make up an ideology interpellate individuals in such a way that they find themselves recognizing these ideas as true, and in the same moment, constitute themselves as free subjects. Without this guarantee, the structure of ideology would be overtly a force that compels rather than a system whose subjects “work by themselves” (1970/1984a, p. 55).

Althusser understood the guarantees provided in this mirror-connection to mean that the structure of ideology is “centered” (*ibid.*). The centering structure provides individuals that it interpellates signifiers of themselves in the Subject (of the ideology), “in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him [*sic*] [the Subject]” (1970/1984a, p. 54; emphasis in original), and that the Subject will recognize its subject(s) in it. Furthermore, the centering structure interpellates around the Subject (of the ideology) an infinity of individuals by way of this mirror-connection (1970/1984a).

In addition, the structured guarantees for the subject are also provided in the knowledge contained in an ideological system. Althusser claimed that all problems of knowledge posed in the ideological form are formulated on the basis of its answer, “i.e.,

not as a real problem but as the problem that had to be posed if the desired *ideological* solution was to be the solution to this problem” (1968/1970a, p. 52; emphasis in original). In this structure, “the formulation of a *problem* is merely the theoretical expression of the conditions which allow a *solution* already produced ... *to recognize itself* in an artificial problem manufactured to serve it both as a theoretical mirror and as a practical justification” (1968/1970a, p. 52; emphasis in original). This reflection is a “feigned” (2003c, p. 50) asking of questions so that an ideology provides for its subject(s) the answers that it seeks in order that the subject can say: ““That’s it, there it is, and it’s true”” (1988/2006d, p. 281). Despite that what ideology represents in its answers is “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1970/1984, p. 36), and “not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals” (1970/1984, p. 39).

In sum, Althusser argued that the mechanism with which ideological systems operate has a duplicative mirror-structure. This structure centers on an infinity of individuals, providing guarantees to the individuals it interpellates and transforms into subjects. In this regard, it is a form of projective-identification (Taiana, 2010, personal communication). This duplicative-mirror structure accounts for the mechanism’s paradoxical effect described above: an operation that in one motion *compels* an individual to find the idea as true for everybody and everything (absent of the subject), and

simultaneously, to consider the recognition to have been an act of *free* consciousness.

This structure is the same for all ideology.

Social function: In addition to theorizing a systematic structure and mechanism for a Marxist concept of ideology, Althusser also theorized the concept of ideology as featuring an essential social function that is practical, cohesive, and transhistorical.

Major to Althusser's theses concerning ideology is that it is through ideological form that ideas become active. In ideological form, ideas interpellate individuals, thus constituting them as subjects who act – more specifically, constituting individuals as subjects who practice correspondingly with a particular system of notions. This principle of action was emphasized by Althusser as a distinguishing feature of ideology (1963/1969c; 2006a). He wrote, “ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge)” (1963/1969c, p. 231).

In this regard, Althusser considered the concept of ideology to also provide a cohesive social function. By designating subjects into relation with one another and their conditions of existence, ideology “ensures the cohesion of the members of a society” (1988/2006d, p. 280). That is, ideological systems represent social relationships and provide the mechanism which interpellates and subjects individuals to act correspondingly with the represented relations (1988/2006d).

Furthermore, Althusser regarded the system of ideology's cohesive and practical social functions as essential to historical life. He stressed that "ideas, even if they are true and have been formally and materially proven can never be historically active in person, as pure theoretical ideas, but can become active only in and through *ideological forms* – *mass ideological forms*, it must be added, for that is fundamental – caught up in the class struggle and its development" (1994/2006b, p. 48; emphasis in original).

However, although ideology is the system through which ideas become historically active in person, the system of ideology in general has no history (1970/1984a; cf. 1988/2006d). Althusser argued that while ideology (in general) "has always existed and always will exist" (1988/2006d, p. 282), the ideas representing the imagined relation between men and their conditions of existence will necessarily change as the conditions and relations change. In this regard, he described ideology as a system that "bends to the interests of the times, but without any apparent movement, being content to *reflect* the historical changes which it is its mission to assimilate and master by some imperceptible modification of its peculiar internal relations" (1968/1970b, p. 142; emphasis in original). So, even though the system in general is itself a "non-historical reality" (1970/1984a, p. 35), the social function that ideology provides in designating subjects in relation to one another and their conditions of existence remains constant.¹³ It

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¹³ Althusser proposes that this non-historical reality "*is eternal*, exactly like the unconscious" as discovered by Freud and subsequently added to in understanding by Lacan (1970/1984a, p. 35; emphasis in original). An implication for SSW stemming

is in this regard that the system of ideology is necessary for a historical life. That is, ideology “is a structure essential to a historical life of societies” (1963/1969c, p. 232) and that “man is by nature an ideological being” (1988/2006d, p. 282).

An important implication from this is that as an essential structure, it is very real and therefore not false (1973/1976a). In this sense, Althusser re-examines a Marxist concept of ideology in a non-rationalist light. For Structural Social Work this suggests an analysis of ideological notions that could offer an alternative to the framework’s criticized practice of addressing false-consciousness.

Material Existence of Ideology: Althusser also opened up an investigation into the material existence of ideology. In this respect, he adds to Marxist theses that were not provided by Marx (1970/1984a; cf. 1994/2006b). His (1970/1984a) essay, “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISA) puts forward his initial attempt at this. His thesis of concern here is: “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material” (1970/1984a, p. 40).

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from Althusser’s work and his considerations of how psychoanalytic theory compliments historical materialism is that the techniques employed in psychoanalysis for de-centering the subject could be germane for engaging in transformative practice with individuals in a framework that is coherent with Marxism; a promising suggestion for the SSW framework which aspires to work with individuals and social issues. Another implication of Althusser’s connecting systems of ideology with the unconscious is that it upsets the consideration of ideology as an object of consciousness. He argued that ideology is a structured system and not an object produced by an individual’s conscious; and as a system, “it is profoundly *unconscious*” (1963/1969c, p. 233; emphasis in original).

Setting out from Marx's statements regarding the necessity of social formations to reproduce their conditions of production, Althusser considers in his ISA essay how the productive forces and the relations of production are reproduced. His investigation finds that:

The reproduction of the labour power thus reveals as its *sine qua non* not only the reproduction of its 'skills' but also the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology or of the 'practice' of that ideology, with the proviso that it is not enough to say 'not only but also', for it is clear that *it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power.* (1970/1984a, p. 7; emphasis in original)

Althusser saw the effective presence of ideology as suggesting it is "realized in institutions, in their rituals and practices, in the ISAs [ideological state apparatuses]" (1970/1984a, p. 57). He argued that ISAs "largely secure the reproduction specifically of the relations of production" (1970/1984a, p. 24).¹⁴

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¹⁴ Althusser stressed that ideology is important for representing the conditions of existence considered necessary for particular relations but it is not what ultimately produces the change in structured relations. The necessity found in ideological meaning exists because it is needed in order to reproduce the conditions of existence; which perhaps explains why Althusser could think the ideological necessity of reaffirming the existing conditions in order to reproduce the relations of production from the viewpoint of reproduction and not production alone. In his later work on aleatory materialism (2006a), he argues that the necessity of the ideological notions is dependent upon the already accomplished fact. The encounter which gives a chance for a structured conjuncture to take form and become an accomplished fact is however entirely aleatory and contingent (*ibid.*).

Althusser suggested that in a given society there are a “*plurality*” (1970/1984a, p. 18; emphasis in original) of ISAs that are unified “*beneath the ruling ideology*” (1970/1984a, p. 20; emphasis in original). He offered a list of examples of ISAs: educational, family, religious, legal, and others, whilst encouraging further investigation into other possible ISAs (1970/1984a, p. 17). Althusser argued that these ISAs are “multiple, distinct, ‘relatively autonomous’ and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms” (1970/1984a, p. 23).

Furthermore, Althusser underscored that it is not the ideas themselves that determine and are inherently compelling (1970/1984a; 1975/1976c; 1988/2006d; 1994/2006b; 2003c; 2003d). He argued “the influence of ideas makes itself felt only under ideological and political conditions that express a given balance of class forces: it is this balance of forces, and its political and ideological effects, which determine the efficacy of ‘ideas’ in the last instance” (1994/2006b, p. 47).¹⁵ This assertion is key for Marxist analyses of how ideologies are “a material force” (Moreau & Leonard citing

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¹⁵ Althusser defends the thesis that it is not ideas in ideological form that themselves determine, that “compel” (1988/2006d, p. 281). He argues that ideological notions which compel subjects to freely recognize as true are caught up in the function of ideology which “has to do with *what is misrecognized* in the form of the specular relation of recognition: that, in the last instance, the *complex structure of the social whole*, and its *class structure*” (2003d, p. 131). A discussion of the recognition-misrecognition structure and its importance for materialist analyses will be furthered in Section 3.3, “The Subject & Its Subjectivity.”

