

Separate Yet Within: Student Experiences of Structural Social Work in a Neoliberal Era

By: Elizabeth Whyte, BAH, Queen's University

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Affairs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work

School of Social Work

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

October, 2012

© Copyright

2012, Elizabeth Whyte



Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-93646-7

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-93646-7

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs
acceptance of the thesis

**Separate Yet Within: Student Experiences of Structural Social Work in a
Neoliberal Era**

Submitted by Elizabeth Whyte, BAH, Queen's University
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Social Work

Sarah Todd,
Thesis Supervisor

Adje van de Sande
(Acting) Director, School of Social Work

Carleton University
2012

Abstract:

The purpose of this research project was to explore the experiences of a small group of Bachelor of Social Work students with the structural social work approach. Their experiences demonstrated the existence of multiple and often contradictory discourses in their understanding of social work. This research discovered these discourses through conducting interviews and an interpretation informed by qualitative research methods. The students demonstrated a strong commitment to the practice of structural social work. Yet, the inclusion of structural social work occurred in a social context dominated by neoliberalism. The students recognized the power of neoliberalism. They felt pressure to have their education prepare them for engaging with this social context. The students had a strong understanding of the oppositional nature of structural social work to neoliberalism. As a result many of these students developed strategies to navigate the tension between structural social work and neoliberalism.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Sarah Todd for her unceasing patience. She continued to assist me to gain greater depth of understanding despite the often long process this entailed. She has challenged me in the most fruitful ways and I will always be grateful for the rigorous education she provided me in this process.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their enduring ability to listen to me work through these ideas. Both of my parents have been supportive and encouraging in this project. I would like to thank my mother for patiently helping me with style and content. I also need to thank my friend Tara Fisher for allowing this project to take far too much space in our friendship. Many of these ideas emerged from lengthy conversations we had about our own struggles to become structural social workers. It was in those conversations that the seed of this research emerged and where it continued to grow for years. Her constant support is appreciated. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Todd Richardson. His patience and support during the good and bad days of this project helped a great deal. For all this support I am deeply grateful.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Appendices.....	vi
I Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Literature Review	5
1.2 Theoretical Framework.....	22
II Chapter Two: Methodology.....	31
III Chapter Three:Multiple Discourses	42
3.1 Findings.....	42
3.2 Discussion	66
IV Chapter Four: Strategies	69
4.1 Findings.....	69
4.2 Discussion	82
V Chapter Five: Conclusion - Trespasses.....	87
VI Postscript.....	95
Appendices.....	99
Appendix A	99
Appendix B	101
Appendix C	103
References.....	104

List of Appendices

Appendix A : Research Instrument.....	178
Appendix B : Ethics Approval.....	182
Appendix C: Closure of Ethics File.....	183

Chapter 1

Introduction:

Since the development of the structural approach to social work in the 1970's, Carleton University's School of Social Work based its curriculum on this approach to social work. The structural approach is rooted in social democracy and the potential for social transformation (Moreau, 1989). The curriculum emerging from this approach contrasts with the neoliberal society in which educators and students in the program live (Lundy, 2004). Neoliberal values such as, individualism, privatization, the freeing of markets, deregulation, and the general withdrawal of the state from the public sphere permeate our society (Harvey, 2005). As a result, there is a tension between the lived reality of students and the curriculum of the School of Social Work at Carleton University. In this research project, I work to unpack this tension. Through this research I hope to foster a better understanding of how a small group of students experience structural social work pedagogy within a neoliberal context. I chose this research area because of my interest in understanding how students navigate moments of ideological contradiction during their education as social workers. How do students react to these moments and what strategies do they employ to work through them? To gain this understanding I interviewed nine BSW students at the School of Social Work at Carleton University.

I used a qualitative research methodology that ensured I explored lived experiences of participants within the context of multiple discourses and ideologies. I made sense of these experiences within the broader theoretical framework of critical social work. I adhere to a postmodern form of critical social work that continues to hold a firm commitment to values

of social justice, but does so in a way that sheds light on its particular meanings to students (Healy, 2001). Specifically, the field of governmentality theory was used in dialogue with critical social work so that I could make sense of the purposeful nature of the discourses expressed by this small group of students. Both critical social work and governmentality approaches highlight voices that can often be marginalized. In my literature review I studied several publications from the perspective of instructors with regards to engaging with transformative social work approaches. I encountered very few studies from the perspectives of the students. This project explores a gap in the research, the gap where the voices of the students should be. This project does so on two levels. I directly engaged a small group of BSW students to share their experiences learning structural social work. I also interpreted those experiences from my perspective as a MSW student also studying structural social work.

The qualitative methodology, critical social work and governmentality theoretical frameworks assisted me in investigating whether, and if so how, structural social work holds significant meaning for this small group of students. What I particularly explored in this project is the impact the dominance of neoliberalism has had on their engagement with structural social work.

As a result of my own experiences of learning structural social work, I decided to explore how these nine BSW students' navigate the tension between structural social work and neoliberalism. The inspiration for this project came to me as I was struggling to understand what informed the diversity of reactions to structural social work. Many of my colleagues (including myself) agreed that our current social context was flawed. We would

often disagree about the role of structural social work played in transforming this context. I, at the time, thought I had found a roadmap in structural social work for how I was going to practice. I was particularly keen to have my practice reflect my desire for an improved social context for both my clients and myself. Being a socialist, a feminist, and an aspiring pacifist, structural social work was a natural fit with my previously established perspectives on the world. I often struggled to understand why many of my colleagues with similar goals - of helping people and making the world a better place - did not take a similar position of adopting structural social work.

Interestingly, what I sought to discover was challenged by the very process of discovery. In other words, I sought to find out why we were not all becoming good structural social workers, and in the process of this research project found myself troubled by that very desire. I found myself questioning what it meant to be a good social worker and why I was striving for such a position. Going into this project I had a simplistic view of the potential for harm in social work practice. At this point, both due to my experience with this research, and many experiences in attempting to apply structural social work in my own practice, I find myself in a much more tentative position with regards to the project's original impetus. The process has shifted the project. As a first time researcher, I must admit that this has been challenging. I have struggled with the discovery of such uncertainty and with its impact on my research. Yet, the struggle has been infinitely more fruitful than anticipated in the first throws of my doubts. The struggles shared by the students in this project challenged and inspired me to face my own.

Despite the shifting of my original desire for this research, it continues to hold meaning, though in a different way than I anticipated. It continues to shed light on the experiences of learning structural social work, and continues to be a project focused on the experiences of students. Not being a well established academic has its limitations, particularly in my struggle to produce my first piece of academic research, but I would also argue it has its advantages. I found that my position of proximity to these students' experiences brought in a perspective often paralleling their struggles.

Compared to my initial inspiration, to make it easier for us to fit into structural social work, I end this project with the recognition that these nine students are coming at this from a different perspective. The students in my study look more for how structural social work can be made to fit them and their context. This is an interesting challenge to my original perspective. I am interested in how we can take this view into account when engaging the approach as a pedagogical tool. In the end, my main goal in this project is to have these students experiences heard, and to explore what they could mean for structural social work in our current social context.

Literature Review:

My research was informed by three bodies of literature: those focusing on structural social work, critical social work, and critical interrogations of neoliberalism. The literature available on structural social work illustrated the pedagogical context in which social work students at Carleton University are immersed. The articles and books exploring critical social work provided a broad theoretical base for understanding this particular approach to social work pedagogy. Within this body of literature I drew upon themes of engagement with postmodern theories, themes around addressing our current social context, and themes regarding how one become a 'good' social worker (for example: Fook, 1999; Rossiter, 2001; Healey, 2001; Leonard, 2001, etc.). Finally, I engaged literature critically analyzing neoliberalism that helped me understand the role of neoliberalism as one of the dominant ideologies operating in contemporary Canadian culture. My exploration of the role of neoliberalism focused on themes of what it is, how it came to be dominant, and the impacts it has in key areas for my research, such as university education and social work practice. The literature reviewed in all three bodies of literature provided the conceptual foundation for this research.

The body of literature that forms the foundation of structural social work includes many publications from faculty members involved with Carleton University. A key example of this is the foundational publication of Maurice Moreau's *Empowerment through a Structural Approach to Social Work*. Published in 1989 this paper lays out the approach of structural social work. Moreau outlines the theoretical roots of the structural approach as stemming from a Marxist analysis that is deeply influenced by feminism. Significant in his

theoretical framework is the concept of ideology as a "material force" (Moreau, 1989, p. 1). What Moreau is outlining when he refers to ideology as a "material force" is the real impact ideology has on the context of social work. In other words, social workers work in environments influenced by the dominant ideology of Canada. Moreau explains the roots of structural social work as emerging from a critique of casework and other social work practices that he understood as reinforcing the dominant ideology rather than establishing a more socially just system. Therefore, structural social work was established as an oppositional force to the dominant ideology at that historical moment (Moreau, 1989).

Structural social work in its current form emerged in the late 1970's, particularly at Carleton University's School of Social Work. The major elements of structural social work include a belief that individual and social problems are caused by a differential access to power and its consequent oppression. It contends that there is no hierarchy of oppression, that the personal is political, and that social workers cannot create social change alone but need to ally themselves with social movements (Moreau, 1989, p. 23-24). Moreau argues for an approach to social work that works to transform society into a more just and equitable system (Moreau, 1989). Moreau's development of a structural approach to social work provides the foundational principles of Carleton's social work pedagogy. As a student within the school of social work, I became increasingly interested in what this challenge meant for me and other students in the School of Social Work at Carleton University. Central to the practice laid out by Moreau is the development of an oppositional ideology of social work. For my study I investigated how a small group of upper year BSW students navigate this oppositional pedagogy within a neoliberal social context.

Since Maurice Moreau there have been several scholars who worked to keep structural social work relevant. For example, Bob Mullaly's recent re-working of structural social work, *The New Structural Social Work*, a third edition based on his previous work *Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory, and Practice* argues that structural social work is still necessary. His third edition (2007) contributes an exhaustive overview of the history, ideological foundations, theory, and practice of structural social work. Mullaly makes the case that our current social context is still in need of transformation. Therefore, an oppositional approach to social work, such as structural social work, is still relevant. One of Mullaly's central arguments is that our welfare system in Canada is not based on objective and scientific development. He posits that our welfare system is a social construction, based on ideological grounds. Mullaly points to the dominant liberal ideology in Canada as the informing force in the development of our welfare system. In contradiction to the dominant liberal ideology in Canada, Mullaly demonstrates the close fit between social work values and beliefs with the social democratic ideology. Mullaly outlines structural social work as containing:

socialist ideology; its radical social work heritage; its critical social theory base; its social change perspective; its dialectical analysis; its inclusion of all forms of oppression; and its conceptual framework that incorporates and integrates these components into a transformative and emancipatory form of social work practice (Mullaly, 2007, p. 135).

Mullaly's contribution to the body of structural social work literature is relevant to my research as it explicitly outlines the contradiction between the ideology of dominant Canadian society, which he identifies as liberal and that of structural social work, which adheres to a social democratic ideology. Also, Mullaly makes an important point that though structural social work emerged from a modernist moral theory, its current form must reflect

“the contributions of postmodernism, post-structuralism, feminism and anti-racism”(Mullaly, 2007, p. 42). This element of Mullaly’s argument for a new structural social work reflects the theoretical framework of my own research. His noting of the opposition of structural social work to the dominant ideology in Canada also reflects my investigation into the experiences of students in navigating that tension (Mullaly, 2007).

Colleen Lundy also takes up the argument that structural social work continues to hold relevance today. She believes that it should continue to play a role in social work practice, but unlike Mullaly she does not believe that an engagement with postmodern theories will assist in this effort. Colleen Lundy (2004) published *Social Work and Social Justice: A Structural Approach to Practice*. This work is a key example of the current perspectives of structural social work provided to students at Carleton University's BSW program. Lundy points to the dominant ideology in Canada as neoliberal. Such literature is important for understanding the broader ideological context in which students who participate in this study are situated. Lundy reinforces the oppositional ideology of structural social work. She locates the ideological position of structural social work as “situated within the transformation quadrants, a structural approach, as developed here, bridges both radical structuralism and radical humanism” (Lundy, 2004, p. 56). For this project I am interested in exploring how this group of students’ values and beliefs are informed by dominant discourses such as neoliberalism or their pedagogical experiences with structural social work. It is the experience of this contradiction that drives my research.

Lundy also provides an assessment of the possibilities for postmodernism with regards to social work that differs from Mullaly's view. She recognizes that postmodernism

has both proponents and critics within social work. For example, she illustrates the notable inclusion of postmodern analyses in the realm of critical social work literature. Yet, alternatively, Lundy outlines hers and others' critiques of the incorporation of postmodernism in social work. She draws upon Joan Laird's position, which points to the issue of subjectivity and social context within postmodernism. In her view Laird identifies how too intent focus on the equality of subjective knowledge could hide the role sociopolitical contexts have in shaping that respective knowledge (Lundy, 2004, p. 41). Finally, Lundy offers her own position. She believes postmodernism is weakening the emancipatory potential of structural social work. Lundy points to the need for structural understandings of lived experiences that move beyond individual subjectivity to achieve social transformation. Postmodernism, for Lundy, weakens the structural analysis of modern society and thereby reduces social work's capacity to achieve a better world (Lundy, 2004). The criticism of incorporating postmodernism into structural social work is an important addition to the body of literature around both structural and other social work approaches. I appreciated having this alternative perspective when engaging a variety of theories in this work. It has not been my intention to incorporate a postmodern element of analysis in this work to undermine the original intentions of structural social work. Rather I hoped it could help illuminate the lived experiences of those exploring such intentions. Despite the important contribution to structural social work literature Lundy's concerns have provided, I chose to align myself closer to those in critical social work who engage postmodern theories. I made this decision as a result of my own experience with structural social work. I have struggled with privileging structural social work perspectives over the diverse experiences and views of students. A critical social work that is informed by a postmodern analysis

assisted me in challenging this instinct and brought to light the variety of students' experiences with structural social work.

Each of the above theorists' contributions to the literature on structural social work is important as they demonstrate examples of its foundational literature and the current publications that work to ensure its continued relevance in our current social context. Their contributions assisted me in understanding the tradition of structural social work and its current use at Carleton University. The literature explored in this study around structural social work brought to light the issues around the continuing oppositional nature of structural social work in our current social context as well as the issue around how to deal with the challenges presented by recent theoretical developments, in particular those identified as postmodern. Critical social work addresses both these themes, but does so from a broader theoretical perspective than structural social work. Critical social work adds a perspective that seriously engages with the challenge presented by postmodernism. This is invaluable to my project as I think it is crucial to take into account such a significant set of ideas that could be playing a role in how the students and myself conceive of social work knowledge. By including literature from the critical social work tradition I hope to further explore these themes and address one other important theme for my research. Along with engaging in the themes of practicing transformative social work in our current social context and engaging in postmodern theoretical developments, this review of literature will critically assess the issue of trying to find the 'right' way to practice social work.