Marx, 1989, p. vi), such as that found in first and second cluster SSW writings (for example, Moreau, 1979; Moreau & Leonard, 1989; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007).

Summary: In summarizing this examination, Althusser put forward a materialist theory of ideology that substantially expanded on Marx's definition of ideology as a system of representations and an "object' of consciousness" (1994/2006b, p. 135). Referring to ideology in general, he theorized a duplicative mirror-structure of ideological systems, an interpellating mechanism by which it operates, and its social function that is essential, practical, transhistorical and cohesive. Althusser also added to Marxist theory by opening up an investigation into the material existence of ideology with his suggestion of ideological state apparatuses. This investigation suggested a relationship between ideology and practice, and asserted a plurality of ideologies autonomous from one another and from a society's infrastructure. His work broke with Marxist theory that previously conceived of ideology only in the singular, dominant sense; such as that found in Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1994/2006b). By looking at ideology from the perspective of reproduction, Althusser casts the concept within a philosophy of materialism; which, in opposition to an idealist rationalism purview argues that ideologies are active and produced, and therefore real and not causal. He also posed ideologies as systems that are needed to reproduce existing conditions and relations, and importantly, that the influence that ideological systems have for reproducing the conditions is determined in the last instance by the balance of class forces.

3.2 Multiple Dimensions: Concept of Overdetermination

Introduction: The second concept put forward by Althusser that I will examine is the concept of overdetermination. Althusser used the term to describe the reflection in the contradiction “of its conditions of existence within the complex whole” (Brewster, 1969, p. 253). This section will first briefly discuss Althusser’s critique of idealist readings of the Marxist dialectic, which he argued failed to adequately conceptualize the Marxist dialectic; and, because it pertains directly to the Structural Social Work literature’s understanding of the Marxist dialectic as well as the SSW failings to explain the complexity of the social work encounter (i.e., reductive, static). Then, I will present a limited examination of how Althusser recasted the contradiction as overdetermined. This examination will focus on how he put forward the overdetermination of the contradiction by theorizing the characteristic determinants and structures that specify the Marxist dialectic: the complex-structured social whole and the law of uneven development (1963/1969b).

Althusser’s critique of the idealist understanding of the Marxist dialectic:

Althusser critiqued the idealist understanding of the Marxist dialectic for its “radical reduction of the dialectic of history to the dialectic generating the successive *modes of production*” (1962/1969a, p. 108). Althusser argued that idealist readings of the Marxist dialectic, such as that found within socialist or mechanistic versions of Marxism, are dependent upon an inverted form of the Hegelian idealist dialectic; which instead of

“deriving the successive moments from the Idea” as in Hegel’s work, derive “from the Economy, by virtue of the same internal contradiction” (*ibid.*). This “*mirror image*” (1962/1969a, p. 107; emphasis in original) of the Hegelian idealist dialectic is understood in Marx’s works as arguing that “the material life of men explains their history; their consciousness, their ideologies are then merely phenomena of their material life” (*ibid.*). Althusser critiqued this reading of the Marxist dialectic for reducing all of history to a process driven by material conditions. The SSW framework has also resisted this reading of the Marxist dialectic, (finding it reductionist,) but has seemingly lacked the theory to advance the framework’s analyses beyond the critique.

To break with this idealist reading of the Marxist dialectic, Althusser argued that it is necessary to recast the dialectic within a materialist philosophy. He claimed that the distinction between a dialectic cast in a philosophy of materialism or idealism “must be manifest in its essence, that is, in its *characteristic determinations and structures*” (1962/1969a, p. 93; emphasis in original). Althusser redefined the dialectic and its contradiction with the concept of overdetermination (originating in Freudian psychoanalysis¹⁶), and which he used to theorize the structure and determinants of the dialectic that break from the idealism of the Hegelian dialectic (inverted or not). He used

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¹⁶ Althusser looks in psychoanalytical theory because “*the same theoretical problem is at stake in both cases: with what concept are we to think the determination of either an element or a structure by a structure?*” (1963/1969b, p. 188; emphasis in original). As well, how to think the determination when “*the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*” (1963/1969b, p. 189; emphasis in original)?

the concept of overdetermination to explain the contradiction as characterized with the complex-structured social whole and the law of uneven development.¹⁷

The complex-structured social whole: Althusser insisted on the complex-structured social whole as one of the determinants of the contradiction. This means the contradiction never exists in a simple or pure state because the complexity of the structured social whole is irreducible.

Althusser wrote that Marx shows “it is impossible to delve down to the birth or origin of the simple universal, ‘production’, since ‘when we talk of production we always mean production at a determinate stage in social development of the production of individuals living in *society*’, that is, in a structured social whole” (1963/1969b, p. 195; emphasis in original). Contrary to the notion that the complex is “merely the development and phenomenon of the simple” (1963/1969b, p. 194) – for example, idealist readings of Marx that understand the historical development of societies to be a process driven by the Economy – the complexity of the structured social whole is irreducible to an origin or simple principle as cause. Rather, the existence of the simple is an effect of the complex unity of the structured social whole. Complexity exists prior

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¹⁷ Even though Althusser would later rebuff the dialectic as a philosophy for Marxist practice, his work on reframing the contradiction by way of the psychoanalytical concept of overdetermination remains important. It remains so because in it stands an attempt by Althusser to theorize within a materialist philosophy the structuring of the conjuncture, and how to think a particular, singular encounter as opposed to the generalizable.

to simplicity. “Simplicity is merely the product of the complex process. This is simplicity’s sole claim to existence” (1963/1969b, p. 196).

Recall the previous discussion on ideology, which argued that a Subject as cause and with purpose is an effect of the recognition-misrecognition feature of the mirrored structure of ideology. In ideology it is ‘as if’ the ideological notions or system of ideology appears as true, and their efficacy is determined by their truth that compels a subject to freely recognize it as so. However, Althusser argued that it is not the idea itself that proves its efficacy, but the determining social relations.

Althusser theorized that the simple or origin (such as Idea, Man, or the economy as cause) is an effect which is immanent in the complex-structured whole; the complex-structured whole that is in part determining any particular conjuncture. He stated:

The simple only ever exists within a complex structure; the universal existence of a simple category is never original, it only appears as the end-result of a long historical process, as the product of a highly differentiated social structure; so, where reality is concerned, we are never dealing with the pure existence of simplicity, be it essence or category, but with the existence of ‘concretes’ of complex and structured beings and processes. (1963/1969b, p. 197).

The Subject, Idea, or the Economy then projected in ideology is an effect produced by the overdetermined “relation between men and their ‘world’, that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence” (1963/1969c, pp. 233-234).

Instead of the ideological myth of a philosophy of origins and its organic concepts, Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete 'object', a structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it. There is no longer any original essence ... any original simple unity... but instead, *the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity*. (1963/1969b, pp. 198-199; emphasis in original)

In addition, the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity entails that the contradictions are always specified by historical forms. For example, he found in Marx's and Engels' work "the basic notion *that the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised*" (1962/1969a, p. 106; emphasis in original). Hence, there is no universal contradiction which explains societies or histories. In considering Structural Social Work, it could follow that there is no universal principle or value to determine/explain ethical action in all societies, communities, families, or homes. The simple principle is an effect produced by the complex relations.

Especially relevant for Structural Social Work purposes, the complex-structured social whole as argued by Althusser is not a form of monism that casts the social whole as a totalizable entity. The multiple dimensions and complexity of issues that structural social workers strive to attend to in their work are theoretically given shape in Althusser's recasting of the dialectic. While Althusser argues that there are multiple contradictions within the structured complex social whole, making it not "univocal", he argues that

neither is it “equivocal” (1963/1969b, p. 209). To understand how the recasted dialectic provides for this claim, the law of uneven development needs to be discussed first.

Law of uneven development: Althusser argued that the law of uneven development is essential to the contradiction. It denies a materialist conceptualization of history or a present particular conjuncture as monist, totalizable, or a static fact. It is imperative to grasp, because without assuming this, the possibility of political practice in a particular and current situation can never be thought.