The theme of the potential role of postmodern theories in critical social work is well developed in its' body of literature. Karen Healey argues that the challenge presented by

postmodern theories can also be seen as an opportunity. She sees the potential integration of postmodern theories into critical social work as an opportunity to revitalize the approach. In particular she argues that postmodern theories could assist in addressing the shifts in our current social context (Healy, 2001). Peter Leonard agrees with Karen Healey that critical social work could benefit from a renewal, especially one infused with postmodern critiques of concepts such as reason, truth, history, and the future (Leonard, 2001). He posits that these critiques could ensure the critical social work approach stays relevant in the constantly shifting social context of practice. For example, he argues we must recognize that history is not written objectively, but is instead a political project in itself. Ideologies such as neoliberalism establish themselves as 'common sense' through a culturally produced understanding of our history (Leonard, 2001). Leonard argues that these discourses around our history are the ground on which our futures unfold. He contends that in this context social work pedagogy and practice can unwittingly reproduce dominant discourses. Fundamentally he highlights the theoretical tool of uncertainty as a crucial site for ensuring critical social work does not reproduce problematic modernist notions (Leonard, 2001). Jan Fook provides additional arguments for the incorporation of postmodernism, rather than its rejection. By incorporating postmodern analyses into her theories, Fook offers a critical social work that is "concerned with practicing in ways which further a society without domination, exploitation and oppression" (Fook, 2002, p. 18). She argues that postmodernism adds to critical social work a practice that focuses both on the oppressive structures in society, while also holding a focus on how people experience and reinforce those structures in our everyday life. By including an understanding of how people construct

and are constructed by oppression Fook hopes to create a social work practice that takes into account the diversity of experiences within a single structure (Fook, 2002).

All three of the above authors contribute a perspective emphasizing the potential value of engaging with postmodern theories for approaches such as critical social work. They argue that it supports the transformative nature of oppositional social work approaches by working against reproducing dominant discourses and understanding the multilayered nature of their construction. Theorists such as Fook argue that if we want to transform the structures of oppression we need to recognize their operation at both macro and micro levels. These theorists posit that postmodern theories will assist in this challenge rather than undermine its social justice tenets. I found these themes to emerge both within the students' struggles with structural social work as well as my own efforts to engage in an original piece of research. My own work ended up being primarily influenced by this view of the potential for including postmodern theories alongside the traditions of critical social work.

Another interesting theme that builds upon the potential for incorporating postmodern theories in critical social work is its engagement with the shifting nature of our social context. Along with structural social work theorists, many critical social work theorists identify our social context as one dominated by neoliberalism. In this sense there is a significant overlap between structural social work and critical social work, as they both agree that the neoliberal dominance in our society demands the continuation of emancipatory approaches to social work. What is distinct in the insights provided by critical social work theorists is the emphasis on lived experience as an important site for theoretical engagement, especially for theories working against neoliberalism. Fook critiques previous forms of

critical social work as overly emphasizing the macro levels of analysis of oppressive forces such as neoliberalism. This critique inspired me to explore this theme with the students in this study for their impression on whether structural social work emphasizes the macro over the micro nature of practice (Fook, 2002).

Fook also critiques how forms of critical social work are often applied in today's social context. She argues that many approaches to critical social work are applied with the assumption that people and society remain the same as when the theory first developed. Related to this critique is Fook's concern that critical social work theory rests on a limited understanding of power and identity in today's society. She argues that critical social work does not appear to be incorporating the multiple locations clients and workers operate within. Many of Fook's contributions to critical social work focus on her concern over the disparity between the ideals expressed of empowerment and social transformation and how people's lived experiences are treated.

Finally, within critical social work theorists address a crucial theme for this research project - the desire to find the 'right' way to practice social work. Karen Healy challenges the concept of seeking the 'true' expression of social work, and argues that we should let go of this desire. By letting go, Healy believes that more space will open for a fruitful dialogue with other social service providers. She hopes that this dialogue will also reinvigorate critical social work and ensure that the diverse range of contexts social workers experience are taken into account (Healy, 2001). Peter Leonard disrupts this idea of finding a 'true' or 'right' way to practice social work when he argues that social workers' should constantly engage in a dialectic between different aspects of their practice. For example, he posits that the dialectic

between critical social workers' belief in interdependence and collective resistance must be held alongside a belief in the value of difference. What this critique underlines is that there is no static 'right' way to do social work, as it is a process rather than an end (Leonard, 2001). Amy Rossiter engages in this debate around how to do social work 'right' or whether it is valuable to strive for this position by proposing that this desire is a search for innocence in social work practice. This interesting perspective is presented by Rossiter (2001) in her article "Innocence Lost and Suspicion Found: Do We Educate for or Against Social Work?". In this article Rossiter explores critical social work's hope for a pedagogy and practice that avoid harm. Rossiter proposes that there is no knowledge that "doesn't exclude at the same time that it includes" (Rossiter, 2001, p. 2). She goes on to argue that there is no form of innocent social work, and therefore no form of innocent social work pedagogy. In response to this position Rossiter proposes:

Perhaps our freedom in social work consists in the struggle to notice trespass in order to evaluate its consequences, think about minimizing risks, or reconsider our participation in the act – rather than believing that there is a knowledge that is innocent of trespass (Rossiter, 2001, p. 3).

Rossiter recognizes the challenge of creating a pedagogy based on this understanding of social work. She wonders how students interact with their desires to be a professional when confronted with pedagogies that argue professionalism can narrow their capacity to build a less harmful practice (Rossiter, 2001). This contribution to critical social work impacted how I explored students beginning to build their professional identities as social workers. Rossiter's analysis of critical social work pedagogy was central in my investigation of how students navigate differing discourses around professionalism, knowledge, and credentials in their search to conceptualize an ethical social work practice.

Both structural social work and critical social work identify the current social context as one dominated by neoliberalism. After reviewing literature in both of these areas I found it necessary to further explore literature on neoliberalism to investigate the themes of what is neoliberalism, how did it come to be a dominant force in our society, and what is its current role and impact on two areas relevant to my research -university education and social work practice. There is a significant amount of literature in the field of neoliberalism. I chose to focus on articles and books that directly addressed the above stated themes.

David Harvey (2005) provides a comprehensive definition of neoliberalism that I found helpful during this project. Harvey explains neoliberalism to be:

In the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p.2).

The result of implementing this theory of political and economic practices is increased deregulation and the privatization of industries and services, leading to an overall retreat of the state from social life. He explains how neoliberalism emerged as a dominant ideology beginning in the 1970's. What is important to note is that these political and economic practices do not act in and of themselves, but are instead enacted by powerful players within our society. Corporations, the media, universities, and other civil society groups took on the work of disseminating and normalizing the ideology of neoliberalism within our communities (Harvey, 2005). A key tool for such dissemination has been the creation of right wing think tanks. Harvey argues that right wing think tanks have been useful in the cooptation of elements of academic society, the dissemination of ideas into the media, and

engaging in lobbying governments to enact policies influenced by neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). The project to disseminate neoliberalism succeeded to the point where neoliberal discourses have posited themselves as the guarantors of freedom in our society. In reality, behind the culturally acceptable and traditionally rooted mask of freedom, neoliberalism achieved a process of restoring class power for an elite group within society (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism set in motion the restoration of greater inequality between marginalized social groups and the elite who benefit from such a social and economic program. Their success in achieving this goal has important consequences for my research. It reinforces the argument that neoliberalism is now the dominant discourse at play in our society. David Harvey states that to best understand the material grounding of how neoliberalism emerged, we must move beyond the infinitely diverse cultural and ideological manifestations and instead look into the everyday experiences of such a process (Harvey, 2005). His work highlights the need for a study that examines how one small group of students are experiencing neoliberalism.

The impact of this dominance of neoliberal discourses for areas relevant to my study, such as university education and social work practice, is examined by many social work theorists and educators. Bob Mullaly notes that the growing strength of neoliberalism in Canada is in contradiction to the fundamental values of the profession of social work (Mullaly, 2007). On a broader level, Peter Leonard explains the impact that neoliberal discourses had upon the support for a well funded and equitable welfare system. He demonstrates neoliberal discourses asserting values about the superiority of market forces over bureaucratic intervention. Neoliberal discourses valorize individual choice over collective decision making and prioritize law and order as the role of the state (Leonard, 1997). These discourses have worked to undermine values in investing in an extensive

welfare system. Colleen Lundy and Therese Jennissen further outline what this delegitimization of welfare provision looked like in the Canadian context. They describe how the period since the 1990's saw significant government restructuring of the welfare provision system. This restructuring caused the effective dismantling of the welfare system established in the post-war period. Jennissen and Lundy outline how neoliberal values of individualism and market rationalism were reflected in reduced commitment to the social safety net (Jennissen and Lundy, 2011). What social work theorists Leonard, Jennissen and Lundy explain is the process by which neoliberal discourses have radically altered the welfare and service landscape of our communities. We see how budgetary decisions informed by neoliberal values affect the frontline valuation of social work and challenge social workers espousing the values of structural social work. These challenges are important to note as they may impact these students' conceptualization of practice.

One of the social services to experience financial cuts has been the post-secondary education sector. Many writers outline the specific impacts of these cuts to university education (Olsen and Peters, 2005; Madgett and Belanger, 2008; Milz, 2005, for example). In this section I review how these writers explain how these systemic cuts to post-secondary education necessitated institutions to seek funding from new sources such as corporate donations and higher tuition fees. The shift away from public to more private funding results in post-secondary education increasingly conceptualized as a commodity. The shift from education as a public good to a commodity illustrates the commercialization of our education system. This results in changes in the style of internal university governance, and an emerging emphasis upon professionalism in university degrees.

The commercialization of the education system is directly related to the budget cuts to post-secondary education beginning in the early 1990's (Madgett and Belanger, 2008). Overall universities saw a twenty-percent reduction in the funds they received from governments. Universities were given permission to fill this gap in funding with increased tuition fees, thereby shifting the burden of funding upon the students. Many students continue to attend university despite the increase in cost, because of the need for university education in the labour market. Yet, it is noted that for the least affluent members of our society it has become a barrier to access (Madgett and Belanger, 2008). This shift in the responsibility of funding the university sector from the various levels of government to students and the private sector is an important shift to note in the educational experiences of BSW students as both the expense and debt burden borne by students shape their expectations and experiences of their education.

The shift away from public funding for universities created an opportunity for greater participation of the private sector in university funding. Madgett and Belanger (2008) outline how this has led to a trend for the increased commercialization of research outputs from universities, partnerships with private enterprises, and more market oriented research funding. All of these shifts have an impact on the role of social work education within the university. Certain fields of the university, such as the applied sciences find these shifts lead to increases in funding, whereas those involved in curiosity based research or non-commercial research, are often faced with less funding opportunities (Madgett and Belanger, 2008). Such neoliberal shifts are either explicitly or implicitly experienced by the students in this study.

Milz (2005) contributes another perspective on the commercialization of the post-secondary education system when she outlines the effects it has upon professors' research. An example that Milz draws of this changing academic landscape is the move by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) towards funding the needs of the marketplace rather than the interests of researchers. This commodification of knowledge and learning is permeating the educational experience for social work students. Such an understanding of education narrows the space for academic exploration and pressures students to see their academic experience more as a tool to succeed in the neoliberal marketplace (Milz, 2005). What I explored is what happens when this conception of education is confronted by a pedagogy that focuses on the critical analysis of society rather than the accreditation of marketable skills. I investigated how students navigate these very different conceptions of a BSW and its purpose for social work practice.

Ollsen and Peters (2005) build upon this theme of the commodification of knowledge and the orientation towards more marketable skills in the post-secondary education system. These authors outline that as a result of the dominance of neoliberal discourses in the university sector, they note "an increasing emphasis on transferable skills, and a general shift towards vocationalism and professionalism in higher education" (Ollsen and Peters, 2005, p. 330). The conception that a university degree is a commodity to be marketed appropriately is further reinforced by shifts in the governance structures of the universities themselves. Ollsen and Peters argue that universities are increasingly run like a corporation, with the leadership of universities being central agents in this new governance model. Power and authority have consistently shifted away from academic Senates towards the more corporate style Boards of Governors. Fundamentally this shift in governing is part of an overall move away from the

collegial nature of decision making towards a more corporate power structure. An increased emphasis on corporate loyalty has also emerged, leaving little space for critical engagement with concerns regarding the university. As a result of marketization, many university administrators believe that to stay competitive it is imperative that only positive statements emerge about the university's brand. To ensure this, more and more universities are utilizing advertising and public relations companies to improve their brand (Ollsen and Peters, 2005).

This section identifies several important themes within neoliberal dominance for my research. It was important to gain insight into neoliberal core principles, its development and how it became a dominant force in our society. Then it was crucial to engage with the impact of neoliberal dominance both for the context of social work practice and the context of social work education within the university. What became apparent is that neoliberal discourses are playing significant roles in reshaping both the educational and working conditions for social workers. This highlights neoliberalism as an important factor in the lives of the nine BSW students in this study and inspired me to bring in a focus on analyzing the experiences of neoliberalism into my theoretical framework.

The bodies of literature that form the foundation of this study offer the core principles of structural social work. They outline the neoliberal context and provide a vantage point to question what structural social work looks like in a neoliberal context. The core principles of structural social work rest upon a stance of social transformation that positions the structural approach in opposition to our current social context. The literature on neoliberalism highlights the contextual tensions embedded in many students' experiences in schools of social work. For example, the impact of neoliberal discourses upon current

conceptualizations of social work and education are highlighted. These were valuable in analyzing what discourses are at play in these students' perspectives on such issues.

The disjuncture between structural social work and the neoliberal context leaves room for a dynamic dialogue within the literature on critical social work. Part of this debate explores the transformative potential of postmodern perspectives to deconstruct social work history and contemporary practices. Many theorists, such as Rossiter, argue for the potential of postmodernism to help critical social work examine its role in social relations and its desire for innocence in this context. Other critical social work theorists point to its potential in further building our understanding of identities and power in our shifting social context. By incorporating all these differing voices I engaged with Fook's vision of a social work approach that is fluid and capable of engaging with the contradictions and dynamism of its lived experiences. This dialogue informs the basis of my analysis and is further developed by the theoretical framework and methodology sections of this research.

Theoretical Framework:

My interest in how the tension between structural social work and neoliberalism is played out in the lives of students within Carleton's School of Social Work emerges from, and is framed by, critical social work and governmentality theories. My interest is one of exploring the experiences of students through a lens of critical social work theory in dialogue with a governmentality approach to analysis. At the core of my theoretical framework is critical social work (Fook, 2002; Healey, 2001; Pease, 2005; Hick, 2005; Rossiter, 2001, etc.), particularly their perspectives on social work education. Critical social work has its roots in critical theory, which emerged in the Frankfurt School in Germany. Beginning in the 1920's its theorists, notably Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, developed critical theory from the early writings of Karl Marx (Bottomore, 2003). It has played a central role in the development of critical approaches to social work including structural social work. Critical social work in today's context is not an uncontested set of unified concepts. It is instead a site of multiple interpretations, including structural social work, feminist social work, and radical social work, amongst others. Yet, there are some basic elements of critical theory that are incorporated into all of critical social work's manifestations, including structural social work. The first core element of any critical social work is the connection between the personal and the political. In other words, it is the belief that individual experiences are influenced by one's social context. To understand and improve individually experienced problems we need to include a structural analysis (Fook, 2002). A second element is the belief that a better world can be constructed (Fook et al., 2005). This understanding leads to the incorporation of emancipatory forms of theory and practice, particularly those focused on undermining oppressive forces in society (Fook, 2002). The emancipatory elements of critical social work

culminate in the view that to achieve a better social world we need a radical transformation of existing social relations (Fook et al., 2005). Within critical social work, it is common to see this element manifest itself in a critique of both the welfare system and the role of social workers within it (Fook, 2002). Another central element to critical social work is the rooting of theory in the material conditions and lived experiences of people. In other words, critical social work does not disconnect itself from the lived reality of those it seeks to theorize in order to make grand sweeping statements of 'Truth'. Due to the diverse manifestations of these principles within critical social work, there developed a range of different forms, such as structural social work, feminist social work, radical social work, etc. (Fook et al., 2005).

It is this dynamism which makes critical social work of lasting interest to so many theorists. Writers such as Fook, Hick and Pozzuto (2005) argue that critical social work should avoid being rigidly defined, and instead try to hold onto this dynamism. By ensuring a more fluid understanding of critical social work, it opens space to include a greater variety of practices working towards transforming how power is exercised in our society (Fook et al., 2005). This dynamic and fluid understanding of critical social work allowed me to develop an equally dynamic theoretical framework for this work and opened up space for me to reflect and ask questions as to whether this dynamism is part of students' experiences at Carleton University's School of Social Work.

My thesis is an attempt to understand how students with a wide variety of experiences and beliefs feel regarding a structural approach to social work. Do they feel their perceptions of the world are in line with the structural analysis taught in the School of Social Work? Do they feel their perceptions of the world are as legitimate as the structural analysis taught in

their BSW? Criticisms of structural social work sometimes focus on how it privileges macro level analyses above the micro level of work, such as interpersonal practice (Fook, 2002). In this thesis I explore whether, and if so how, this dynamic operates among a small group of students at Carleton's School of Social Work.

The privileging of the macro level of analysis over the interpersonal micro level is further fueled when Jan Fook critiques the 'commodification' of theory (Pease and Fook, 1999). Fook's 'commodification' of theory is the conception of a theory as a concrete set of ideas that are meant to be imparted between individuals to build a consensus on social relations. At the individual level, if a person adopts the set of ideas then they are deemed in the 'right' (Pease and Fook, 1999). In the context of my study, this raises the concern that students who adopt a structural approach to social work are perceived as right, while those with an alternative perspective need to have their consciousness raised by students and educators at the School of Social Work. This is another dynamic that I explore in this thesis as my theoretical framework is particularly organized to highlight contradictions and tensions between theoretical perspectives and how those play out in students' lives.

A final area of concern for critical social work is its position in our current social context. Many modernist assumptions regarding progress, objective knowledge, and a linear understanding of history are challenged by postmodern critiques (Leonard, 2001). Many of the discourses fuelling the conceptions of an emancipatory narrative of our western society are shown to rest in ethnocentric arrogance. To rely on these discourses in critical social work could leave us little creative space to respond to difference and alternative discursive perspectives (Leonard, 2001).

Emerging from these critiques is the need to develop a form of critical social work that values the lived experiences of students, does not assume the position of 'Truth', continues to stay vigilant against establishing a position of superiority by the worker, deconstructs the discourses informing critical social work, tries to understand our role in reproducing discourses of oppression, and works to include the diversity of clients into an understanding of activism and agency in our social context. There are many theorists who have provided input into such an understanding of critical social work (Fook, Pease, and Hick, 2005; Rossiter, 2001; Leonard, 2001, etc.). It is these tensions, highlighted through a postmodern theoretical framework, that underpin much of the questioning and analysis of data within this thesis.

The line of postmodern questioning that supports the analysis in this thesis is in no way intended to relinquish the long and rich critical social work tradition. I maintain the theoretical position of resistance to social injustice in our society. Yet, I wish to do so with what Amy Rossiter sees to be the essence of critical social work -that is being comfortable to engage within a context of uncertainty and questioning rather than constantly seeking certainty (Rossiter, 2001). I agree that the combination of postmodern theory with critical social work is useful in today's social context. For an emancipatory project such as critical social work to be effective in today's social context it needs to incorporate the changing epistemologies of its current students, clients, and practitioners (Pease and Fook, 1999). By incorporating other postmodern elements into my theoretical framework, I hope to create space for contradictions, slippages and questioning among the perspectives of the students participating in this research project and in my own interpretation of these perspectives.

For my work, I rely upon governmentality theory to engage with the previously outlined elements of critical social work. I utilize governmentality analysis alongside that of critical social work as a result of some of the above-mentioned criticisms within the tradition of critical social work. Governmentality theory offers insight into issues around macro and micro social forces. It also helps shed light on gaps in power analysis and identity construction. Many forms of critical social work envision power to be embedded in oppressive structures of domination, whereas governmentality theory provides a more diffuse view of power within society (Foucault, 1977). I argue that a dialogue between these two views of power provides a fuller picture: illustrating how while power can often be concentrated in certain structures, it can also exist in a variety of forms amongst people.

To have governmentality theory in dialogue with critical social work theory in this project means utilizing the differing perspectives of each to gain multiple perspectives in my analysis. For example, I engaged governmentality theory to illustrate the impacts of shifting exercises of power upon subjectivity. Bringing in critical social work helps to gain insight into what this new subjectivity could mean for the emancipatory project rooted in both structural and critical social work. In the rest of this section I will explore some relevant tenets of governmentality theory that assisted me in understanding the experiences shared by this small group of BSW students.

Foucault's (1997) work on shifting forms of governing, such as the shift from sovereign power to liberalism, lays the foundation for governmentality theory and its deconstruction of the rationality of neoliberal dominance in our current social context. Many theorists (Barry, 1996; Osborne, 1996; Rose, 1996, etc.) have built on his foundation to

outline the role of neoliberalism in our society via governmentality theory. Foucault argues that each rationality of governing evolved techniques of rule, including specific forms of social discipline. An effect of these forms of discipline was a shift in the subject of rule. Foucault demonstrates that when the form of power shifts, so too do the subjectivities in society. This point makes it important to understand political rationality alongside the lived reality of it as a subject (Foucault, 1977). The priority of this study is to focus on the lived experiences of the students interviewed. What Foucault posits is that such lived experiences are influenced by the political rationality of their era. Therefore, along with the experiences of these students, this study requires some introduction to their social context.

Many scholars have built upon Foucault's argument to further illustrate a new shift in governmentality within our society, that of neoliberalism. Barry, Osborne, and Rose (1996) broadly outline the shift in western societies from a dominant liberal discourse towards a neoliberal governmentality in their book *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*. One of the major signifiers of neoliberalism outlined by Barry, Osborne, and Rose (1996) is the retreat of the state. Rather than analyzing this retreat as a reduction in the amount of state intervention into society and the lives of individuals, they argue that this shift has resulted in the "autonomization" of governing. In other words, they argue that the governance of neoliberalism is enacted through more decentralized techniques than those of liberal governance (Barry, Osborne, and Rose, 1996). Rather than this resulting in a vacuum of state influence in our lives, it is that the forms of influence shift. In the case of this study, such an analysis helps me understand the influence of dominant discourses upon students. Though there may not always be explicit influence by

the state or other social powers, it is important to see if there are more subtle and implicit influences at play in these students' lived experiences.

Nickolas Rose (1996) deconstructs the shift in western governing from a liberal rationality into a more neoliberal ethos. His illustration of this shift focuses on three key signifiers of this new political ethos (Rose, 1996). The first signifier is a shift in the role of 'experts' in society. Experts had a role of some public responsibility for the development of a healthy and productive society. For example, within a liberal governing regime experts played a central role in welfare systems, which were a substantive element of governing in the liberal era. These experts, such as social workers, developed a strong level of autonomy for their professions. Their autonomy was rooted in the respect for their expertise in a specific field. Rose identifies the neoliberal shift as expertise are no longer considered enough to warrant such autonomy. Instead, calculative regimes are implemented to oversee these areas of expertise, such as social work (Rose, 1996). As Rose puts it:

the enclosures of expertise are to be penetrated through a range of new techniques for exercising critical scrutiny over authority – budget disciplines, accountancy and audit being three of the most salient (Rose, 1996, p. 54).

These techniques actively undermine the previous autonomy of experts in society. Experts must become responsible to these oversight regimes. The power of experts has therefore shifted within a neoliberal rationality of governing (Rose, 1996). I am interested to see if the students in this study feel anxious about how prepared their education has left them to navigate such a social context.

The second signifier Rose outlines regarding the shift from liberal to neoliberal rationality of governing is "a new pluralisation of 'social' technologies" (Rose, 1996, p. 56).

Rose points to the replacement of the notion of public good with a responsabilized subject. This shift is a phenomenon of the reformulation of government as less explicitly engaged in the public elements of society. In other words, government no longer focuses its role as governing from the centre, but instead installs technologies to help decentralized groups and individuals to govern themselves at a distance. Therefore, the shift outlined by Rose is not the end of governing; it is a shift in the responsibility of implementing the governing regime (Rose, 1996).

A neoliberal shift in governing relies upon the creation of a subject who can be ruled at a distance, who no longer relies upon a centralized form of government and a collective conceptualization of the public good (Rose, 1996). Rose outlines the need of this new subject to “enterprise themselves” through making the appropriate life choices (Rose, 1996, p. 57). The enterprising self is the third notable shift in moving from liberalism to a dominance of neoliberal discourses identified by Rose. The role of the individual within society has shifted into one where:

Within this new regime of the actively responsible self, individuals are to fulfil their national obligations not through their relations of dependency and obligation to one another, but through seeking to *fulfil themselves* within a variety of micro-moral domains or ‘communities’ – families, workplaces, schools, leisure associations, neighbourhoods (Rose, 1996, p. 57).

Individuals take on the responsibility to fulfil themselves within a social context informed by a range of technologies working to inform how one ought to create a responsible lifestyle. It is important to recognize that there is often a sense of increased freedom as individuals autonomously make choices, which suit their specific needs. Yet this sense of freedom works

within the grammars of living influenced by the technologies launched to ensure the lifestyle project takes an amenable form to the rationality of neoliberalism (Rose, 1996).

The analysis I utilized in this project rests upon a dialogue between the core tenets of critical social work and governmentality theory. Critical social work brings a perspective that the personal is political and that a better world can be created through the development of transformative and emancipatory forms of social work practice. Critical social work develops this perspective with an emphasis on how various practices are experienced by both workers and clients. Governmentality theory is not rooted in the same social justice project. Instead, its theorists focus on how political lenses are shaping our current social context (Barry, Osborne, and Rose, 1996). This provides an important perspective to a critical social work analysis. Governmentality theory assisted me in ensuring that I looked beyond my goals for structural social work and engaged with how those goals are shaped. I found governmentality theory to be a useful check to my personal lenses. Governmentality theory challenged me to see the experiences of these students from more than my own political lens. In other words, I drew upon governmentality theory to ensure that my critical social work theoretical framework engaged perspectives that were perhaps not always in line with its political programme. Both theories helped me try to develop meaning from the variety of experiences shared by the students in this study.

Chapter 2:

Methodology:

The philosophical position in Qualitative Research engages with the tensions embedded in drawing upon critical and humanistic traditions. It is one that reflects my own ontological perspective. Nelson et al.'s (1992, p.4), quote in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011) illustrates this important characteristic within qualitative research:

Qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postexperimental, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly defined positivist, postpositivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and its analysis. Furthermore, these tensions can be combined in the same project, bringing both postmodern and naturalistic, or both critical and humanistic, perspectives to bear (Nelson et al., 1992, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.6).

When using qualitative research to focus on the specific qualities of the phenomenon of students' experiences of structural social work in today's social context, I strove to utilize both a postmodern and a humanistic interpretation of the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In particular, I used interviews as my data collection method and the method of interpretation for the analysis. In these interviews and their subsequent interpretation, the focus became *how* these social experiences emerge and develop meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In this section I will explain my rationale for utilizing the qualitative research methods of interviewing and interpretation.

In this project I wanted to explore the lived experiences of a small group of BSW students learning structural social work in a neoliberal era. To explore this topic I chose to

use the qualitative method of interviews for my data collection. My rationale for choosing interviews rests on the central goal of this research to elicit the students' perceptions of their experiences with structural social work and neoliberalism. It is this drive to understand what they think about their experiences that convinced me that interviews were the best method for data collection. In the book *The Authority to Imagine: The Struggle Toward Representation in Dissertation Writing*, Garman and Piantanida help highlight the role of data collection in the research project as a whole. The authors in this book outline how three strands of research are eventually woven together make the final document. The first strand is 'experiential text', where the researcher develops an understanding of what is happening in the phenomenon (Garman, 2006). In other words, it is the data collection process. To begin my data collection, I spent several weeks developing my interview guide. In collaboration with my supervisor, I developed a series of questions and prompts. The first several questions were to set the students at ease and to begin to develop a rapport. Then questions focused on what the students had learned in their studies, focusing on what they knew about structural social work. I then moved the questions towards a discussion focusing on their reaction to this knowledge. Around this time I would explore the students' motivations for studying social work and their goals as social workers. We would discuss the social work profession more broadly and then finish on the topic of the social context of practice. The research instrument is attached in Appendix A.

There are a myriad of forms for interviews. I chose to use semi-structured interviews. This means the questions were used as guidelines and many interviews moved from various topics without direct use of these specific questions. I chose semi-structured interviews because my goal was to gain some preliminary exploratory data (Reinharz, 1992). Such

preliminary and exploratory data was useful for my project, as it is a small project that strove to shed some light on the student experience of structural social work education. My project did not work towards a comprehensive overview of such experiences. In this project, interviews were used to tap into the narratives these nine students build about their experiences with learning structural social work (Silverman, 2000). It was not my goal to use semi-structured interviews as a mode to encapsulate their experiences, but rather I used them as a research tool that helps bring some of their perspectives into the dialogue on structural social work education (Silverman, 2000).

Before engaging in the interviews I worked on getting ethics approval from Carleton University's Ethics Board. In preparing the application, I focused on finding an interviewing process that would protect the anonymity of the student participants. I wanted to make sure they felt safe to share their honest reflections about learning within the School of Social Work. I worked to ensure that if they said anything critical they would not be exposed to retribution. This became a significant focus for my application. My ethics application was processed and I received a formal email from Leslie J. MacDonald-Hicks on January 26th, 2011 indicating I had ethics approval to move forward with my data collection. Later, on May 11th, 2011 I communicated with Leslie J. MacDonald-Hicks indicating I had concluded my interviews, and they have since closed my ethics protocol at Carleton University. Both documents are attached to this project as Appendices B and C.

My data collection began by soliciting students to come and participate in my research. I chose to focus my search for participants on upper year BSW students. I did so because I wanted to interview students who had several years experience with studying

structural social work. I also hoped that because they were nearing completion they were perhaps contemplating how that knowledge would be utilized in their practice outside the university. I contacted potential participants by posting a call for participants on the School of Social Work message board, asking Professors of upper year BSW classes to make announcements and pass around the poster, as well as having an email sent directly to all third and fourth year BSW students. Over the course of the 2011 winter semester I had nine students respond to these calls. It was my intention to interview between eight and ten participants. I chose such a small sample size because of several factors. Methodologically I felt that a small sample size was acceptable for my project as it was a preliminary and exploratory project, not looking to provide comprehensive research on 'the student experience'. It was my intention to gain some insight into how a few students navigated their experiences of learning structural social work in a neoliberal era. This number of interviews was also informed by practical factors. Being a new researcher I felt that a smaller number of interviews would be more manageable. Also, I tried for many months to get these nine; therefore I felt it would be extremely challenging and time consuming to bring in more participants. Therefore, as a result of time and capacity limitations I felt that the nine students I interviewed were sufficient to move this project forward to the interpretation phase. I recognize that nine participants is a fairly limited sample size. I understand that my data is not capable of being applied to other circumstances, or to the student population at large. Considering my methodological perspective and my particular research question, I felt that for this project it was a priority to delve further into those specific lived experiences. I explored the theoretical constructions these students develop as a response to the contradiction between structural social work and neoliberalism. This recognition that my data

is not representative of the whole student body also informed my acceptance of the limited diversity of the nine students who participated in my interviews. There were a range of backgrounds and self-identifications shared in the interviews by these students. Yet, I did not make it a central element of my research to delve into their identities and work to ensure I had a range of social locations that fully represented the diversity of the student population on a whole. Instead, I was content to explore the specifics of this small group of students, rather than attempt a comprehensive study that could reflect the experiences of the student population on a whole.

The specific process involved holding the interviews in my office at the Graduate Students' Association, which provided the privacy of a closed door if the participant felt more comfortable. I recorded the interviews with a recording device, and saved the interviews on a removable disk. I chose to use the recording device over written notes so that I could focus on listening and interacting with the research participant during the interview. This choice resulted in the loss of being able to include non-verbal cues in the transcribed data. For example, if a student appeared frustrated as they shared a classroom experience. The data that was collected focused solely on the verbal cues offered and recorded. The choice to record the interviews also meant that I spent significant time transcribing this verbal data into written form. This was a sacrifice of time, but I felt it was valuable to accept this delay in order to have data that reflected the specific words used by these students.