Fundamental to his assertion that the law of uneven development is essential to the contradiction is the claim that “*the complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance...this specific structure is the basis for the relations of domination between contradictions and between their aspects*” (1963/1969b, p. 202; emphasis in original). For analyzing a unity of structured social relations, it entails that the “complex whole cannot be envisaged without its contradictions, without their basically uneven relations” (1963/1969b, pp. 204-205). Furthermore, it “means that the structure of the whole and therefore the ‘difference’ of the essential contradictions ... is identical to the conditions of the existence of the complex whole” (1963/1969b, p. 205). To Althusser,

This reflection of the conditions of existence of the contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction, this is the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic, the one I have tried recently to encapsulate in the concept of

‘*overdetermination*’. (1963/1969b, p. 206; emphasis in original)

Considering what this means for a Marxist-based social work practice, it means that to act on the real conditions of a particular encounter or situation is to act on the existing conditions. For structural social workers, the problem presenting in a social work encounter is then defined not as the result of a simple, universal contradiction, but is defined by the existing conditions of the complex-structured-social whole and its uneven relationships. The challenge then becomes not to demonstrate how a simple, universal contradiction gives meaning to all structural social work encounters, but to develop skills for critically analyzing the existing conditions, (amongst other skills).

In addition, Althusser stressed that it is imperative “to understand how the concrete variations and mutations of a structured complexity” (1963/1969b, p. 210) shift from one encounter to another, governed by the law of unevenness. That is, as the existing conditions of an encounter change, the “concrete restructurations” of the conditions of existence reflect the “complex structure in dominance” (*ibid.*).

Althusser used the terms of principal and secondary contradictions to discuss the uneven restructurations (1963/1969b). The categories of the principal and secondary contradictions are used by Althusser to suggest that the differentiated, uneven as well as a plurality of contradictions constitute a complex-structured social whole.

In plain terms this position implies that the ‘secondary’ contradictions are not the pure phenomena of the ‘principal’ contradiction, that the principal is not the

essence and the secondaries so many of its phenomena, so much so that the principal contradiction might practically exist *without* the secondary contradictions, or without some of them, or might exist *before* or *after* them. On the contrary, it implies that the secondary contradictions are essential even to the existence of the principal contradiction, that they really constitute its condition of existence, just as the principal contradiction constitutes their condition of existence. (1963/1969b, p. 205; emphasis in original)

The terminology of principal and secondary contradictions does not depict a pre-determined hierarchy of contradictions (a depiction that SSW authors have similarly claimed was necessary but arguably lacked a theoretical concept to give shape to the multiple and uneven dimensions determining the social work encounter). Neither is the terminology to suggest that the secondary contradiction is irrelevant. The secondary is essential to the primary.

The categories 'primary' and 'secondary' are also used by Althusser to conceptualize how contradictions change, but the structure in dominance remains. To explain the shifting changes between the principal and secondary contradictions, Althusser used two terms associated with the Freudian concept of overdetermination: condensation (fusion) and displacement (1963/1969b; 1964/1984b). These terms are used to classify the phenomena of the changed relations between contradictions. Althusser suggested that "if the structure in dominance remains constant" the "exchanges of roles between contradictions and their aspects" be called "displacement" (1963/1969b, p. 211). He also suggested that the "principal contradiction produced by *displacement*

only becomes ‘decisive’, explosive, by *condensation*” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original).

Based on this structuring of the contradictions he goes on to suggest that moments in a process can be discerned by distinguishing three distinct phases (non-antagonism, antagonism, explosion) of the contradictions structured in dominance. Furthermore, distinguishing what phase the contradictions are in at a particular conjuncture is “crucial” for political practice (1963/1969b, p. 216).

Conclusion: In closing, overdetermination denotes a contradiction that is “complexly-structurally-unevenly-determined” (1963/1969b, p. 209). Althusser reformulated the contradiction via a borrowing of the concept and terms from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. With the borrowed concept of overdetermination as well as the terms of displacement and condensation, Althusser put forward a materialist dialectic that emphasized the irreducibility of a social whole’s complexity and its law of unevenness. With this recasting, Althusser accounted for not “one model of unity” or a monist conceptualization of history and social whole, but offered a conceptualization of the structured complex unity of a social whole that opens up a theoretical possibility for analyzing a particular conjuncture, including a current encounter. His work does so because it disallows for the contradiction to be determined by, for instance, a principle, mode of production, or subject. In doing so, this transformed dialectic is argued by Althusser in (1962/1969a), (1963/1969b), (1964/1984b), and (1975/1976c) as what provides for thinking “determination in the last instance” and “the relative autonomy of

the superstructures and their specific effectivity” (1962/1969a, p. 111). This transformed dialectic also offers Structural Social Work a theoretical means with which to think the contradictions acknowledged in social work practice in a non-reductionist analysis.

3.3 The Subject & Its Subjectivity: Structured Effect Determined by Social Relations

Introduction: The third and final concept of Althusser used to inform this research is the concept of the subject and its subjectivity. Keeping with a focus on how Althusser’s work can address the problematic uses of the subject found within the Structural Social Work literature (i.e., the conflation of the concept ‘subject’ with ‘individual’), this section presents some of Althusser’s reasoning as to why in a philosophy of materialism the concept of the subject is not to be confused with the concept of the individual. As well as why the subject, whether as the individual, or any form of essence, principle, or idea, cannot be posed as determining or causal, from a materialist philosophical perspective. This second point is relevant for negating the possibility of forming a dialectic relationship to describe transformative practice, such as found in the Structural Social Work framework with the Individual as Subject and determinant to society, structured social relations and material conditions. Lastly, this section will present how Althusser recasts the concept of the subject within a philosophy of materialism.

Althusser’s Critique that the Idealist Conceptualization of the Individual as Subject is Inconsistent with Marx’s Historical Materialism: Within bourgeois idealist

philosophies (e.g., idealism, humanism, economism, historicism, mechanistic materialism, philosophy of the Enlightenment) Althusser argued that the concept of the subject and its subjectivity is inconsistent with the meaning and functioning of the concept within a materialist philosophy, which is central to Marx's work. Additionally, the concept of the subject within bourgeois idealist philosophies is not a theoretical concept but an ideological determination (see for instance, 1970/1984a; 1973/1976a). He argued that bourgeois idealist philosophies "borrowed the legal category of 'subject in law' to make an ideological notion: man is by nature a subject" (1970/1984a, p. 44). The notion 'man is by nature a subject' Althusser argued is inconsistent with materialist philosophy and Marx's work because it poses the subject-form as ahistorical, as an a priori entity. In other words, it poses the subject-forms of men and women as pre-given and constituted by the individual, with men and women thus conceived as individual agents.

Althusser defended, in contrast, that a historical materialist conceptualization of our social and historical life occurs because human beings act in socially and historically determined practices and relationships; and, not because men and women naturally and autonomously constitute the subject-form. That is, humans "work in and through the determinations of the *forms of historical existence* of the social relations of production and reproduction" (1973/1976a, p. 95; emphasis in original). Human beings are social individuals who are "*active in history*" but, importantly, as "*agents* of the different social

practices of the historical process of production and reproduction” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original). Thus, in historical materialism, “as *agents*, human individuals are not ‘free’ and ‘constitutive’ subjects in the [idealist] philosophical sense of these terms” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original). Instead, human beings “can only be agents *if they are subjects*” (*ibid.*; emphasis in original). Hence:

No human, i.e. social individual can be the agent of a practice if he does not have the *form of a subject*. The “subject-form” is actually the form of historical existence of every individual, of every agent of social practices: because the social relations of production and reproduction necessarily comprise, as an *integral part*, what Lenin calls “(juridico-)ideological social relations”, which, in order to function, impose the subject-form on each agent-individual. The agent-individuals thus always act in the subject-form, as subjects. (*ibid.*; emphasis in original; cf. 1970/1984a)

Consequently, “*individuals are always-already subjects*” (1970/1984a, p. 50; emphasis in original). All practice is done in the subject-form. The subject-form exists prior to being taken up by an individual. Althusser provided the example originally offered by Freud to illustrate this.

It is certain in advance that it [the unborn child] will bear its Father’s Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived. (1970/1984a, p. 50)

Individuals are always subjects in subject positions that are there before taking them up, which makes the idea of ‘individual agency’ outside of subjection theoretically incoherent with a materialist perspective.