I conducted all the interviews in person, with each interview lasting approximately an hour. I interviewed the participants on an individual basis rather than in groups. I was concerned that if they were with other students, such as in focus groups, I would not get the

full individuality of their response. When planning this research project, I thought there would be contention around whether one liked or disliked the structural approach. Therefore, by choosing interviews I was hoping to get each student's frank assessment of the approach. I worried that in focus groups students could feel pressured not to share their perceptions of the approach if they were not the popular position. By focusing on the individual response to structural social work I lost some of the opportunities afforded by focus groups. I sacrificed opportunities such as the possibility for focus groups to equalize the power between myself as the researcher and the participants. By being outnumbered I could have reduced my authority and allowed more space for the participants to challenge my agenda. After consideration, I felt that for methodological and practical reasons interviews would best suit my research. My desire to have each student share their personal perspective on learning structural social work became the rationale to use semi-structural interviews over other potential methods. On a practical note, it was a method I felt comfortable utilizing as a first time researcher.

For those students who participated in my research project, there was an honorarium of ten dollars. I provided this honorarium because I think it is crucial to recognize the value of the participant's time. I struggled with the concept of compensating students for their participation in my research. As an unfunded researcher, it was a financial strain upon my limited resources. Yet, I also felt compelled to demonstrate respect for the students' time and value it in a way that is generally recognized in our society. This desire was also in tension with not wishing to use money as a means to pressure students into consenting to participate context (Research Ethics Policy and Advisory Committee, University of Toronto, 2011). Therefore, in an attempt to address both my desire to compensate participants with the

concerns around using monetary honorariums, I decided on offering ten dollars. My hope was this sum represented my respect for their time but was not enough to unduly influence participants to give their consent, as it was a bit less than the minimum wage for an hour's work in the labour market.

The interview process is one deeply embedded in social conventions around interpersonal communication (Oakley, 2005). This causes a tension when approaching interviews as a data collection method. Ann Oakley outlines this tension effectively when she explains that: "a balance must then be struck between the warmth required to generate 'rapport' and the detachment necessary to see the interviewee as an object under surveillance" (Oakley, 2005, p. 218). In identifying this tension, Oakley exposes some of the myths about interviewing that can lead to greater ethical issues of objectification, such as disdain for emotions, expectations of a submissive research participant, and the avoidance by the interviewer from sharing their opinion or providing responses to questions asked. She identifies these characteristics in the paradigms around interviewing in many popular textbooks (Oakley, 2005). In challenging these common prescriptions around 'proper' interviews Oakley offers guidelines for less hierarchical approaches to interviews. Guidelines including a less exploitative attitude towards the interviewee, providing greater visibility for subjugated voices, and making space for greater two way communication were all elements that eased my concerns regarding my 'insider status' as a student of the School of Social Work (Oakley, 2005). At first I was worried that my common experience with the research participants would somehow taint the data collection process. Yet, after reading these and other feminist guidelines for interviewing I was relieved to see that my alignment in many ways with the participants could be of value rather than a barrier to 'proper' interviewing

(Oakley, 2000 and 2005; Watts, 2006; Reinharz, 1992). These guidelines fostered a confidence in me that allowed for moments of joint laughter, empathy with similar experiences at the School of Social Work, and even answering questions pertaining to my experience, especially as a graduate student. For example, one student asked me what I thought about the MSW program as they were considering continuing on in social work as a master's degree. I shared my impressions of the program, though clearly did so from a personal position. Since that moment, the question and my answer has left me somewhat unsettled about my role as an interviewer. I don't regret answering her, but it has taken some time and engagement with feminist research literature to ground such an experience as a legitimate part of the research process. I was also nervous about the ethical implications regarding bumping into the research participants at campus events. Oakley's writings on interviewing allowed me the confidence to strike up friendly conversations with participants when I ran into them at campus events. I have not found that the students want to reopen our discussions, but they do sometimes ask about the project's status or progress. I have always felt comfortable keeping the research participants informed as to the status of the project and hope to invite them to read the final product when it is completed, though considering the time lapse since the completion of the data collection phase many will have likely moved on and will be difficult to get in touch with.

After the data was collected, I moved to the interpretation phase of the research. This phase is referred to by Garman (2006) as the 'theoretical text'. This is where I worked to decipher the concepts offered by the students. It was in this phase that I drew upon critical social work and governmentality theories. I used these theories to interpret the data from these two perspectives. I worked to incorporate this phase as a persuasion of these possible

interpretations; rather than a direct cause and effect relationship between the data and my interpretation (Garman, 2006). I recognize that there could have been a myriad of interpretations of the data. I saw this as an opportunity to engage in the dialogue and offer the explanation developed by my theoretical analysis.

The final phase of research outlined by Garman (2006) is that of the 'discursive text'. Discursive text refers to the process by which one returns to the literature of the field to further engage with the aspects related to the research topic. Central in this phase of interpretation for qualitative perspectives is the view that each interpretation brings to light a different part of the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, I felt that it would be valuable to engage social work theorists' interpretation of student's experiences with critical forms of social work pedagogy. It was at this stage of my research that I worked on creating a discussion between my findings and those of other empirical studies on similar themes.

Along with a focus on the qualities of an experience, or phenomenon, a central tenet of qualitative research is the need to contextualize such moments within their social relations, processes, and institutions. This contextualization emerges from the view that knowledge, and the nature of reality it is derived from are socially constructed (Cooper and White, 2012). Therefore, it was also at this phase of the research project that I engaged further research to inform the context of these students' educational experiences. In the case of my project, this focused on evaluating the impact of dominant Canadian discourses, such as neoliberalism. The next two chapters outline this drawing together of all three strands of the research project.

Qualitative research requires a level of reflexivity by the researcher to examine the role of (auto)biography, discipline, and political context among others, are having on the research project (Cooper and White, 2012). This aspect of qualitative research is helpful for my research as I recognize my own political agenda played a role in the development of this research project. I believe that it is important for the researcher to recognize their own political and social position so that one can better map the potential influences it could have on the research. In Ann Oakely's statement that "the act of knowing and what is known are often irredeemably fused" she outlined the inevitable role my own ontology and epistemology have played in this project (Oakely, 2000, p. 291). While I agreed with this statement, I found myself in the challenging position of discovering my own less than coherent ontology and epistemology. In the end, my own struggle between postmodern and humanistic interpretations of the world reflects similar tensions in qualitative research, and shaped my analysis of the data. In reflecting regularly throughout this project this paradox became clear. My recognition of my internal tensions is what first attracted me to the topic of engaging in structural social work in neoliberal times. Though engaging with the tension has been a struggle and continues to be an ongoing process, it has been a fascinating and productive process.

This self-reflection brought to light another important consideration for the research process. It is important to be open about the inevitable limitations that myself as a researcher pose to this project. As desirable as it may be for some to engage in research from an impersonal and objective stance, this has not been possible for my own work. The research is limited in its purview by the inevitability that it must filter through my own ontological and epistemological perspectives. The important limitation to me in this position of privilege is

the foregrounding of my own interpretation of these students shared experiences (Oakley, 2000). It is important to note that the students' experiences are interpreted by me and that privileges my perspectives on their meaning. This is a serious limitation embedded in the single researcher model of my thesis. A solution to such a limitation could be in the incorporation of community-based research, where these students could play a larger role in the planning and interpretation of the research (van de Sande and Schwartz, 2010). Unfortunately for this project that was not a feasible option and therefore a limitation that must be accepted for the findings of this research. I have attempted to reduce as best as I can the potential that my research could reflect my own selective interpretation in two crucial ways. To gain as much insight into the meaning and interpretation of these experiences by the students I utilized semi-structured interviews. Secondly, I worked in two different theoretical paradigms to try and ensure a variety of perspectives was incorporated. Despite these efforts, it is clear that the final paper offers a reflection of nine students' experiences, but always through my personal/theoretical lens.

Chapter 3: Multiple Discourses

Findings:

My research identified that students rely upon multiple and often contradictory discourses when describing their experiences in the BSW program. Students who participated in this study were clearly navigating a challenging and complex terrain. There is never an open field of discourses for people to draw upon to give their experiences meaning. Instead, there are limited possibilities that they must piece together to create a sense of coherence. These complex discourses arise again when students anticipate how they will practice social work after graduation. The contradictions between discourses reflect the interplay of two powerful belief systems in their experience of studying to be a social worker. First, that of structural social work pedagogy and secondly, a society dominated by neoliberalism. In attempting to navigate the disconnections between these two discursive fields, students draw on both in a dynamic array of ever-changing strategic negotiations. In this chapter, I will explore how these students' struggles with two powerful discourses lead to the multiple and often contradictory discourses being expressed. I will illustrate what some of these discourses could mean for the students' and our programs intention to practice structural social work.

One of the key themes to emerge from the students' experiences in the BSW program was their strong allegiance to the structural approach. They each expressed an interest in having structural social work inform their education and future practice. Jane described how she was drawn to Carleton as a result of the alignment between structural social work and her own worldview:

I really enjoyed it [structural social work] because I naturally kind of think that way. I kind of look at other situations that affect a person. I came to Carleton because I knew that was what they focused on. I'm not so much focused on the clinical type of work (Jane).

Along with Jane, Rebecca also expressed the value of structural social work to her in the BSW program:

I think there is a place for it [structural social work]. I think it a really good thing social workers are getting the structural education. So from my perspective I think the structural approach is good in terms of educating social workers to understand that it is not just about their clients and there are these bigger issues in society. Those issues are why we have the clients we have. You can talk about the questions of homelessness and poverty, like why do we even have them. Rather than just accepting that they are there. You look at the food bank as a band aid solution. Whereas other people, if they don't get the structural approach they think well people need food. So we are just going to give them food. But you don't think about the reasons behind it. So in that sense I think it is really good that social workers have that structural awareness (Rebecca).

Abraham joined Jane and Rebecca in the view that structural social work is an important perspective to engage with, and that it suits his view of social work practice:

I personally think, I don't know if this is my bias talking because I haven't been to another school of social work, but I think it [structural social work] is the best way. I think it's the only way you can look at it; I mean how can you not look at the structures that oppress people. It's like, it just seems to be important to have that insight (Abraham).

The students all spoke of structural social work as a positive addition to the body of knowledge they would use in practice. These students expressed a belief that structural social work is something important for students to be exposed to. In a study on the attitudes of undergraduate social work students towards poverty and impoverished people. Robert Weaver and Sung Hyun Yun discovered a similar theme. They did a survey and gathered pretest and post-test data on 166 BSW students, focusing on their attitudes towards poverty

and impoverished people. They discovered that the more exposure BSW students have to discourses around poverty, which do not individualize the problem, the more their attitudes towards poverty reflect a more structural understanding. They found these themes by gathering post-test data after these students were exposed to structural analyses of power in a particular course. Their data showed a significantly higher degree of structural attitudes towards poverty than before the students took the class and were further exposed to these views (Weaver and Yun, 2011). The students in my study demonstrated a similar trend. The students' exposure to the structural view of poverty has either reinforced their structural views or influenced their views towards a more structural understanding of issues such as poverty.

One can see from these students' views regarding structural social work that some principles resonated with them because they aligned with their previous perspectives about society and the role for social work. The students' allegiance to the structural approach appears to be partly rooted in what they perceive to be the purpose of social work and what they imagine their role as a social worker to be. The students shared that the reason they entered into the Bachelor of Social Work program was to help people and to make the world a better place. Such goals align with the role set out by structural social work, for the worker to work towards social transformation while partnering with clients to fight for emancipation from their specific experiences of oppression (Mullaly, 2007). Each student identified one of these two themes as the driving force behind their desire to practice social work:

I want to create social change. To make Canada and the world a better place. I hate seeing people in bad circumstances and the structures of our society that keep them oppressed. I think that's unfair (Athena).

Hera agreed with Athena regarding her intentions as a social worker and alluded to the fact that she feels her ambitions are consistent amongst her peers:

Its super cliché, but I want to change the world. A lot of people go into social work for a lot of different reasons, but that is one of the ones I hear a lot, I want to make change (Hera).

Rebecca brought to light the individual level when she identified the desire to help people in difficult circumstances, while still alluding to a desire to support broader social change:

I guess my purpose as a social worker, I mean part of the reason I came into the profession was I want to be there to support other people who are facing challenges or difficulties in their lives. Whether they are personal or broader challenges (Rebecca).

These views reinforced what the students see as the purpose of social work in our social context. They expressed a view that our current social context is flawed, and as a result of issues such as marginalization and oppression they believed social workers have a role in altering social relations to create a more just society. This aligns not just with the principles of structural social work, but also with the broader area of critical social work (see, for example, Fook, 2002). Such an alignment demonstrates that these students are engaging with and incorporating the discourse of social transformation from structural social work (see, for example, Mullaly, 2007). This is a powerful discourse for these students, as all but two of the nine students interviewed explicitly stated their desire to make the world a better place. The other two students regularly expressed a desire to help people by ensuring a better understanding of our social context and by recognizing that issues in society can negatively affect their clients. For example Jen explained that:

Yeah. I have been studying it [structural social work] here for the last four years. I think it becomes part of your practice as a social worker. I wouldn't be able to see someone in a certain situation and not think of the larger social context (Jen).

What this quote implies is firstly, that structural social work is resonating with Jen after several years of exposure, and secondly that this resonance means that Jen feels that the social context of a client could be a significant force. This view that the social context is an important factor in helping her client means that Jen has also adopted the structural social work discourse that social structures impact our individual lives in meaningful ways. Therefore, if a structure is experienced as a negative factor for many people, perhaps we ought to address the societal issue while working with them at the individual level. Though Abraham did not explicitly state his reasons for pursuing social work when asked, his earlier quote about how structures can oppress people demonstrated his incorporation of the structural social work discourse that our social context is flawed and in need of transformation. These nine students all expressed a degree of alignment between their own worldview and the mission of structural social work to transform our society into a more socially just context. As a result of the students' alignment with the structural approach, it is important to identify how these students draw upon the elements within that approach to inform their educational experiences and the possibilities of their future practice.

To further explore these students' allegiance to structural social work I asked them how they conceptualized the approach in their education and understanding of social work practice. In this question I wanted to understand what elements of structural social work actively engaged these students. When I tried to make sense of the answers to this question, I began to wonder whether most of the students understood structural social work primarily in terms of the element of materialization. In other words, it seemed to me that almost all of the students focused on a view of structural social work that rested primarily upon the worker's

efforts to conceptualize the client's problems as influenced by broader social forces, rather than as an individualized problem (Murray and Hick, 2009). Specifically Mishka argued that, when drawing on structural social work:

You consider what factors outside of this individual is impacting their personal problems. Like racism. Everything is connected, so that individuals are connected to the structural factors, or the systemic structures, whatever you want to call it. It's different from say like psychoanalysis (Mishka).

Other students also explained how structural social work influenced them to ensure that the macro level, such as the structures of oppression, is taken into consideration when working with clients. For example, Rebecca commented that structural social work assisted in helping her resist pathologizing individuals for experiencing social issues. She envisioned using it to build her practice by:

Focusing on issues in society while relating the relationship between your client's issues and the greater issues in society and recognizing that relationship. That's primarily what I get out of the structural approach. I really like the connection of people's personal barriers and challenges with larger society. When you are working with people that you are not just blaming them for their own problems, but that you are recognizing there are greater issues that need to be addressed. That is the aspect I really related to. In terms of direct practice I really think it can help you. If you have your client coming to you it could be very easy to sit there and blame them for their own situation. If you have awareness that certain people have more challenges and barriers against them you are going to have more empathy when dealing with that person (Rebecca).