Therefore, based on Althusser's reading of Marx, a materialist questioning of human beings and their agency requires an examination of subject-forms. Examination of subject forms takes us not to a focus on the individual, but to the social relations. In view of the Structural Social Work objective to analyze and mitigate the structural and social nature of problems experienced by individuals, this suggests that the concept of the subject and its subjectivity is highly relevant.

Althusser's Critique that the Idealist Subject as Cause is inconsistent with Marx's Historical Materialism: Althusser also argued that a materialist philosophy most fitting with Marx's theory of historical materialism does not employ the meaning to the subject as a cause, origin, centre or essence that characterizes philosophies of idealism. For Marxist practice and a corresponding philosophy of materialism, Althusser rejects the Subject as cause. He wrote:

To be dialectical-materialist, Marxist philosophy must break with the idealist category of the 'Subject' as Origin, Essence and Cause, *responsible* in its internality for all the determinations of the external "Object", or which it is said to be the internal 'Subject'. For Marxist philosophy there can be no Subject as an Absolute Centre, as a Radical Origin, as a Unique Cause. (1973/1976a, p. 136)

He critiqued philosophies of idealism for maintaining the idea that the subject is 'responsible in its internality for all the determinations of the external object', and with this, for failing to acknowledge the essential transformation that occurs between the subject and the object when submitted to the process of producing knowledge of the object based on the subject (or vice versa). According to Althusser, Marx conceived of

production to occur in the generation of knowledge (1963/1969b). With this, production of knowledge always begins with an abstract concept as a raw material and transforms it into an object of knowledge. There is no essential sameness between the end product and the original product. The transformation is due not to the essence of the raw material being worked upon (abstract concept, Generality I), but to theory being applied which has limits and specifics in how it works on the raw material. However, in idealist philosophy, there is no production or transformation. There are no external determinations for producing the object of knowledge; the determinations are totalizable from the standpoint of the subject. The lack of external determinations allow for the question of the subject's essence to be sought in the object.

From the standpoint of the genesis of knowledge of the subject, the relation runs from object to subject, from the phenomenon to its essence. It is in the object that one can come to know the subject. It is in the object that one must come to know the subject. What one finds in the object, one will find again in the subject; but one can decipher the essence of the subject only in its object. (2003d, p. 122)

Since, it supposes that there is no change in essence, the essence of the subject can be found in the subject's objectified form. This allows for the subject to be posed as the cause. For instance, the problem of the "ensemble of social relations" cannot be reached by way of the concept of Man posed as the subject (1963/1969c, p. 243).

Alternatively, Althusser read a dominant materialist tendency in Marx's work that the process of social change, of history, cannot be thought with a Subject as cause. He wrote:

Since Marx, we have known that the human subject, the economic, political or philosophical ego is not the 'centre' of history – and even, in opposition to the Philosophers of the Enlightenment and to Hegel, that history has no 'centre' but possesses a structure which has no necessary 'centre' except in ideological misrecognition. (1964/1984b, pp.170-1)

Hence, Althusser argued that “*there are no subjects except by and for their subjection*” (1970/1984a, p. 56). “The person who is addressing you is, like all the rest of us, merely a particular structural effect of this conjuncture, an effect that, like each and every one of us, has a proper name” (2003b, n. 2). As an effect, it is clearly cast by Althusser as not causal. Obviously defined this way is in contrast to the subject categorized within bourgeois philosophy that considers it an origin, cause, or essence. But while it is in contrast to the subject of bourgeois philosophy, which is to say the traditionally defined subject as the individual, he adds to the definition by theorizing how the ambiguity of the traditional definition is accounted for.

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the*

commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection' all by himself'. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. (1970/1984a, p. 56; emphasis in original)

Ingeniously, Althusser thinks what structure and mechanism would produce such ambiguity.

Althusser's Theorizing of the Subject & its Subjectivity as a 'Structural Effect':

Althusser recasted the concept of the subject as an effect produced by a structured conjuncture. He theorized how it is produced as well as how it functions.

First, the subject is an effect produced within the system of ideology. The subject effect is the form of being produced within ideological systems that corresponds human practices with social ideas and structured relationships (1970/1984a). The subject-effect is produced within the system of ideology because it "is bound with the *truth-guarantee* in the centred, double-mirror structure" (2003c, pp. 37-8; emphasis in original). The category of the subject is necessary for individuals to be hailed and interpellated into practices whose ideological discourse signifies itself as designated for that individual (though it is not limited to just one individual; it projects around it the infinity of individuals) (1970/1984a).

Althusser argued that as an effect of a structured conjuncture, the concept of the subject and its subjectivity is consistent with Marx's historical materialism for the materialist understanding of the subject. In this sense, the subject in Marxist theory is not

a free and individually-constitutive agent (as understood in philosophies of idealism). He argued instead that the notion of the individual as a free-subject is an effect necessary “in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (1970/1984a, p. 56). Contrastingly, “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection” (1970/1984a, p. 56). The imposed subject form on each agent is determined not by the individual, but by the social relations that need it in order to reproduce (1973/1976a, p. 95). Agency is thus inextricably tied to the subjected position in an ideology.

Furthermore, the real author then is “the given *circumstances* in which ‘men’ act as subjects under the determination of social *relations*”, which “are the product of the *class struggle*. History therefore does not have a Subject, in the philosophical sense of the term, but a *motor*: that very class struggle” (1975/1976c, p. 139; emphasis in original).¹⁸ Taking Marx as example, Althusser remarked that it was Marx as agent of the critique, not author, that he was “compelled” by his position in the proletariat movement to produce the critique (1994/2006b, p. 35). “Marx wrote on behalf of this

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¹⁸ In his phase of putting forward a dialectic-materialist philosophy for Marxism, he spoke of the class struggle as the motor, as evidenced above, with the subject produced by a particular structural conjuncture that is overdetermined. Soon thereafter the publication of, *Is it Simple to be a Marxist?* (1975/1976c), he refers to ideology as the motor of the ISAs (1994/2006b). This change brings the class struggle more into play, something that he insisted on. In his later works, he suggests metaphorically thinking of the class struggle as the force, the energy that the machine of the state, motored by ideology, operates (1994/2006b). This discounts the question of how can man or men change social relations.

‘author’, infinitely greater than he was – on its behalf but, first of all, by its agency and at its urging” (1994/2006b, p. 18).

Second, the subject has the structure of what Althusser, drawing on psychodynamic theory,¹⁹ referred to as recognition-misrecognition (2003c). In short, the subject is projected in the system of ideology as an origin (or source, cause, essence). This projection is produced by a process of complex, antagonistic social relations. The subject-effect is thus structured so that the simple origin which it projects and is recognized by its subjects is misrecognition of the process of conflicting relations and their overdetermined unity.

Furthermore, Althusser alleged that the misrecognition is not accidental, but “*made for that purpose*” (1994/2006b, p. 110; emphasis in original). Speaking specifically of the dominant ideology, Althusser stated:

The ideology which the state professes is also made for that purpose – an ideology which, in a thousand guises, denies the existence of class struggle and the class functioning of the state, in order to stammer, out of the convinced mouths of its agents (or the political parties that have vested interests here, or are complicit in this illusion), the litany of the virtues of ‘public service’, of the public-service state .... What we have here is a prodigious operation of annulment, amnesia and political repression. (1994/2006b, p. 110; emphasis in original)

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¹⁹ See Jacques Lacan’s text “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” in the collection, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (2006).

Put this way, the subject that is recognized is a case of misrecognition of the antagonistic social relations whose historical struggle has been elided. This suggests that the Subject, whether Man, mode of production, or Ideal, is from a historical materialist perspective important for opening up an investigation into the existing conditions and social relations whose historical struggles constitute its existence. In this regard the concept of the subject as put forward by Althusser is a relevant and important concept for the Structural Social Framework to consider because of its production in political and structured relations.

Additionally, it is in line with this thesis of the misrecognition of a centre that Althusser pursued Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and claimed that historical materialism was related to psychoanalysis. Althusser believed:

Freud has discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence has not the form of an ego... that the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself. ...this *structure of misrecognition*, which is of particular concern for all investigations into ideology. (1964/1984b, pp. 170-1; emphasis in original)

This points to a possibility for the incorporation of therapeutic practices applicable in the worker-client setting that if informed by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis could potentially be congruent with the Marxist theoretical base informing the framework.