Similarly, Jen suggested that,

In that sense you don't blame solely the individual, because social problems are entrenched within social context. You have to consider their social context. I think you can't just look at the person outside of their social context. it would be futile really (Jen).

In these quotes, participants displayed a strong understanding that materialization is the process of grounding the client's problems in an analysis of their access to resources,

particularly attending to why their access is less privileged than others (Murray and Hick, 2009). This idea is central to structural social work, which views the role of a social worker to include investigating the socio-political and economic context of individual issues (Lundy, 2004).

I began to wonder why it was that this group of students seemed to make sense of structural social work through only one of its central tenets. Structural social work rests upon several core tenets, first laid out as five practices by Maurice Moreau. The School of Social Work at Carleton University promotes these five along with a sixth as laid out by Ben Carniol on their website's 'Other Useful Resources' section. (Article retrieved from School of Social Work website <http://www1.carleton.ca/socialwork/practicum-hub/>). The six core tenets of structural social work taught at Carleton University are: defense of the client with an emphasis on maximizing access to rights and resources, encouragement of a collective consciousness by the individual client for greater collectivization of people experiencing similar oppressions, materialization - whereby clients gain a stronger understanding of their experiences of the primary structures of oppression, increasing the client's power in the worker-client relationship, empowering the client via personal change, and finally, working with clients and other workers to enact political change (Carniol, 1992).

When participants conceptualized how they would practice the structural approach there was significantly less consistency about the other elements of the approach. In particular, the elements that require moving beyond the individual level of practice and engaging in collectivization were spoken of far less often. For example, less than half of the nine students mentioned any collective level of structural social work practice. There were four students who did touch on elements beyond materialization. When they described these

other elements there emerged a series of perspectives that did not always align with the tenets of structural social work as laid out by its prominent theorists. Rebecca demonstrated one form of understanding the structural approach when she described what one does to fight against the oppressive structures that negatively affect one's clients:

It [structural social work] gives you a platform to advocate for change on a larger spectrum, and that's really important to me. That is one aspect I appreciate about the structural approach as opposed to the clinical approach. I find that the clinical approach isn't going to inspire you to do the advocacy piece in the same way the structural approach does. I think it is a very necessary part (Rebecca).

It is interesting to see how Rebecca envisioned moving beyond the traditional clinical role of treating the individual client. Here she explained that you do so by advocating for a better system. This is an important element of structural social work and is something individual social workers do. However, it tends to veer away from the more collectivist oriented aspects of structural social work. It is important to note here that this does not mean the students were not aware or concerned about the collectivist aspects of practice. When trying to pull together responses to my questions there were certain patterns of emphasis upon the individual aspects of practice that increased my interest in the complex terrain that students in the school of social work must navigate. For students it is not an easy negotiation; rather it is full of disconnections and anxieties.

A similar disruption emerges with all but one of the four students who mentioned more than the materialization element of structural social work. Mandeep and Jen both referenced other elements of structural social work when they listed off the elements of structural social work they had recently read in Moreau. Mandeep listed the different elements and then clearly illustrated which is the most valuable tenet for him:

So I always think of the five, Maurice Moreau's five. I don't know if I will have them in order. So there is collective action, consciousness raising, that is always a big one, always trying to get your client some resource management. I think the main part is helping the client see that it is not their fault, whatever the problem is, maybe it's getting Ontario Works, or issues with their families. Its more the systems fault than the fault of the individual (Mandeep).

Here Mandeep demonstrated that, while recognizing a number of aspects of the structural approach, it is the core tenet of materialization that emerged as the most dominant. Jen engaged with the other elements of the structural approach in a similar way to Mandeep. She described how her professor was working to make clear the multifaceted nature of structural social work. She illustrated how she engaged with the view of the professor:

My professor really made it clear, but from what I gather structural social work is a two tiered approach. So there is tier one - dealing with the larger social economic conditions which contribute to people's problems. Then tier two, or I might have said it in the wrong order, but this tier is dealing with the here and now. It's great to go advocate but what are you going to do about the person sleeping on the sidewalk that night (Jen).

When prompted to further deconstruct what those tiers would look like in practice, Jen demonstrated which elements resonated more for her:

So yeah, client empowerment, not blaming the individual, working from strengths, what else... I have read a lot of Maurice Moreau lately (Jen).

After having been recently exposed to the foundational structural social work text by Maurice Moreau, Jen shared the elements that she had committed to memory. All of the elements that she specifically engaged with are in line with materialization and individual levels of practice. What is of particular interest in these quotes is not that they had not memorized all aspects of the structural approach, as this is not a reasonable expectation. When identifying a wider range of practices comprising structural social work, these students persistently prioritize materialization as the tenet that most resonated with them.

There was one student who shared how other of the elements outlined by Moreau and other structural social work theorists informed her understanding of how to engage in the approach. Athena explained how she viewed the different elements of the structural approach to work together:

Cause remember what in structural social work, what you do, whether it is the Carniol paper or some of the Hick papers, they talk about it, the very first step is for people who are so debilitated from being in the political economy, you work with the individual to bring them to a point where they can ally to a group. Then the idea is you bring them into a group situation with others who share their oppressions. First step, you are not alone, second step, it was different before, third step, if it was different before then it can be different in the future (Athena).

She outlined a view where the collective nature of structural social work begins with the materialization of the client's experiences, but then moves to a role where the social worker takes collective action with the client and others to affect change and create a world where such experiences are no longer common.

With only one such example of intersection between materialization and collectivization appearing in this study, I began to think about why participants might have organized their responses primarily in terms of the aspects of the approach that focus on the individual level of practice rather than the collective. As I worked through this data, I began to wonder whether the focus on the materialization aspect of the role of a social worker marks an important directionality in the way that structural social work is adopted. It is possible to read this as one of a number of ways in which neoliberal discourses intersect and reconfigure structural social work in the lives of these students. Such a reading allows us to consider ways in which structural social work discourses are brought together with alternative and often-conflicting discourses. By focusing on the individualized aspects of the structural approach and obscuring the collective aspects, participants seem to be struggling to

find some footing within the disjuncture that exists between structural social work and a neoliberal society. The students incorporate an analysis of oppression into their view of social work practice, but do so in a way that is sustainable within a neoliberal context.

This drawing upon multiple discourses while engaging with an explicitly critical form of social work is not unique to these students. It has been identified in similar studies of social work students, such as Donna Jeffery's research with nine recent graduates of the University of Victoria's Bachelor of Social Work program (Jeffery, 2007). Jeffery also noted an interesting gap in the adoption of her school's critical social work approach of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Jeffery interviewed nine recently graduated BSW students to see how they adapt the Anti-Oppressive Practice from their educational experiences to their practice experiences. What she discovered was that despite these students' strong allegiance and support of Anti-Oppressive Practice, and its critique of the social work tradition of the 'liberal helping subject', their own liberal subjectivity persisted. The students shared fruitful experiences of engaging in power, experience, and identity through a radical critique during their education. Yet, somehow along with these experiences Jeffery found that the liberal subject persisted (Jeffery, 2007).

In interrogating the persistence of the liberal subject within radical social work pedagogies, Jeffery identified that the students in her study take in radical critiques via liberal techniques. Jeffery elaborates on these liberal techniques in the classroom, which she argues are used to maintain the liberal subject:

By focusing on techniques – be these ritual denunciations of privilege, rote recitations of self-location, or homage to authenticity – students fail to take away the larger lesson of anti-oppressive practice: not as a form or code for professional correctness, but a disciplined interrogation of the profession itself (Jeffery, 2007, p. 128).

She goes on to argue that the mode by which students engage in Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) is the undoing of its potential for transformative critique and the failure by students to adopt a truly critical consciousness. She does not blame students for this misreading, and notes that not all students engage with AOP in such a manner. Yet, she does posit that this type of experience of a critical social work education is not unique to these students and this AOP program. Jeffery identifies that the social context of a post-secondary institution is built to support the liberal values of codified knowledge. She identifies this as a major factor in these students' experiences of the radical pedagogy of AOP. She also admits that the rigorous critique within AOP, especially its consequent ambiguity regarding subjectivity, knowledge, and social work practice are deeply challenging positions to hold. In her study she found that though students drew upon liberal techniques and sustained liberal subjectivities, they did not do so without some engagement with AOP:

The collision, then, of radical questions and liberal solutions, of anti-oppressive practice and a world naturally resistant to its critique, produces the new subjectivity that is the substantial focus on this discussion (Jeffery, 2007, p. 128).

She identifies this new subjectivity in her study as the "enlightened helper". Jeffery argues that the "enlightened helper" draws upon multiple and often contradictory discourses of AOP and liberalism. For example, they adopt the AOP discourse of critique of the traditional social work practice, yet do so while also integrating the liberal discourse of professionalization. In essence, what Jeffery is arguing is that instead of transforming their liberal subjectivity by coherently adopting AOP discourses, the students in her study translate elements of AOP discourses into a liberal subjectivity (Jeffery, 2007).

Jeffery's empirical study of recently graduated BSW students offers added context for making sense of the experiences of students in this study. Jeffery identifies a series of liberal translations of radical discourses embedded in the core of the AOP pedagogy of the University of Victoria BSW program. These translations take a critical AOP program and transform it into a 'correct' set of professional techniques, like skills to be applied in the workforce. Jeffery argues that these skills develop in resistance to the ambiguous and uncertain positions requested by critical social work, and instead create the re-formation of the approach into a liberal subjectivity. In the end she posits that her students avoid a re-negotiation of their professional identity by translating their experiences with AOP into a liberal subjectivity which suits the social context of social work practice. Jeffery makes it clear that though she has identified these contradictory discourses emerging amongst the students she interviewed, she does not censure them for their struggle. She identifies the incredible challenge laid forth by AOP and the natural struggle that emerges from such a challenge (Jeffery, 2007). Jeffery's arguments help shed light on the challenge facing the students in my study. To fully integrate an oppositional discourse in a social context dominated by neoliberalism is a serious struggle and one not easily surmounted. Naturally, such a struggle is reflected in the multiple and often contradictory discourses emerging in their experiences with structural social work education.

In this study the tension between structural social work and neoliberalism emerged with some discourses reinforcing a more neoliberal form of professionalism. In particular the discourses of codified knowledge and skills emerged alongside those already identified as reinforcing structural social work. These discourses emerge alongside the structural social work position of a critical stance regarding skills based professionalism. Mullaly argues that

a competency-based view of professionalism leads to greater control of workers and supplants the primary tenet of structural social workers having a capacity for critical social analysis (Mullaly, 2007). Interestingly, the students in this study do not demonstrate adoption of that view of professionalism. Instead, Pilar expressed her desire to see a range of professional skills further developed in the BSW program:

There was definitely some things as I went through the program I would have really liked more of. People want more of the applied skills, and more counseling techniques and things like that. I also would have liked more policy courses. So the structural social work approach and a bit more around professionalism, learning to be more professional. Like practice in writing policy, and communication. I mean when you are in a classroom and just being dictated to the entire time you are not really enhancing your skills to communicate (Pilar).

In this quote Pilar engaged with discourses of professionalism via the expressed need to develop set skills so as to fit into her expectations of professionalism in the field of social work. Pilar is not alone in weaving a discourse of professional skills development into her understanding of social work education. An understanding of the university as a space where one ought to gain knowledge in the form of codified skills emerges in Jen and Abraham's comments about their expectations for the program and where they wished there was a greater focus:

I would have hoped for more [skills], I feel like I have a good theoretical base. But I would have hoped to get more counseling skills. What does that theory look like in practice? I think you do need a solid theory base in which to center your practice, but I would have liked to have more skills. In talking with people who went to college first and then came here, I came straight from high school, I have heard that they learnt so much more in college in terms of skills (Jen).

Abraham reiterated many of Jen's points when he explained:

I want to learn some more specific things to help me in the field, for example trauma counseling. I am hoping to get back into the hospital and to be able to do that, obviously I am going to do my Master's, where I am going to have real

skills to be able to take with me. The BSW is a generalist perspective. In terms of real applicable skills, I feel like I learned more in college (Abraham).

Both Jen and Abraham described the difference between their university experiences and those of students who attend college, the major difference in their view being a focus on skills. They added their voices to the previous quote when they explained they would have preferred to have their BSW provide more of a skills oriented education like that provided in colleges. These quotes highlight the difficult position in which students find themselves – anxious to be able to present to employers as competent and ready to practice. They are acutely aware that employers increasingly view university education as primarily a site for producing flexible workers and they feel the need to position themselves as such. Students are increasingly required to appreciate the progressive aspects of their education as only valuable when paired with the project of producing job-ready workers.

In their article “An Unfinished Reflexive Journey: Social Work Students’ Reflection on their Placement Experiences” authors Lam, Wong, and Leung explored nine BSW students’ reflections upon their practicum experiences. In this qualitative exploration they also discovered the finding that these students regularly expressed anxiety regarding their skill level. These students connected being a competent social worker with the ability to deploy bounded knowledge sets in the form of skills. The authors explain that:

Practice competence was the students’ prime area of concern. It was largely measured by the demonstration of professed skills and the application of classroom knowledge (Lam, Wong, and Leung, p. 99, 2007).

The students in these authors' study demonstrate a similar understanding of skills as the students in both Jeffery's and my own study. They offer a view of skills as the measurement of professional competence. This is instead of a competence the authors posit as being based

upon the improvement of the authentic self when engaging with others or as Mullaly outlines competence as resting in a strong ability for critical social analysis (Lam, Wong, Leung, 2007; Mullaly, 2007).

Dr. Ben Carniol elaborates on the skill building view of post-secondary education in social work. He observed this trend during his years as a Professor of social work at Ryerson University. In his book *Case Critical: Social Services and Social Justice in Canada*, he explains how many of his students also entered the BSW program with explicit desires to help people and make the world a better place. During their education he saw students increasingly connect their desire to help people with a need to acquire practical skills. He explained how his students often express desires for more skills in aspects such as interviewing and assessment (Carniol, 2005). Carniol points to his students' assumption, that if they hold professional skills they will be better social workers. This is cited as a reason why there is such demand for skill developing social work education (Carniol, 2005). Students in critical social work programs, such as those from a structural or AOP approach, become immersed in an understanding that social workers are capable of doing harm. Critical social work programs often explicitly demonstrate how social workers have been agents of social control in our society (Mullaly, 2007). This naturally makes students anxious to develop forms of practice that avoid such harm.

In the case of the nine students in my study, they adopted elements of the structural approach, often citing how it will help them from perpetuating harmful aspects of our society. Yet, the manifestation of this natural anxiety regarding potentially doing harm in social work practice also emerges for the students in Jeffery's and my own study as a search

for the 'correct' skills to help them perform a less oppressive function in our society. This desire for skills or an approach to ensure students avoid reproducing oppression in our society overlooks the underlining challenge of structural social work or other critical approaches. While beyond the scope of this project, these findings leave me wondering what type of pedagogy might effectively disrupt the desire for innocence and instead, produce a social worker who is able to sustain an ongoing discomfort with a fraught practice. The challenge they propose is to develop a new form of practice, rather than to translate elements of critical approaches into the still dominant traditional practices of social work (Jeffery, 2007 and Rossiter, 2001). What is of particular interest to me is how the students in my study navigate this challenge. It is clear that the students in my study find themselves immersed in both perspectives, as is illustrated by the multiple discourses they share regarding structural social work education.