Summary: In summary, Althusser critiqued humanistic idealist readings of Marx that identify the subject as causal and consequently, construe the individual to be a natural subject, constituting their agency freely and independently. He argued that such notions are ideologically determined and not theoretically supported or consistent with the materialist philosophy crucial to Marx's works. Althusser defended the idea that individuals are always-already subjects, and that an individual's agency is non-existent outside of subjection. Althusser's recasting defines the subject and its subjectivity as an effect in the system of ideology produced by a particular structural conjuncture that is determined by antagonistic social relations, which in the last instance is the antagonism between classes, i.e., the class struggle. He argued the subject has the structure recognition-misrecognition; the recognition of the subject is misrecognition of the process of social relations conflicting which have produced the subject-effect.

RENEWING SSW WITH MARXIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Chapter 4

Renewing Structural Social Work with Marxist Poststructuralism: The Task Ahead

This chapter explores how the work of Althusser can renew the SSW framework as understood in Canada. By applying the arguments and recasting the concepts found in the preceding chapter's examination of Althusser's Marxist poststructuralist concepts, the following will explore ways to amend aspects of the theoretical limitations of the framework examined in Chapter 2.

The intention is to present ideas which suggest ways the Marxist base of the SSW framework could be strengthened, revised and in some cases opened up. This chapter will suggest ways that some of Althusser's Marxist poststructuralist ideas have potential for assisting SSW scholars and practitioners with responding to the theoretical and social challenges currently shaping the social welfare and social work fields. Further investigation into these suggestions, examination of various other scholarly materials, and practical attempts at translating these ideas into action are but a few important ways still needed to advance the struggles at the heart of the SSW framework and social work practice.

This chapter focuses on three ways which the work of Althusser can contribute to a renewal of the SSW framework as understood in Canada:

- 1) by drawing on the work of Althusser to return the SSW framework to a Marxist understanding of ideology, and helping address the framework's theoretical challenges with ideological analyses;
- 2) by using Althusser's concept of overdetermination as an explanation of the complexity of the SSW encounter;
- 3) by considering Althusser's use of the subject and its subjectivity to advance the SSW framework's engagement with this concept.

4.1 A Return to a Marxist Understanding of Ideology

Althusser's work suggests some possibilities for addressing the SSW challenges by applying materialist ideological analyses with subject-individuals, as well as helping deal with criticisms of the framework's consciousness-raising practices. His reformulated concept of ideology can be used to revise the humanistic turn the SSW literature has pursued in its uses of the concept of ideology. Althusser's work can be used to return the SSW framework to a Marxist understanding of ideology.

To begin, Althusser asserts that knowledge in ideological form is not produced by an individual's rational agency, but is a social product (1988/2006d). His reading of Marx does not entertain the "question of an idea [belonging to a system of ideology] produced by an individual imagination" (1988/2006d, p. 281). According to Althusser, ideological notions are not authored by an individual, because ideological systems of

ideas refer to a system of social relations, to a projected form of “socially established notions” (*ibid.*). This means that the meaning ascribed in an ideological notion has been socially produced, exclusively.

As such, his work does not allow for humanistic definitions of ideology, such as that put forward by Carniol, to whom ideology is an individual’s worldview (1984). It similarly rules out Mullaly’s reference to ideology as a personal belief system or paradigm (1997; 2007). It also excludes Lundy’s (2004) use of the concept which allows for ideology to be conceived of as a set of personal beliefs and attitudes. These definitions make concessions for an individual to be an autonomous producer of their beliefs, values, and worldviews. This is a non-Marxist view rooted in the epistemology of the Enlightenment. Althusser argued Marx’s work displaced this epistemology, opening instead a new epistemology within a philosophy of materialism (see for instance, Althusser, 1969/1965). Thus, in this first respect, Althusser’s work differs from the SSW consideration of ideological systems as determined, even if only in part, by individuals, because he refutes Marxist consideration of ideology as authored or produced by an individual’s imagination.

This revision is important for SSW because it is the materialist reading of Marx’s concept of ideology that allows structural social workers to use ideological analyses in practice and move from defining problems presenting in a client’s life to identifying the social relations producing these problems. By amending the SSW humanistic

interpretations and uses of ideology with a materialist reading of ideology, structural social workers can pursue the framework's founding goal of turning problems found in an individual's life, into the problem of society. Structural social workers are led by the framework then to define problems as social, and directing their practices at processes of social change. Interestingly, the humanistic direction that SSW took the concept of ideology is the direction that Althusser countered: he argued that the humanistic approach is antithetical to the materialist approach opened up by Marx (see for instance 1963/1969c; 2003a).

To further the gains from this revision of the humanistic turn in the SSW use of the concept of ideology, the framework's application of ideological analyses to the concept of the individual needs to be addressed. Doing so can contribute to addressing the SSW challenges with applying materialist analyses of ideology at the level of the individual. It does this by setting aside the Enlightenment concept of the individual and using the concept of the subject.

From the theoretical viewpoint of Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism, the first and second cluster's questioning of how to apply ideological analyses to individuals is incoherent and destined to be unproductive (see for instance, Carniol, 1984; Lundy, 2004; Moreau, 1979; Mullaly, 1993; 1997; 2007). It is incoherent and unproductive because such questioning fails to take into account that the system of ideology does not in theory act on the concept of the individual, but on the concept of the subject. Althusser writes,

“the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” (1970/1984a, p.49). In other words, when an individual is interpellated or hailed by an ideology, it is in subject form. Therefore, if an individual is not subject to an ideology, then that ideology is not said to be operating; hence, providing no reason to ask how it is acting.

The consequence of this for SSW analytical purposes is that to submit an individual to a Marxist theoretical analysis of how it relates to an ideology provides an analysis which is only theoretically coherent and productive when using the concept of the subject. This is because in Marxist *theory*, which is the domain which Marxist ideological *analysis* operates within, systems of ideology do no work on individuals but on subjects. To apply ideological analyses beyond this limit, such as the SSW literature has done when considering individuals as a determinant and bearer of ideology, is to step outside a theoretically supported Marxist analysis. It inevitably and incongruently mixes the Enlightenment concept of the individual with the Marxist; the latter being a counter to the former.

In addition, if as Althusser argues that “individuals are always-already subjects” (1970/1984a, p. 50), the question of how to apply or use ideological analyses with individuals-as-subjects is of importance. Thus, unlike Lundy (2004) who raises the concern that focusing on our subjectivities will not further transformative practice, the work of Althusser suggests the opposite. Furthermore, Lundy’s call for further work

concerning the relationship between theory, ideology and social work practice will be challenged without incorporating the concept of the subject and its subjectivity. This point will be added to in Section 4.3, “Moving Away from the Polarity between the ‘Individual & Society’ Towards Understanding the Subject.”

Althusser’s work also provides a conceptualization of ideology that could substantially address the criticized aspects of the framework’s practice of consciousness-raising. Recall that the first and second cluster literature has been criticized by third cluster writers as well as non-SSW scholars for putting forward practices that reinforced negative power dynamics between social workers and clients (for example, Fook, 2002; Weinberg, 2008). These dynamics often lead to power struggles over who is more correct or justified, and does not necessarily lead to changes in the client’s perceptions (Tester, 2003). Althusser’s work suggests conceptualizing the system of ideology in a non-rationalist framework.

In his essay, “Elements of Self-Criticism” (1974/1976b), Althusser argued that rational interpretations of ideology as false are detrimental for Marxist theory and practice. Althusser argued that ideology, although distorted because it “expresses a will” (1963/1969c, p. 234), is not “erroneous ... an error” (1974/1976b, p. 113). A particular ideology may be politically contestable, but the existence of a particular ideology is real, or “in the words of Marx is ‘a material force’” (cited in Moreau & Leonard, 1989, p. vi).

Ignoring this reality or discrediting it as false does not serve the critical analyses of Marxist theory which aims to act on reality in order to change it (1974/1976b).

In this regard, Althusser's work can be used to address the critique of consciousness-raising as understood as addressing false ideas (i.e., false-consciousness) held by a client (or a social worker). By focusing on how ideological notions are real, the analysis and dialogue between the worker and client is encouraged to shift from framing ideas as incorrect – an effort unlikely to be successful because of the system of ideology's structure which provides guarantees to its subjects that it is true (2003c) – to focusing the analysis on the force that compels the ideological notions to be recognized as true. This can be used to return the idea of consciousness-raising practices to a materialist analysis of ideology that characterized the SSW framework's initial uses of the concept. It also suggests a link with the third cluster and broader critical social work emphasis on how power is exercised within the worker-client encounter. Furthermore, the structural social worker and clients' analyses can be directed to examining what are the structured conditions which have produced a particular meaning, and why this meaning is presenting at the particular encounter. These are questions which resonate with the SSW framework's core objectives of applying structural analyses in the social work encounter.

To summarize, Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism suggests ways in which Marxist ideological analyses within the SSW framework can be renewed to meet the

criticism that the framework's practice of addressing false-consciousness (i.e., consciousness-raising) reinforces unequal power dynamics. Moreover, it advances the framework's objective to analyze how individual clients and social workers alike are effected by ideological systems. These revisions suggest that ideology as a concept and analytical tool remains usable for responding to critiques in the SSW literature, despite its minimal presence in the third cluster literature. Althusser's work offers a return to a Marxist understanding of ideology that contributes to furthering the framework's objectives of structural and materialist analyses; objectives that are definitive of the framework's original, core intent. These revisions are made by modifying the humanistic approach in SSW uses of the concept of ideology, and thus refuting consideration of ideology as determined by an individual's rational agency.

4.2 Using the Concept of Overdetermination to Explain the Complexity of the SSW Encounter

Althusser's approach to the Marxist concept of contradiction via the psychoanalytic concept of overdetermination can be applied to improve the SSW framework's capacity for explaining the complexity of the social work encounter. This can be used within the SSW literature to tackle criticisms that the framework as understood in Canada is reductive as well as non-responsive to changing relations of power (see for instance, Baines, 2007; Jeffrey, 2007; Moreau & Leonard, 1989, Todd & Burns, 2007; Weinberg, 2008). As well, the concept of overdetermination can be used to

respond to a concern raised by the third cluster and non-SSW scholars that the framework's structural analyses fail to account for individual and local nuances (see Jeffrey, 2007; Todd & Burns, 2007). In both these areas, the concept of overdetermination can be used to address criticisms leveled at the SSW framework, as well as strengthen the framework's use of materialist and structural analyses for meeting the theoretical and political challenges encountered in the social work field today.

One of the key reasons that Althusser's use of the concept of overdetermination can benefit the SSW framework is because the concept does not lend itself to analyses that reduce complex encounters to a singular and totalizable whole. The contradiction(s) is reformulated in Althusser's work to demonstrate how a singular contradiction is not responsible for producing the encounter (1962/1969a). Instead, the dominant contradiction in the encounter is determined by a complex-social-whole, which has multiple dimensions, with each dimension structured, autonomous, and anachronistic (Althusser, 1962/1969a; 1963/1969b; see also 2006a). This complexity is irreducible.

Furthermore, the simple meaning found in the contradiction which dominates an encounter is an effect (Althusser, 1963/1969b, p. 197). The production of this effect is a result of the historical process of the relations amongst these dimensions in conflict (Althusser, 1962/1969a; 1963/1969b). This means that analyses of the contradiction as overdetermined directs analysis of an encounter not to the simple meaning dominating a

conjuncture, but to the complex-structured social whole that produced the simple as an effect.

Formulated this way, the concept of overdetermination offers a means to conceptualize the dominant-subordinate relationships between the multiple dimensions of a social whole existing in a given situation without reducing all of the existing dimensions active in the given situation to mere phenomena of the dominant contradiction. This can be used to redress the SSW idealist reading of Marx's work as monist, reducing everything to an analysis of the economic structure, which several first cluster authors acknowledged and aimed to resolve; such as, Leonard (1975), Findlay (1977), and Moreau & Leonard (1989). Conversely, it casts the SSW analysis so that it attends to multiple dimensions, such as class, gender, or ethnicity. In this respect, the concept of overdetermination suggests that the framework's Marxist base can be reframed in order to meet criticisms that the framework's reliance on Marxist (and structural analyses in general) tends to homogenize or essentialize the meaning of the problem(s) encountered (see for instance, Mullaly, 2007).

The concept of overdetermination also helps meet criticisms that the SSW framework's modernist structural analyses are non-responsive to the diverse and dynamic relationships between the multiple dimensions shaping the encounter (Baines, 2007; Todd & Burns, 2008). The concept of overdetermination shifts this reading of the social work encounter by its presentation of the uneven encounter between multiple dimensions

as contingent. This means that there is no pre-determined relationship among the multiple dimensions in the encounter's structured conjuncture. In terms closer to the SSW literature, there is no pre-determined hierarchy of oppressive dynamics (see Moreau, 1990). Instead of a contradiction that is universal, the relationships between the dimensions shift from one encounter to the next, and are reflected in the unity of the complex-structured-social whole (1963/1969b).

The last point was somewhat picked up in the first cluster writings of Moreau (1990) and Moreau & Leonard (1989). In these texts, SSW is presented as a framework that supposedly does not pre-determine the relationship between multiple dimensions. However, Moreau & Leonard's (1989) research found that the first cluster presentation of the SSW framework was understood by its practitioners as pre-determining a set of macro-level dimensions as dominant, primary contradictions, and a set of micro-level dimensions as secondary. This is inconsistent with Althusser's use of the contradiction as overdetermined, to which no pre-determined hierarchy of structured dimensions is attributed (1963/1969b).

In addition, the SSW framework's characterization of the multiple dimensions determining an encounter as "alongside each other" (Moreau & Leonard, 1989, p. vi) is counter-productive to the Marxist analyses that the framework is rooted in. While these descriptions are consistent with recognizing a multiplicity of dimensions, they lose sight (based on Althusser's reading of Marx) of one of the characteristics specific to a Marxist

contradictions of relationships, which is the law of unevenness. In the intention to be inclusive and “holistic” (Moreau, 1990, p. 63) the SSW framework invokes analyses which are inconsistent with its Marxist base and conflict-view of society, by treating all dimensions as having equal weight in all encounters. The concept of overdetermination can account for the complexity of multiple dimensions without treating the relationship between these dimensions as “equivocal” (Althusser, 1963/1969b, p. 209). Thus, the overdetermined contradiction offers a conceptual tool for analyzing the dominant-subordinate relations acknowledged by Moreau as an “identical ethos” found amongst all structured relations (Moreau, 1990, p. 64). It supports analyses concerned with unequal distributions of power, and improves the SSW description of the dialectic as merely relational (see for instance Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007; Weinberg, 2008).

Lastly, the concept of overdetermination can be used within the SSW framework to challenge criticisms, such as that raised by Todd & Burns (2007), that the framework’s structural analyses are inadequate. They wrote “SSW may not adequately acknowledge that people’s lives are always more complex than the structures that shape them” that their lives “may exceed or disrupt the structural relations that shape their lives”; and, that a structural analysis is insufficient “in which local power relations are as central as those at the structural level” (2007, p. 25). This suggests that Todd & Burns encourage greater consideration of non-structured dimensions because they understand structural analyses to be pre-determined and reductive. However, based on a recasting of the structured

encounter via the concept of overdetermination, their call to expand the SSW framework's analytical capabilities beyond structural analyses may be unnecessary.

To summarize, the concept of overdetermination offers an analytical tool to explain the complexity of the SSW encounter that is not reductive or unresponsive to changing dynamics. Rather than leading to monist Marxist analyses, it directs analysis to the complex social whole. Nor does it lend itself to analyzing one situation in the same way as another. In this regard it could assist structural social workers by enabling them to not apply generalized, pre-determined hierarchies of dimensions (such as that found in certain first cluster misapplications of the concept) to encounters. It gives a sense of how changes between dominating structures can occur, and supports analyses concerned with identifying oppressive relations and conditions. Also, it could potentially be used to explain the complexities without reverting to an emphasis on non-structural issues that reappears in third cluster writings as well as can be found in the current critical social work (see Gray & Webb, 2009). These efforts are highly relevant for meeting current political and theoretical challenges in the social work field.

4.3 Moving Away from the Polarity 'Individual & Society' Towards Understanding the Subject & its Subjectivity

Althusser's recasting of the concept of the subject and its subjectivity can be used to move the SSW framework away from the non-Marxist polarity of individual-society. His work supports critiques raised in this thesis:

- (1) The dialectic is incorrectly posed as a relationship between structured relations and the individual; to be theoretically coherent with Marxism the individual needs to be replaced with the subject.
- (2) The schemas classifying ideologies in the first and second clusters do not support theoretical analyses of the subject, and reinforce a polarity between individual and society.
- (3) The importance for rethinking the political importance of the concept of the subject and its subjectivity in SSW analysis and practice.