Why are these liberal and neoliberal discourses so prominent, even in spaces carved out by critical forms of social work education? Amy Rossiter provides an argument to explain students' and practitioners' search for an innocent form of social work. She deconstructs this desire for skills in social work education as a resistance to the ambivalence within the history and current practice of the profession. As social workers, Rossiter explains how we end up torn between our good intentions and the inevitable trespasses that occur when living in our world. By trespass, Rossiter refers to Melissa Orlie's view of trespass in our society:

Trespasses originate not in a recalcitrant will, but in the pursuit of living. The fact that trespasses are not always intended does not lessen their weight and efficacy. Trespasses are the harm brought to others by our participation in the governing ways of envisioning and making the world. The trespasser is the "lawful citizen"

who, because well-disposed toward the law, daily becomes the agent of injustice. Trespassers are not the active hands-on instruments of wrongdoing, but the "responsible", well-behaved predictable subjects of social order who reinforce and extend its pattern of rule (Orlie, p. 23, 1997, in Rossiter, 2001, p.3).

In using this quote Rossiter lays out the inevitable potential for trespass when deploying our professional knowledge. In other words, students find themselves in an ambivalent position of potential trespass and their desire to help people and make the world a better place. In this uncomfortable tension, we see the students in this study taking on a form of structural social work they see as helping them navigate the potential harm in social work practice. The students' adoption of structural social work necessarily accommodates the broader neoliberal discourses that shape their daily life and their future work. This sheds light upon the power of both discourses at play in these students' educational experiences.

Rossiter expands Carniol's view that students want more specific skills so they can be better social workers by deconstructing this desire. She identifies the desire to be a better social worker to be entwined with a desire for a good social work practice, in other words reaching for an ability to do social work 'right'. Rossiter argues that this search for skills is then a search for a site of innocence in the uncertain terrain of practice. As a result of Orlie's outline of the potential for trespass existing in all our deployments of knowledge, Rossiter describes how she has shifted her understanding of social work theory from seeking a site of innocence into a search for a practice that helps us assess the ways in which our practice regulates individuals and groups in society, and its latent trespasses. This practice of assessing the potential for trespass can help workers navigate and understand its consequences better. Rossiter lays out an argument identifying this discourse of skills, as the way to avoid trespasses, potentially leading to increased harm via individualization and

further regulation of clients (Rossiter, 2001). Jeffery cautions that a discourse of critical social work can be translated, via a skill building view of social work education, into a set of techniques that end up working to reinforce liberalism rather than create a more socially just alternative (Jeffery, 2007).

What my data illustrates are signs that similar tensions are manifesting within the BSW students in my study. Along with their recognition of the need for a critical understanding of social work practice, a strong discourse of skills based proficiency has emerged amongst these nine students. Rossiter's work helps point to the drawing upon skills based competency as a means of striving to be a successful social worker. What these contradictory discourses illuminate are the diverse pressures acting upon students, directing them to various ways of being a 'good' social worker. Emerging from a commonly held desire to be helpful and avoid doing harm, these students are drawing on diverse discourses they hope will help them achieve this goal. Yet, what Rossiter opens up is the possibility that such a goal inevitably sets us up to fail. She argues that this striving for being a perfect social worker blinds us to the potential harms we are perpetrating in this goal. I find this to be an important argument for shedding some light on the struggle facing the students in this study. The drawing on often contradictory discourses could be rooted in this anxiety to reduce harm. This search offers some explanation for their interest in drawing from multiple perspectives to reach the stated primary goal of becoming a social worker that helps people and makes the world a better place.

Skills in a neoliberal social context also become part of creating a successful self, particularly within a competitive labour market. Bonnie Urciuoli explains how a powerful

discourse around skills manifests itself in how students develop their subjectivity. She outlines how it is often ambiguous how discourses around skills impact the ways in which students imagine themselves, but she argues that they are establishing conceptualizations of subjectivity based in seeing oneself as a set of skills (Urciuoli, 2010). Individualism and skill discourses combine to create pressure on students to bear the responsibility for their own successful integration into the workforce. This pressure is often manifested in the pursuit of credentials to demonstrate one's expertise in the field (Urciuoli, 2010). This analysis connects with the governmentality theory argument that individuals are increasingly bearing the responsibility for their successful integration into the marketplace (Rose, 1996). I can see the discourse of credentialism emerge in these students' reaction to such social pressures. Emerging alongside the view of university as a site of building critical capacity, there is evidence here of understanding its role in ensuring access to the labour market. University degrees help the students do so by providing a valued credential. One student directly stated that she was doing her BSW to get the piece of paper that would open the path into a higher level of employment opportunities than was afforded by her college diploma:

I almost feel like I am buying a piece of paper, hugely. If it wasn't for the way the profession is, with the grading of your paper (degree level). So why I am still here is only because I need that piece of paper. Another major reason to continue is pay grade. In Alberta you can register as a social worker with a diploma, you can be a registered social worker, but you are still stuck in that whole what you need on a piece of paper to practice to get certain jobs. Certain jobs really depend on having these credentials. I feel like it's becoming more of a hierarchy (Mishka).

In a highly competitive job environment where the pressure to dissolve unions and decrease wages is high, these kinds of strategic moves are often required for survival. With increases in the price of housing and food, students quickly realize that they need more credentials in

order to have any economic security. Another student shared their experiences of watching classmates come into the BSW program with the explicit intention of gaining a more highly valued credential than their college diploma. This participant pointed to the pressure students are feeling to upgrade their credentials so as to access better employment opportunities in a highly competitive and hierarchical labour market.

They are coming here to upgrade their credentials, to get a BSW so they can get a RSW and maybe a MSW. So they can advance in the profession (Athena).

One student elaborated on her general feeling around why getting any university degree was important in this social context:

There is this pressure that you have to go to university to get a job. It's hard to get jobs (Pilar).

These students shared the pressure to acquire credentials, skills and other forms of recognized expertise so that they can survive the strictly hierarchical social work field in the province of Ontario.¹ The combination of individualism, skills based professionalism, and credentialism help create an increasing view of subjectivity as a 'life project' in which individuals bear the responsibility of entrepreneurial self-management (Urciuoli, 2010). The pressure that this places on students contradicts the pedagogical environment in which students are taught to understand themselves as privileged and as needing to challenge systems of power. When these discourses collide students are faced with a challenging and complex social context to navigate.

¹ In the province of Ontario, social work is organized into a hierarchy with three clear levels; the Social Service Work Diploma trains you to do some social work but does not allow the individual to register as a social worker. To register as a social worker one must attend one of the university programs, either the BSW or the MSW. Some jobs, such as those in many Hospitals, are reserved only for those with a MSW.

The students in this study explain what they see as a failure of structural social work to provide them with the capacities they will require to successfully navigate the pressures within the workforce:

There is just such a disconnect between being in school and a job in the workforce. We spend a lot of time just 'structural, structural, structural' but a lot of people just want enhancing who they are as a social worker, and they can't do that here (Pilar).

Pilar is not alone in identifying this perception of a disconnect between the more critically oriented education they are receiving at Carleton's School of Social Work and their conception of what they will need when they enter the workforce. Abraham spoke of both himself and a close personal friend's experiences with structural social work pedagogy:

One of my best friends in the program, she is 24, she is like 'I hate this structural shit. I hate it, I want to work with children with Asperger's, how the hell is this going to help me!' In some ways I really get where she is coming from (Abraham).

Here Abraham is identifying this view that what one learns in their BSW ought to be useful for one's specific area of practice, that if knowledge is not directly applicable to practice it seems to lose some of its value in a high paced competitive labour market. As the market place orients towards a competency based model, these students are also pressured to rework their vision of a university education. While they find the critical aspects of the curriculum interesting, they feel an intense pressure to spend their classroom hours on developing skills for practice:

I got here and I am reading about Emmanuel Kant and Karl Marx, and I love it, don't get me wrong, I could just read this stuff for hours, it's really interesting to me, but I don't know if it's really going to help me counsel somebody (Abraham).

Their sense that structural social work is not meeting the demands that will be made of them in the job market opens space for other perspectives on what is necessary to be a successful social worker. Such a view is culminated in an understanding of university education as a means of accessing marketable skills demonstrated by a recognized credential. This role of university education provides them a competitive advantage in a job market, where they will have to communicate their marketability through such credentials. When this desire for skills and credentials is measured against the full principles of structural social work, we see these discourses are at odds with the critical form of practice espoused in the approach.

As the discussion moved forward with these students, it became clear that along with their strong allegiance to structural social work, they are drawing upon multiple and often contradictory discourses to inform their social work education. One student explicitly brought in a discourse of economic rationality as a critique to her own earlier stated position of alignment with structural social work:

There is not much focus on economics. That can sometimes put us at a disadvantage. Now that I am nearly done school I feel like maybe it was a bit skewed, that it was so left wing. It would have been nice to see things from the economic perspective, which I do see now because that is the reality. I really think all social work students should take economics (Pilar).

This student draws upon the neoliberal belief that economic rationalism is the reality and that other perspectives are somehow not practical or realistic. This contrasts rather dramatically with the structural social work view that an understanding of reality requires a much broader base of analysis than economics (Mullaly, 2007). Pilar's own struggle with economic rationalism and her interest in structural social work provide an illustration of the challenges facing the students in this study. They are all engaging in discourses that set extraordinarily high expectations of what they need to achieve to be successful social workers. As they try to

develop the capacity to be good social workers and meet their goals for helping people and changing the world, they draw upon both structural social work and neoliberal discourses. This search for success creates a tension, between their educational setting and the realities of the marketplace they are entering. In the next chapter we will build upon this tension and explore how students anticipate their integration into the field of social work practice.

Discussion:

While Jeffrey (2007) describes the persistent nature of liberal discourses in her AOP social work pedagogy, Shoshana Pollack and Amy Rossiter (2010) outline how those, and neoliberal discourses, are emerging among students engaged in various types of critical forms of social work education, for example feminist social work. In their article "Neoliberalism and the Entrepreneurial Subject", Shoshana Pollack and Amy Rossiter outline an emerging subjectivity where "the individual is an entrepreneurial, self-interested, rational economic being, who is best left to calculate his or her own interests and needs" (Olsen and Peters, 2005 in Pollack and Rossiter, 2010, p. 159). They call this subjectivity the 'entrepreneurial self'. This analysis connects with the governmentality theory concept of the increasingly responsabilized subject (Rose, 1996). These authors outline the central paradox of this entrepreneurial self within critical social work contexts as being the neoliberal rejection of the public good in favour of economic rationality. This subjectivity reinforces a notion of an individualized responsibility rather than a societal responsibility for wellbeing (Pollack and Rossiter, 2010).

Pollack and Rossiter (2010) make the connection between Rose's (1996) illustration of the shift from liberalism to advanced liberalism in our society and the effects of this upon social work and the identity of social workers. Pollack and Rossiter see the reproduction of the entrepreneurial subject within critical social work spaces to have significant consequences for the potential of critical approaches, such as structural social work. The social context under neoliberalism is one where the traditional demands of social justice do not translate well into the new calculative regimes. These demands tend to rely upon the

notion of a public good and that reducing marginalization will help all those in society (Pollack and Rossiter, 2010). Within the paradigm of neoliberal individualism and choice, this call for social justice no longer resonates as it did in the liberal welfare regime. The notion of the public good is eroding and as Rose outlines; it is being replaced by the entrepreneurial subject. The perception of liberty in this new enterprising subjectivity is rooted in discourses which result in a system of self-surveillance (Rose, 1996). Pollack and Rossiter connect this self-surveillance and erosion of the public good to the core mandate of social work:

The resulting underlying message of monitoring implies a distrust that alienates workers whose very choice of work is based on their desire to devote their work lives to the public good (Pollack and Rossiter, 2010, p. 159).

In other words, this emerging subjectivity works to distance social workers from the core tenets of the critical forms of social work such as structural social work. The entrepreneurial subject is one whose identity suits neoliberal governmentality rather than a transformative social democratic project. As a social worker, Pollack and Rossiter argue the entrepreneurial subject manifests itself in a retreat from contributions towards the public good and develops a greater focus on survival in such a context, such as acquiring greater skills and professionalism. What Pollack and Rossiter outline here is both a shift in the social context of social work and a shift in the identity of social workers (Pollack and Rossiter 2010).

In my research I note elements of this new identity emerging within the small group of BSW students I interviewed. I would argue there are elements of this 'entrepreneurial self' in these students' conceptualization of social work. The elements that emerge in the conversations I had with these students are those of a persistently individualized lens, a skill

building view of post-secondary education, and a credentialism that reinforces the narrative of the enterprising self. These elements emerge alongside social democratic conceptualizations of self and society. For example, discourses of social transformation, being an ally and the impact of structures of oppression upon individual's wellbeing. The interweaving of these multiple and often contradictory discourses highlight the challenging terrain that these students are forced to navigate. Students are drawing upon two distinct discourses that are in opposition to each other. I argue that this data is a reflection of the powerful nature of both the structural social work and neoliberal discourses at play in these students' educational experiences. These discourses place the students in a challenging situation of having to navigate this tension. Such a struggle clearly has an impact on the students' conceptualization of structural social work education, and as we will see in the upcoming chapter, its practice.

Chapter 4: Strategies

Findings:

In the previous chapter we explored the educational experiences of this small group of BSW students and discovered that they all identify with the structural social work approach. In identifying their goals of social work practice as aligned with those of structural social work these students relied upon multiple and often contradictory discourses in order to create a vision of structural social work that might be workable in a neoliberal society. These discourses reflect both the educational and social contexts of structural social work and neoliberalism respectively. In this chapter I will explore how these students have a strong understanding of the tension between their educational and social contexts. They recognize the neoliberal dominance of the contexts they will be entering as practicing social workers. As a result of this recognition and its inherent tension with their adopted structural social work approach, these students have identified some areas of specific concern. What these students have identified are a few areas of their education that they feel have not addressed this fundamental tension and their resulting concerns for their future practice. The students themselves have developed some strategies to navigate this tension. I will illustrate these strategies in this chapter and explore some of their possibilities for structural social work.

The students in this study had a comprehensive understanding of the oppositional nature of structural social work in relation to the predominantly neoliberal social contexts they will be entering as practitioners. The strength of neoliberalism was considered a significant challenge to the practice of structural social work by all of the students who

participated in this research. Jen identified her perception that neoliberal views, such as the individualized nature of social problems, are held by a large number of people in the community.

I think society in general is dominated by the 'pull up your bootstraps' view. I am in the school of social work and hang out with other social work students so I hear a lot of the other side. But in society I think it is more towards this bootstraps view. A lot of people think like that. (Jen)

It is apparent that these students believe that the dominance of neoliberalism is in opposition to the way they would like to frame and resolve social issues. Jane joins Jen in recognizing the dominant role of neoliberalism in our society, and expanded on what this means for how she will practice structural social work.

I think it is really odd because the way the structural is set up I think if I understand, is that it is kind of opposing neoliberalism because it's not a conservative viewpoint. It's not individualistic at all. But then the practical experiences and going out there it does have that neoliberal feel to it. My experiences with my practicum have been more focused in that area. So I'm like, there is a disconnect here. It's actually one of my biggest lessons I've learned, how do you apply this need for structural change in a realistic way in neoliberal institutions, which are everywhere in social work. Many agencies don't operate this [neoliberal] way, but they are affected by it because that's the way society is in Canada. It's finding a balance for me. (Jane)

Jane explained she not only feels that neoliberalism is the dominant ideology in Canada, and therefore a powerful force in the field of social work, but also identified how that affects her perception of how one 'realistically' goes about doing structural social work. For Jane, this disconnect becomes a serious external barrier for operationalizing structural social work. This is an important factor for many students' conceptualization of how they will apply the structural approach in their daily practice within a neoliberal social context. Mandeep outlined his concerns about ensuring he accesses as many services and resources as possible

for his client while continuing to work towards the goal of undermining the dominance of neoliberalism.

The thing is to think about how to challenge it [neoliberalism]. I think that's where structural social work comes in. But again, you can't always be as radical as you wish. You have to play the political line to get maximum funding for your clients, and sometimes that means so to speak being more conservative, while advocating when you can. It's a hard line to play, but it's a major issue. But again, I think structural social work can address, and maybe claw back, on those issues. (Mandeep)

While recognizing the tension between structural social work and neoliberalism in social work practice, Mandeep presented the view that the role of structural social work is to address neoliberalism by working towards a more socially just world. Mandeep also joined Jen and Jane in identifying that this tension is going to be a struggle to navigate as a worker committed to their clients, the organization, and their communities on a whole.

R. Forrester-Jones and E. Hatzidimitriadou (2007) looked at whether health and social service workers felt the knowledge they learnt in their education related to their everyday work. They found that many workers valued the theoretical knowledge they gathered during their education, but also found disconnects between it and its' implementation. Some participants in Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study also explained that they felt a tension between wanting to deploy the theories they value and fearing retribution by managers or colleagues for doing so. I see this tension in what Mandeep and Jane have conceptualized for their practice. They identify with the structural approach but are anticipating similar forms of barriers to its implementation. Like the students in Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study, they enjoy the opportunity to learn more and value the theories they are exposed to, but they think practicing such knowledge could lead to dilemmas. The workers in Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study identified a series of

barriers they found to deploying their new theoretical knowledge in practice. They noted that workplace issues such as heavy workloads, minimal time to reflect, finite resources, and limited access to further reading materials in the workplace were all significant barriers to the regular implementation of the theories they were exposed to during their education. Therefore, like the students in this study, the participants of Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study outlined a variety of environmental barriers as a significant challenge to their interest in implementing the theories they value from their educational experience. Interestingly, Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study combined with the data in my own demonstrate that many students or new graduates feel the challenge to implementing the values they learned in their educational experiences comes from external pressures rather than personal disinterest.

The concerns expressed here around what knowledge the students learned and valued in their university education illustrates emerging tensions around the role of the university in our community. Some of these issues facing universities were identified in the literature review, such as the continuing impact of funding cuts (Ollsen and Peters, 2005). Tensions around the neoliberal impact upon the fundamental goals of the university warrant addressing. Many authors have begun to map the impact of neoliberal dominance upon the university. Issues that have been uncovered include what knowledge becomes valued within the university. Urciuoli (2010) sheds light on how neoliberal dominance in society is reorienting students' and their communities' goals for a university education towards applicable capacities within their working lives. The multifaceted pressures laid out by Rose (1996) to carry the responsibility to enterprise oneself feed into a valuing of education for its applicable outcomes in the workforce, rather than a broader democratic project of building

educated citizens. Neoliberal dominance has oriented the university towards an entrepreneurial endeavor that no longer prioritizes the public good of a higher educated citizenry. It is instead often seen as an institution to provide individuals with the opportunity to develop the capacities they need to succeed in the workplace. This tension is present in Forrester-Jones and Hatzidimitriadou's study. It also emerges at times in the students' struggles with structural social work in this study. The tension of what education in social service work should entail and how that relates to the workplace is an interesting theme that the students in this study struggle with as they anticipate entering the workforce with their BSW. This struggle reflects the overall shift in the role of universities in our society.

As these students reflected upon the tensions between their adopted structural social work practice and the neoliberal social context, they began to develop concerns about how best to address this tension. Much of these concerns demonstrated the previously mentioned neoliberal reorientation of the purpose of university education. We see here the rooting of their concerns in the applicability of the knowledge they have been introduced to. Though the students in this study shared their valuing of the inclusion of the structural approach in their education, they also identified some areas that emerged as potential gaps in light of their concerns about the social context of practice. The central gap identified by the students in this study was the ambiguous relationship between the theories they were exposed to in the classroom and their conception of the 'realities' of practice. In other words, their unease is rooted in the relationship between structural social work theory and practice. For example, Mishka outlined how she understood that structural social work can be practiced in the realm of policy, but often lose this comprehension of how to practice it in direct intervention:

There needs to be more of a connection. Especially if you are going to include structural social work, because it seems to be a huge disconnect between the fact that structural social work impacts individual counseling. More policy ones [classes] attempt to do that. There is still a disconnect between if you are counseling people individually and that things that we are teaching you right now are important. There was some way this [structural social work] was not transferring to that. It was just like these things are important on a structural level, and then you go to counsel people it just disappears. (Mishka)

Here Mishka identified a crucial barrier to a full conceptualization of how she will utilize the structural approach in her practice. Despite having a sense of value for the approach and its alignment with her intentions for social work practice, she found that she is unable to conceive how she will integrate structural social work into specific elements of her practice, such as counseling. She liked what she was being taught in the classroom, but struggled to make the connections between the structural social work of her classroom and her vision of direct intervention practice. Rebecca expanded on this worry about the disconnect between the theory of structural social work they are learning in the classroom and her conceptualization of how to practice it in the field:

There is a lot of focus on doing that advocacy and change piece. I think it does overwhelm, the 'okay, how am I actually going to do that in my practice'. So I don't think there is as much discussion as there could be or should be about how you are going to do that. It doesn't discuss the challenges in our current society against doing that form of change, because it is a very realistic thing about running an agency and trying to advocate for change; you could lose your funding. It's a very realistic issue. It's a naïve thing to say, we just need to go out and advocate for change. (Rebecca)

Rebecca outlined a level of frustration with not getting enough information on how to navigate the tension between the desire to change the world and the need to practice within its realities. She identified being overwhelmed by the demands of structural social work in such an oppositional social context. She identifies a desire to have greater discussions around navigating this serious tension. Again, we see the focus representing this neoliberal trend of

an orientation of education towards informing workplace success. Rebecca went on to express her fear of being seen as naive, of losing funding, and of being weighed down by the practice of structural social work. Rebecca further elaborated her fears around using the structural approach in her day-to-day practice:

Even within the agency, as a person, how am I going to advocate for that when we are in a society where people who do that kind of thing get turfed. So if I am a social worker and I am in an agency where I disagree with certain policies, and I go against those policies that I think are disempowering the clients I am working with, what's to say they are not going to fire me. There are a lot of real world issues we could get into a greater discussion around because it does bring up a lot of ethical implications of how you can advocate for change when you have so many limitations and challenges yourself. I think that is an issue. (Rebecca)

In this quote Rebecca added her fears of personal retribution for incorporating the structural approach into her practice. Finally, Rebecca identified the overarching fear of practicing ethically in such an ambivalent position between structural social work and the dominance of neoliberalism. She further reinforced her desire to have these issues addressed more directly in her classroom. Jen also expressed her frustration and fears in not being able to conceptualize how to use structural social work in quotidian practice:

So someone is poor and their social conditions have created that, but okay, what do we do from here. Yes we know it's a problem and we'll go advocate about that. But what about in the here and now, the frontline stuff, which is often what social work looks like. Since there isn't a specific model for it, I don't actually know what to do. (Jen)

In explaining her lack of understanding around how to implement the structural approach in frontline practice, Jen points directly to this disconnect between its theory and its daily practice. She highlights how her concern with understanding theory is how it is applied in her social work practice. This is an interesting orientation of theory. Hera reinforced this struggle to conceptualize the frontline direct intervention practice of structural social work:

I am currently doing a case study for one of my projects and I am sitting there and I read every single piece of literature around structural social work available in the library, and there is not a lot, which is why I could do it in one day. But I am sitting there and I get it, I get structural social work, I get what it is trying to do, I get what its purpose is, but there is still some part of me that does not understand how to link the person, face to face, and have a distinction between interviewing skills and clinical skills vs. structural social work skills. (Hera)

Hera's confidence in understanding the nature of structural social work is not matched by the confidence to practice it. This is a significant disconnect between its theory and practice clearly experienced by many of the students in this study. Hera also points out her view that the limited amount of structural social work literature at her disposal fails to provide the insight she is looking for. These quotes point to some possible explanations of these students concerns around practicing structural social work. We see evidence of apprehension with regards to both external barriers and internal uncertainty when it comes to implementing their adopted approach of structural social work. As for external barriers, these students primarily note the issue of neoliberal dominance, and its operationalization in their workplace. They focus on the tension this will create between their desire to oppose neoliberalism and their desire to serve the best interests of their clients and their organization. These concerns then led to a reflection upon what kinds of preparation they have had in their education for addressing such tensions. Here we see evidence of internal barriers, such as a lack of confidence in their understanding of the 'nuts and bolts' of the approach. The students elaborate further fears of missing elements of the approach necessary to practice in these contentious contexts. Finally, we see an interesting orientation around the role of theory. Theory is engaged with by these students as a tool to assist them in developing a structural social work practice. There was not much mentioned in terms of how structural social work theory has value as a means to re-evaluate the world around them or their role within it. This

could be seen as a trend in line with neoliberal influences upon universities, in framing the university as a space for job preparation and skill development rather than a broader democratic project of education for the public good.

Reinforcing these students fears that the 'realities' of practice will lead to a struggle between their adopted structural social work and the dominant culture of their workplace is a similar study done by Fiona McSweeney (2012). In McSweeney's study, she examined how 15 social care students engaged with the tension between their educational experiences and the culture of practice. She noted that these students often draw upon various sources to address this challenge of relating what they have learned to how they will practice. In her study she notes the students drawing upon socially and pedagogically informed discourses. McSweeney points to the possibilities of a disconnect between theory and practice when there are multiple sources of theory, in her case those presented in the classroom and those dominant in society. In her study she found a spectrum of how much students drew from the classroom and how much from their culture and society. On one end of the spectrum she found that twenty percent of her participants identified theories derived from their education to be irrelevant to actual social care practice. For example one of the students in her study felt theories were not important for the work:

I've always found theories used as an excuse. Recently when one client of mine was warned about slamming doors and abusing people and I sat and listened in disbelief hearing four different views. [...] All we seem to be doing is making excuses for him (Student in McSweeney, 2012, p. 372).

In the case of this student, the role of theory in practice appears to be rejected. The majority of McSweeney's participants, fifty-three percent of those asked, expressed a position of interest in theory but struggle to find how best to utilize it. McSweeney's study therefore

identifies a similar anticipation of disconnect between theory and practice as found amongst the students in this study. Her study also points to the same conceptualization of theory as a tool for informing direct practice; instead of also having a significant role in broader ontological positioning of practice within our world. The students in hers and my studies have not yet entered the workforce, but are already apprehensive about how to apply certain theories they have been exposed to in their studies. They both feel that the theories are valuable, but struggle to think of how they will integrate them into the challenging social context.

Jennifer Poole (2010) also explores students' fears about practicing critical approaches to social work, in the case of her study the Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) framework, in today's social context. She engages in a discussion with several BSW students who recently graduated from a critical social work program at Ryerson University. She found many discourses to reinforce the concerns anticipated by the students in my own and McSweeney's study. Poole asked what these students hold on to from their critical social work education. In other words, what Poole investigates in her study, is how this stance sits with former BSW students once they enter into the workforce. She found that these students, similar to the findings of my own study, value critical social work practices. The new graduates she met with also identified a series of challenges to actually doing these practices in their social work. They found it difficult to hold on to their critical approach due a variety of fears. They explain these fears of practicing critical social work to be informed by: a fear of being perceived as naive, concern of being alone in identifying oppressive actions, and a sense of instability in the job market forcing them relinquish more critical forms of practice. One of her students identified a serious challenge in practicing a form of critical social work

when she stated "AOP taught me to fight however it did not give me the first aid kit with which to clean my wounds once I have been boxed to the ground" (Student in Poole, 2010, p. 6). Poole admits that she would like to improve the pedagogy of critical social work to provide both the "boxing gloves" and the first aid supplies to address these fears and to help them maintain their critical forms of social work practice after graduation. She expresses her view that there is no set way to 'do' critical social work practice to impart to these students. Yet, in the collection of texts, practices, and challenges she hopes to continue upon the unfinished tradition to make it resonate with these students. She hopes to address their fears of practice after they have left the classroom (Poole, 2010). Poole therefore addresses the important issue that perhaps there have been areas of critical social work approaches, such as 'first aid kits' for the challenge of practice, that still need further developing. It is clear from the perspective of the students in this study that they would welcome such developments to assist them in conceptualizing how to translate structural social work into a more clear vision of practice.

T. Wilson (2008) further explores the student perspective of a BSW degree in the article "Reflecting on the Contradictions: Governmentality in Social Work Education and Community Practice". Wilson shares about having just graduated from a critical social work bachelor's degree and reflects upon the experience. One of the central reflections that emerge in the article is the sense that the author and fellow students felt a sense of confusion, disillusionment, and even at times contradiction between their practicum experiences and the pedagogical ideals presented in the classroom. One of the observations that fuels this sense of contradiction is what Wilson considers to be the superficial level of engagement with the progressive and critical elements of their education (Wilson, 2008). This level of engagement

leaves a gap in Wilson's view between the classroom ideals and the current context of practice. Wilson explains that this gap and its resulting fragmented adoption of critical social work is an issue of concern when reflecting upon their critical social work education. Wilson reinforces the central challenge felt by her colleagues and the students in my study - that of the challenge in the "implementation of emancipatory philosophy (of any stripe) within a severely constrained job" (Wilson, 2008, p. 196). Along with Poole, Wilson points to the need for further development of critical social work education to assist students in addressing this challenge (Wilson, 2008).

What is interesting to explore is what students do to navigate their fears about the social context and personal preparedness as laid out above, particularly given the tools they have been exposed to by their specific form of critical social work education. In other words, what strategies do they intend to deploy to survive the challenge presented by practicing structural social work in an increasingly neoliberal era? In the previous quotes outlined by Mandeep and Jane, describing the challenges presented for structural social work by the dominance of neoliberalism, they point to a common strategy to engage in such a struggle. They each outline the need to be flexible in their application of structural social work. Mandeep puts it as "playing the political line", where he posits a strategy of melding one's use of structural social work with an more conservative approach to be able to navigate some of the more precarious situations at work. He gave an example of when one would employ such an alternative approach when he explained the need to garner as many resources as possible for the clients. Jane illustrated a similar strategy in her previous quote when she posited her belief that one needs to find a balance engagement in structural change and surviving a predominantly neoliberal society. Jen provides a similar strategy:

So in certain situations I would think, do you know what, structural social work out the window for this one. At other times I think you can't just look at the person outside of their social context, it would be futile really. I do value it has a spot within the realm of social work practice. (Jen)

Jen made it clear that she also believes there needs to be some flexibility in the application of structural social work if one is going to attend to the diverse needs of one's clients. Many of the students in this study did not describe any such strategies, reinforcing their own claim that they need more class time for developing a better understanding of how they can engage with the challenges presented by their social context.

Discussion:

What is particularly interesting about these initial strategies beginning to be developed by these students is their relationship to those laid out by structural social work theorists. Structural social work theorists, such as Murray and Hick (2009), point to these every day moments of challenge as crucial sites for structural social work practice. Pointing to the central tenet that the personal is political, they see it as crucial that structural social work be implemented both within and outside these institutions. In other words, they see the tension between neoliberalism and structural social work as opening the possibility for engaging the critical nature of the approach. Bob Mullaly recognizes that there are many serious challenges to implementing structural social work, particularly the contradiction between its values and those of neoliberalism. He also sees the fears expressed by many students as an entirely natural response to the challenge of working within or outside of the system for social transformation. Yet, Mullaly points to those spaces as being logical for social workers to struggle for social transformation, by helping to "erode oppressive structures and practices starting within its own arena for struggle - the social agency" (Mullaly, 2007, p. 320). He recognizes that the vast majority of social workers will end up working in social agencies where there is a bureaucratic reality that pressures workers to conform and can often result in new graduates losing their 'idealism'. There are a myriad of constraints upon workers within the system. Proponents of structural social work, such as Mullaly, argue that it is precisely in these spaces that structural social work is necessary. He argues that with sensitivity to the nature of each specific workplace, it is possible for structural social workers to take on intra-organizational struggles (Mullaly, 2007). As for

specific strategies he points to the Code of Ethics for Canadian social workers as a source of empowerment for such work. In the Code of Ethics the primary obligation of all social workers is clearly towards the client, rather than to the agency. He argues that in this obligation structural social work finds some space to work for the expansion of the social care elements of a social agency. He outlines a few strategies for doing so in his book *The New Structural Social Work*, such as democratizing the agency. Fundamentally, Mullaly makes it clear that change is a slow process, and therefore workers must have realistic expectations for the results of their structural approach. Though it is time consuming, he argues it is nonetheless crucial to keep the movement towards a more socially just system (Mullaly, 2007).