First, Althusser's work supports the critique raised in Chapter 2 that the SSW framing of the dialectic as between individual agency and structures is a case of epistemological confusion. Althusser's work showed that agency is dependent upon subjection, which makes the category subject-agent not individual-agent (see 1970/1984a). His work puts forward a concept of the subject which makes it theoretically incoherent to think of complex social relations via the concept of the individual (see 1973/1976a). Analysis via the individual ends up with human essence, or as a subject of historical process (*ibid.*). Althusser argued that both of these routes are incongruent with a materialist understanding of the subject (*ibid.*). As well, he argued in his later work (see for example, 2006a) that a materialist and idealistic understanding are not in tandem, but in opposition and part of an ongoing break in philosophy with one dominating the other at various conjunctures. Regarding Marx's work, Althusser argued

that it is the materialist tendency that is dominant and thus, the materialist understanding of the subject is most relevant for a Marxist-based practice and the consideration of the subject as individual is unfitting (*ibid.*). Clarifying this looseness of tongues is important because the individual is a totalized concept and does not lend to thinking the various subject-positions that are part of a complexly-structurally-unevenly-determined historical life.

The above not only suggests that the dialectical relationship would be better framed as between subjects and structures (thus abandoning the individual-society posing of the dialectic) but it also suggests the question of how human beings change the world with imagining different arrangements is theoretically inconsistent with Marxist materialist analyses (for an example of this questioning in the SSW literature, see Mullaly 2007). Thus, unlike the emphasis by Lundy (2004) that the dialectic between consciousness and material existence is key to radical social work still today, an examination of Althusser's work suggests that the tension is more usefully considered as between subject-agents and ideological structures. As Althusser argued, while it is not the individual or individuals organized in collective action that creates structured relations, neither is it useful to consider individual's consciousness as acting in a historical form on material existence (see 1973/1976a). Since the concept of the individual means an independent, autonomous actor who is not a product of historical social forms, it is incompatible with Marxist analysis. On the other hand, the concept of

the subject allows structural social workers to think the agent-form as produced by social and historical determinants. It is as subjects that individuals act in structured relations.

Second, Althusser's work does not fit with the schema for classifying theories and ideologies found in the first and second cluster Structural Social Work sources (Carniol, 1984; cf. Lundy, 2004). These schemas are incompatible with Althusser's Marxist poststructuralist ideas because they remain at the ambiguous definition of the subject as both subject-agent and object (a definition which was demonstrated in the work of Moreau & Althusser [1970/1984a], Leonard [1989], Mullaly [2007]). As well, the schemas pose the dialectic as between individual and society. That is, SSW "bridges" both the humanistic and structuralist approaches (Lundy, 2004; see also Mullaly, 2007). Hence, from Althusser's Marxist poststructural perspective, these schemas are inconsistent with a Marxist concept of the subject. As well, these schemas do not support thinking how a subject is produced, nor how its subjectivity is an effect of this production. These are important investigations for a materialist analysis of the individual as subject.

An alternative schema for representing the encounter between an individual and structured determinants which produces a subject and its subjectivity has been suggested by Taiana (2010, personal communication).

This diagram represents the subject as a category produced in the encounter between structures and an individual's biological endowment. Notice that the individual, (or terms of individual consciousness, or individual agency) is not posed in relation with the structural determinants. Also, this suggested schema does not encourage conceptualizing the subject as either objective/structured or subjective/personal, or as indefinable with an ambiguous meaning floating somewhere in between the two poles; a

possibility which was allowed by the silence in the SSW literature regarding how the subject is produced (Carniol, 1984; Lundy, 2004; Mullaly, 2007). Instead, in this diagram the subject is not causal to the encounter, but is produced in the encounter and its subjectivity is an effect. This is compatible with how Althusser puts forward the concept of the subject.

It is relevant and important for the SSW literature to support structural social workers with conceptualizing the subject and its subjectivity in this form, rather than as totalizable, independent, apolitical and ahistorical as with the concept of the individual. This is because it supports analyzing the structured and social nature of problems (and how they are experienced by individuals) through an examination of their subjectivity as an effect of the subject form that is produced by their encounter with structured determinants. It is important for maintaining the framework's roots in Marxist practice that the subject is conceptualized in this materialist, structured form.

Third, Althusser's work defends thinking of the subject and its subjectivity as political and not individualistic. In this regard, his work is not novel to the social work literature, but adds to the arguments for incorporating analyses of the subject found in the third cluster writings as well as the broader social work literature. His work stands to revise third cluster writings that although they emphasize the incorporation of poststructural concepts, such as the subject, their potential for furthering the SSW framework's original objectives of providing structural analyses and opposing humanistic

approaches within the social welfare fields are undermined by their continued use of the concept of the individual (amongst other criticisms, some of which were discussed in this study.)

To summarize, Althusser's recasting of the concept of the subject and its subjectivity is relevant for renewing the SSW framework because it supports thinking of how an individual's actions can be considered with respect to structured determinants. In doing so, it also supports thinking the political and social dimensions of a person's experiences. To do so though, the subject and its subjectivity cannot be confused with the concept of the individual. Having this mistake present within the literature negates the possibilities of applying a Marxist analysis of how human beings are engaged in social relations and in historically determined forms. Addressing this theoretical concern is important for the Structural Social Work framework and its objective to analyze the structured and social conditions of problems encountered within social work practice.

Chapter 5

Summary & Conclusion

At the outset of this study I characterized the Structural Social Work literature as in a quagmire; a crisis in the theoretical coherency and robustness of the framework. I claimed from the outset that, as understood in Canada, the SSW framework for analysis in the social work and social welfare fields was weakened by theoretical inconsistencies, gaps and confusion. I argued that a number of theoretical weak points undermined efforts by its practitioners to apply the framework in practice as well as further develop its theoretical base in response to the political and theoretical challenges of today. Specifically, I argued the SSW literature demonstrated:

- *inconsistencies with applying a Marxist concept of ideology for social work analytical purposes;*
- *lack of a theoretical concept to help explain the complexity of issues encountered in social work practice;*
- *epistemological confusion between the concepts of the individual and the subject.*

To counteract these issues, I examined a selection of Althusser's work, exploring ways Althusser's recasting of the concepts of *ideology, overdetermination, and the*

subject and its subjectivity could be used to resolve the SSW framework's problems. I presented ways Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism could contribute to renewing the theoretical robustness of the SSW framework. A summary of these ways is offered in the next section.

5.1 Summary

The following encapsulates this study's arguments for strengthening aspects of the SSW framework with a few Marxist poststructural concepts put forward by Althusser. First, I argued that the SSW literature's challenges in applying Marxist ideological analyses with individuals would continue to be problematic due to the framework's use of the concept of the individual as a determinant of ideology, with individual agency for creating the ideals, thoughts, and beliefs necessary for directing social action. Using Althusser's work, I demonstrated that Marxist theory did not support humanist analyses of ideology as either determined by or acting with respect to the concept of the individual. I also used Althusser's work to demonstrate how ideological analysis could be applied with respect to an individual's experiences or problems by using a Marxist concept of the subject. This revision can meet a longstanding challenge for the SSW framework: to apply its Marxist-based analyses in practice with individual clients. Also, it can renew the importance of ideological analyses for SSW practice in light of how Althusser's formulation of ideology meets the prevalent poststructural critiques raised by third cluster scholars as well as scholars outside of the SSW framework in asking how an

ideology is produced. This reaffirms the materialist analyses that are cornerstones of the SSW framework.

However, the above critique does not suggest that the question of how individuals act in society and enact social change is irrelevant or impossible. It simply argues that the possibility of framing the question in a theoretically coherent and productive manner is seriously challenged due to the theoretical inconsistencies within the question. Resolving this theoretical confusion would strengthen the SSW framework. As well, hopefully it can point to directions for future theoretical developments to be achieved with the vital question of how human beings enact social change.

In addition, I argued that the rationalist framing of ideology and the critiques of its associated practices of addressing false-consciousness could be avoided. Althusser's work suggested thinking of ideology as a real system, despite it being distorted and imaginary. In doing so, his work avoids the binary division of true-false and thereby meets the postmodernist critique prevalent in the social work literature since the mid-1990s that the framework's modernist structural analyses operate on false dichotomies (see for instance, Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 1997; 2007).

Althusser's reading of the Marxist concept of ideology can then be used to redirect SSW analysis to the underlying social relations determining the meanings represented in systems of ideology. The structural social worker can direct their analysis to the social relations producing a particular ideology, as well as the power dynamics

involved in this production. This leads analysis not back to an individual's rational agency as determinant, but to the social relations producing an ideology. These are prime objectives of the SSW framework. These revisions suggest that the framework's application of ideological analyses remain important for social work practice today, contrary to its minimal appearance in the third cluster literature.

Second, I argued that the SSW literature's well-recognized challenges with examining the complexity and issues of multiple dimensions encountered in social work practice could benefit from the concept of overdetermination as put forward by Althusser. The concept of overdetermination poses the problem of the encounter as complex and structured in dominance. It gives shape to SSW analyses which find relations of dominance and subordination constant, but changing in their specific form. The concept of overdetermination supports analyses of specific and varied encounters.

This examination also suggests that calls by third cluster authors (Todd & Burns, 2007; Weinberg, 2008) (and other non-SSW scholars, such as Baines [2007] and Jeffrey [2007]) for explanations outside of the framework's structural analyses for explaining the complexity of the social work encounter, may be unnecessary. That is, the concept of overdetermination seems to offer an analytical tool to conceptualize the complexity, and diversity of social work encounters while keeping a structural analysis of the encounter. However, if this call is to return to a more humanistic approach within social work

practice, then this study's findings are not of use, other than to critique that endeavour as not fitting with the framework's Marxist base.

Third, I argued that the SSW literature conflated the concept of the individual with the subject, and in doing so loses useful Marxist analyses of the subject as well as incorrectly poses the dialectic between individuals and society. Althusser's work demonstrated that the subject cannot be confused with the individual because in Marxist theory only subjects have agency. An implication of this for SSW purposes is that investigation into the subject is relevant, not apolitical and individualistic as the second cluster writings suggest. Also, Althusser's work was used to demonstrate that subjects do not determine society or structured relations but instead are a product. Due to these findings, it is questionable how the SSW framework could advance beyond its present tension with understanding the dialectic between individuals and society unless it resolves this theoretical confusion.

It also perhaps could be said that the SSW framework's posing of the knowledge generated by the SSW framework as being determined by both the individual and structured social relations is an ideological determination and not theoretically supported. This is similar to Althusser's critique that the bourgeois legal ideological notion of the subject found in philosophy of the Enlightenment is not a theoretical concept but an ideological determination (see for instance, 1970/1984a, or 1973/1976a).

Finally, I drew on the work of Taiana and suggested that her diagram offers an alternative with which to think how the subject and its subjectivity-effect are produced. As well, it directs analysis towards analyzing the singular conjuncture in which a subject and its subjectivity is produced. This is supported by Althusser's work which suggests that analyzing the singular conjuncture is imperative for materialist analyses and Marxist practice.

5.2 *Limitations*

There are a number of limitations to this study's examination as well as the conclusions that this study can reach. One of the more significant limitations is tied to this study's scope of the literature examined. This study focused explicitly on literature that was identified by its authors as developing or applying the Structural Social Work framework in Canada. This study excluded writings that are not identified by their authors as applying the SSW framework, but that may likewise apply a Marxist-based analysis and have encountered similar theoretical and political problems facing the SSW framework. Thus, this analysis is ignorant of developments that may have already occurred in the social work field in response to the problems tackled here, potentially making this study's findings in certain respects ill-informed if not redundant. However, this study's focus on the SSW literature attempted to directly address the problems as they present specifically in the SSW literature; an examination which, when taken in its entirety, is not duplicated in the literature. This study has been pursued in the hope that

such a targeted analysis can help advance the relevancy and importance of the SSW framework in the social work academic and practice domains.

Another limitation is that my examination of the work of Althusser does not engage in the controversies surrounding his work, such as to what extent is Althusser's reading of Marx valid. Neither do I assess any contradictions that may be found in the work of Althusser. In defense, this examination is not an assessment of how well Althusser read Marx. Rather it is an examination of how Althusser's reading of Marx and his recasting of certain Marxist theses and concepts can be applied to meet political and theoretical challenges of the post-war crisis that resonate with those found in the SSW literature in Canada.

Finally, my focus on the theoretical coherency of how a few concepts are understood and applied within the SSW framework does not examine how the revisions can enhance structural social work practice. My suggestions for how the ideas of Althusser can benefit the SSW framework are strictly in theory. Putting these ideas into practice, and critically examining their usefulness for the challenges defining the social welfare and social work fields today, is needed.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, an examination of the Structural Social Work literature based on the work of Althusser has demonstrated specific ways in which the theoretical robustness

of the framework can be strengthened. It has also suggested how the theoretical base of the SSW framework can be developed with Althusser's Marxist poststructuralism in order to further the framework's potential for meeting theoretical and political challenges currently shaping the social welfare and social work fields. These revisions contribute to renewing the SSW as a relevant framework for analysis as well as improving its theoretical foundation.

This study's examination also suggests some encouraging avenues for furthering the Structural Social Work's engagement with other theoretical struggles. Possibly the most important theoretical struggle encountered within this research, yet not addressed, is the SSW challenge to theorize the social work encounter and pursue goals of social justice. In other words, how to support structural social workers with moving from descriptions or assessments of the situations encountered in their practice, to asserting ideals of social justice or goals for social change. This struggle has been present in the SSW literature since its inception, and has possibly become even more heightened in the contemporary second and third cluster literature with the incorporation of postmodern critiques. The writings in political philosophy of late-Althusser (late-1970s onwards) – in which he pursued developing an aleatory materialism for Marxist theory and built on his earlier attempts to theorize the singular conjuncture – possibly point to developments within materialist philosophy and theories that develop further the tension between describing an encounter and intervening, as well as the tension between social change and

order.²⁰ These tensions are relevant to the Structural Social Work literature. This suggests that further research with these questions by philosophers and theorists who have picked up these questions are relevant to the development of the Structural Social Work framework. It points to potentially new ways of responding to these struggles that have yet to be incorporated into the SSW literature.

In addition, examination of Althusser's work suggests that historical materialism could be applicable in practice with individual clients through contributions of psychoanalytical theory that shares questions of how the subject is socially produced. This is relevant for addressing SSW's concerns with mitigating individual clients' experiences of oppressive structures, as well as supporting clients with responding to, and engaging in historical changes in their lives. Further investigation is needed into how other scholars, social work and beyond, may have taken up these questions and answered them.

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²⁰ The writings of the political philosopher, Slavoj Žižek (1949 -) appear promising for informing an investigation around the question of how to move from Marxist-based analyses of the social welfare and social work fields to intervening politically in light of the challenges shaping the contemporary social welfare and social work fields. His work covers several theoretical and philosophical areas of interest that are relevant for developing the SSW framework, amongst other approaches: a re-examination of the concept of ideology that challenges post-modernist critiques, an analysis of the global capitalist system's process of change and where openings for intervention lie, an application of universals and ideals for radical political practice today, and a unique approach to a materialist understanding of the subject and its subjectivity (London School of Economics and Political Science, n.d.; Parker, 2007; Sharpe, 2005).

This study's early discussion of the differences between the three clusters with regards to what knowledge is deemed necessary for social workers can also be taken a step further. By applying the work of Althusser to these observed differences, the ideologies overdetermining the texts comprising these clusters can be made more visible. Recall this study's discussion of the three clusters, and that in addition to the changing socio-political-economic landscape and theoretical influences, the varying disciplines of the authors presented in what they identified as the object of knowledge necessary for developing the SSW framework. By drawing on Althusser, these observations can be accounted for as a structural effect. That is, the objects of knowledge and the theoretical-political problems featuring in the three clusters are "no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' which he [*sic*] exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and *its* objects and *its* problems" (Althusser, 1968/1970a, p. 25; emphasis in original). Recognizing the structural conditions reflected in the displacement of objects of knowledge within the SSW literature is important for applying materialist analyses of how the framework has been produced, its conditions of existence, and for identifying what effects structural social workers could displace into the social work and social welfare fields.

Lastly, this examination of the Structural Social Work framework as understood in Canada raises questions about the tension between materialist and humanist

approaches in the social welfare and social work fields. Undoubtedly Althusser's work has brought the materialist-humanist tension to the fore. While Althusser's work does not resolve this tension, nor is it here intended to, his work does encourage questions, such as: What can be understood of the position that the SSW framework takes up amidst this tension? How can the shift of the SSW framework towards a humanistic approach adequately address the global changes currently occurring in the world, and that have a direct impact on social work practice? Why at a time when the restructurations of the market economy have for example, increased the divisions between rich and poor, would a humanistic approach present so definitively in the Structural Social Work literature? Last, at least for this list of questions, how to put forward analyses and objectives for social work practice today that can be an effective force for addressing these social, economic and political challenges?

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