Kylie Aggias (2010) produced a study of both a cohort of students about to graduate and a group of nine recently graduated BSW students. Her study helps illustrate similar concerns expressed by upper year BSW students as well as some strategies that recent graduates have developed to respond to the previously identified tensions. Some major themes that emerge in her qualitative study with these students are: their fears about entering into the workforce, that once they did enter the workforce they often downplayed their values fostered in their BSW program so they could better fit into the working environment, and their strong desire to be recognized as a professional in work spaces (Aggias, 2010). The students in Aggias's research all studied social work under what is referred to as the Newcastle Model. This is an approach to social work practice developed at the University of Newcastle in Australia, and is rooted in a social justice framework similar to structural social work. The upper year BSW students in Aggias's study express a perception that they will face value and ethical differences with established social workers when they enter the field,

particularly as a result of their social justice framework. This fear is one not directly expressed by the students in my study, but one that is embedded in the general concern of a tension between neoliberal workplaces and their structural approach. Interestingly, this perception was found to exist in the experiences of the recent graduates. As a result of these differences, the students in Agglias's study explain their strategy of tempering their values with the need for workplace harmony. For example one of her students expressed:

I don't think probably I'd be as readily eager to challenge the organization so much. I just think it would be harder as a new grad to do your job well if you are not accepted by the organization (Social work student in Agglias, 2010, p. 351).

Agglias's research explored studies with similar findings for nurses as well. She found that many new graduates feel the need to balance their views around ethical practice with their need to be accepted into the workplace. As Agglias put it "fitting into the workplace requires a compromise between their ideals and the realities of the practice context" (Agglias, 2010, p. 351). This finding of Agglias is in line with the students in my study's expression of a need to balance their structural social work approach with the realities of the organizational environment. One of the ways Agglias's students worked to ensure they fit in was to protect and build upon their professional status in the workplace. Therefore, one of the motivations to keep their ethical and ideological differences quiet in the workplace was to ensure their peers consider them competent professionals. This consistently emerged in Agglias's study as a central concern for both the upper year BSW students and the new graduates. These concerns strongly mirror many of the desires outlined in chapter three of this study, those of desiring more skills and reputable credentials to help establish their professional status (Agglias, 2010).

The students in this study appear to be developing strategies that keep open a significant amount of space for the continued practice of structural social work. What is notable is how few students in my study have engaged in this area, three of the nine in total. Also, I think it is important to note that not all strategies, such as those presented by some students in Aggalias's study, reinforce the critical nature of approaches such as structural social work. Some of the strategies laid out in her study involved the downplaying of the workers' values and a desire not to challenge the workplace, even if there are issues curtailing the implementation of the workers' values and approach. Therefore, it is important to note that some strategies may reinforce the role of structural social work, whereas others may work to alienate the approach from the day to day work. Though there are some strategies laid out in structural social work literature, there appears to be a need for continued engagement. Due to the identified need by these students for greater preparedness for entering such a challenging social context of practice, I would argue that this area of strategies could be further explored. Perhaps it could be one of the areas as identified by Poole and Wilson in need of further development of critical social work.

The students in this study, and several examples from the other empirical studies introduced in this section, offer an interesting view of the role of theory social work practice. As this is an exploratory study focusing on the students understanding of their educational experiences, I have focused on what they have identified as key concerns. A concern that they did not identify, but that emerged from their explanation of structural social work theory is what the role of theory is in university education. This research cannot take this theory as a central focus, but it is crucial to identify it as a potential for continued research. The students in this study demonstrate a focus on the role of theory as a tool to assist them in their practice

of social work. This is an important role for theory, but it is not its only role. Many of the theorists engaged in this research (for example, Urciuoli, 2010; Rose, 1996; Pollack and Rossiter, 2010) point to the dominance of neoliberalism as having an impact on how students are envisioning theory in their university education. What they point to is a shift in university education where the more philosophical elements are losing value in a neoliberal social context. Instead, education in the university becomes more focused on applicability than on broad ontological exploration. The focus of the university as a public good educating citizens has been impacted by neoliberalism. The impact outlined in the literature review of this project includes, but is not limited to, the commercialization of research, the undermining of collegial and democratic governance, privatization of funding, and an increasing debt burdens for students. Though the students did not elaborate their concerns with any of these issues, they have an impact on the universities role in our community. What this study highlights is that these shifts are experienced by this small group of students. The purpose of a BSW degree and the knowledge engaged within it is influenced by the dominance of neoliberalism. Further research would be valuable in deconstructing students' conceptions around university education as a whole and the possibilities for utilizing theory in all aspects of their lives. As this is a small exploratory study, I focused on these students conception of structural social work theory and their use of it in their future practice.

Chapter 5: Conclusion - Trespasses

This study has no intention of delving into a debate around whether structural social work is a good or bad approach for these students to adhere to. Rather, this study is based on the premise that structural social work is the chosen approach of the School of Social Work at Carleton University. As such, this research explores how this chosen approach of structural social work is being experienced by a small group of BSW students, particularly in light of the increasingly neoliberal social context of these students' education. To explore the experience of learning structural social work I focused on a small group of nine students and their lived experiences while at Carleton University. By drawing upon the philosophical traditions of critical social work and governmentality, I analyzed these students' experiences. Each theoretical perspective helps bring to light different and important elements in these students' diverse discourses. Critical social work brought to light the ethical dilemmas facing social workers, such as the inevitability of trespass and how to work with one's clients as an ally. Governmentality theory offered insight into other pressures we face as social workers. It illustrates the pressure we experience around feeling individually responsible for our success in a highly competitive and hierarchical labour market. Each of these perspectives has helped me understand the meaning of the students' experiences they imparted.

My main finding is that these students are reproducing multiple and often contradictory discourses around social work practice. The discourses reproduced by these students around social work practice in today's social context include a strong allegiance to the structural approach advocated by the School of Social Work. These students explain their intentions to practice structural social work and their valuing of its role in their education.

There is a significant amount of alignment between these students' beliefs and values around the purpose of social work and those laid out in the structural approach. The fundamental desires to help people and make the world a better place are central both to these students and to the mission of structural social work. In this study, one can see possibilities for the practice of structural social work in these students future.

Yet, along with such strong alignment between these students' goals and values and those of structural social work there emerges a struggle around its inclusion for these students. This struggle is rooted in the tension between the pedagogical discourses of structural social work and discourses of neoliberalism. The tension between these two discourses creates a complex and challenging context for these students to try and develop a social work practice. They are navigating a slippery terrain. The first significant expression of this struggle rests within these students' conceptualization of structural social work. The majority of the students in this study expressed materialization as the tenet of structural social work that most resonated with them. When pressed to further explain their understanding of structural social work, only one student engaged significantly with the more collective aspects of the approach. When reading this conceptualization of structural social work from critical social work and governmentality theories perspectives, one could argue this conceptualization reflects the tension between their pedagogical and environmental discourses. In other words, these students understanding of structural social work is being filtered through multiple lenses therefore opening space for multiple discourses to be at play simultaneously. The result of this appears to be evidence of the significance of the tension between neoliberalism and structural social work. We see these students navigating this tension by working to make space for structural social work, but doing so within a context

dominated by neoliberalism. The students in this study demonstrate an interesting melding of powerful discourses at play in their lives. The result of such a melding is in many ways structural social work sustainable in a neoliberal context.

Further evidence of this bringing together of structural social work with neoliberalism can be found in the students' engagement with discourses around a skills based professionalism for social work and a credentialist perspective of university education. The majority of students in this study explained their desire for a greater emphasis on skills during their university education. Some students explained that they wish their degree would reflect more the education provided in a college program. Many students in this study also express a concern that their education is not aligned with the needs of the job market, for example not having enough specific transferable skills. These students fear that the theoretical elements of their education do not help them become competitive in the job market. Many of these students believe if their degree were to represent knowledge of a set of professional skills this would be of greater competitive advantage. They feel that a credential that more explicitly represents such skills will assist them in accessing good jobs, and while in those jobs will help them demonstrate their professional competence to their peers.

This vision of university education, when critically engaged with from a critical social work and governmentality theory perspective, appears to reflect emerging neoliberal discourses around a subjectivity rooted in a marketable set of skills. Governmentality theory helps interrogate the shifting of the university in a neoliberal social context. These shifts impact the university beyond funding cuts and include impacts such as its role in our society.

The role of the university has altered, from one of public good to a location for the improvement of our individual capacity to succeed in the labour market (Urciuoli, 2010).

This shift has an impact on the valuing of certain elements of the knowledge engaged with in the university, for example theory. In this project the students' valuing of theory is an interesting example of this shift. There is potential in this exploratory example to elicit further research on the changing role of theory in our current university system. The students in this study demonstrate an understanding of the pressure to garner competitive credentials so one can appropriately communicate the holding of skill sets in the labour market. Therefore, along with expressing their alignment with structural social work, these students are also recognizing many of the forces at play in their social context. They are navigating these by attempting to engage in both structural social work and neoliberalism.

The students in this study demonstrate a strong understanding of the challenges facing them as structural social workers in practice. They recognize the dominance of neoliberalism and the tension it creates between their approach and the context of practice. As a result, these students begin to develop ways to survive this tension. Some of them have even started thinking through strategies to help them navigate this tension. These students sense that if they are to explicitly engage the political nature of structural social work they could run into serious barriers and potentially experience retribution from employers and co-workers. These students demonstrate that they are seriously reflecting upon the challenges facing them in structural social work practice. As a result of these reflections they have pointed to some areas they feel would help them improve their navigating of this context. They noted the need for greater development in their educational experiences of the relationship between theory and practice, particularly with regards to the current social context.

Structural social work is taken up by these students in diverse and often contradictory ways, but so too is neoliberalism. This sheds light on the variegated and multiple forms of neoliberalism in our society as well as the forms of opposition to it. This is an important element to bring into focus, as often it feels like because neoliberalism is dominant it is also coherent. In the case of this small group of social work students we can see that this is not the case. As such, there are interesting possibilities in the multiple and contradictory discourses for both structural social work and neoliberalism.

I consistently incorporated critical social work and governmentality theories to analyze this data. These two sets of theories helped me make sense of the interview data. Critical social work assisted me in deconstructing these students' struggles with adopting a form of social work practice. A critical social work analysis also assisted me in bringing to light these students' struggles with uncertainty and trespass within the field of structural social work. Theorists such as Leonard (2001) and Carniol (1992) helped illustrate the role of uncertainty in social work students' conception of their educational experiences. The more students strive for certainty the more attractive elements of professionalism like neutral and transferable skills become to satisfy such desires. Fook (2002) explores how discourses around bounded sets of knowledge further support this discourse of a skills-based proficiency. An appetite develops from these perspectives on knowledge for a credential to demonstrate proficiency in these skills. Critical social work theorists helped me deconstruct the underlying desires for such trends amongst these nine students.

Rossiter (2000) further elaborates an analysis of the underlying struggles at play for students who seek certainty through some of the strategies mentioned above. She identifies

this reach for certainty to stem from the desire to avoid doing harm in one's practice. In other words, she points to students' search for an innocent form of social work practice to support these discourses. If one has clear sets of knowledge in the form of skills and one performs them well, then one could reasonably assume they would not do harm in their work. They would be doing social work 'right'. Rossiter counters such a desire as being unrealistic and potentially harmful. In the case of the students in this study their search for an innocent form of social work practice involves creatively navigating their intended practice and their social context. In the findings of this research paradoxes emerge when such an attempt to find innocent practice is engaged. This finding reinforces Rossiter's concern that this search for innocent practice still inevitably leads to trespass. This finding also points to the potential that these paradoxes are embedded in critical social work approaches like structural social work, and as a result may set students up in these tensions. I would argue there is a need for further research into the tenets of structural social work and its political program to decipher if such a possibility is evidenced.

Finally, in this research I followed a form of critical social work theory that incorporates a weak postmodernism into its tools for analysis. As a result, I have drawn on governmentality theory to help bring in this other analytical tool. I found governmentality theory to be particularly useful in exploring the paradoxes and contradictory discourses expressed by these students. When I was trying to understand why these particular contradictions emerged, governmentality theory helped bring to light the potential role of neoliberal discourses alongside those of structural social work. It assisted me to understand the students need for a strategy to navigate two different and powerful discourses. The form their strategies for survival took was flexibility with regards to the application of structural

social work. The approach informs their stance to social work, but it is taken as a practice that can be implemented creatively to help them manage the challenging context of practice.

In the case of this study the unfinished nature of integrating structural social work knowledge by these students opens the possibility for continued praxis and reflexivity. Though knowledge is an unfinished endeavor, just as human experience is, it is important to note the possibilities for continued growth (Alcoff, 2000). Paradox is a human experience, especially in a world deeply influenced by oppositional discourses such as those in the environment of these students. Yet, with such an understanding of where these students' experiences are coming from, it is important to engage with some ways we can grow upon this dynamic nature of experience and build a stronger structural approach. This engagement is an important site of future research. For example, the students' interest in developing a better understanding of the relationship between theory and practice could be a fascinating opportunity for further research. These students have clearly demonstrated their creative and intellectual potential to engage in this struggle. Therefore, I would argue they hold the potential for a continued reworking of their approach that can more fully incorporate their stated intentions to inform their work with the structural social work approach.

Like these students, I continue to work through my intentions to practice structural social work. I started this project with a desire to figure out how to make it easier for the students in Carleton's School of Social Work to fit into the structural approach. As I worked on this project, I discovered that such a desire was problematic. I was so certain I had found the 'right' way to do social work; there was little space left for other views or practices. This was a harm in embedded in my goal. In my initial desire I was already failing to be the

empathetic researcher and social worker I was striving for. My desire to find the 'right' way overshadowed my desire to be an ally. I was challenged by these students to look beyond this narrow perspective. These students were working on this project of trying to find ways to make the structural social approach work for them. I was inspired by their efforts and found my perspective shifting. Along with the students in this study I also leave my degree with some fear around how to do structural social work. I am fundamentally unsure of how it is going to be incorporated. Though, I am getting to a place where I don't mind being unsure. I realize now my earlier certainty was problematic. Perhaps this new position will offer opportunities alongside its challenges.

Post-Script:

In the end, this thesis does not look like it was intended in the beginning. The discrepancies between how the project was initially intended and how, in the end, it reads may be a bit disorienting for readers. In this postscript, I reflect a bit on this journey so as to provide some final context for the winding road that is reflected in the discursive turns of this work.

Firstly, I would like to explain a bit about how I came to the Master's of Social Work program at Carleton. I was working for a couple of years as a contractor in the civil service and decided I wanted to return to university for a master's degree. When choosing a program I was looking for something that would help me hone my critical thinking skills while building greater capacity to work for social change. After agonizing over the choice between the MSW and a MA in Women's Studies, I settled on the MSW. I had read a bit about the structural approach and was inspired by the ideas so chose Carleton University where the school of social work is embedded in this approach to social work.

This had a significant impact on how I came to engage with the structural approach, particularly during the early years of my degree. I came to my masters in many ways with my mind made up about structural social work. I felt quite sure what I needed to do. I had to learn all about structural social work and then go out there and get to it! I had it all figured out. Yet, in the class discussions and in social situations outside the classroom I found myself a bit frustrated when friends of similar views about the need to change the world didn't have the same buy in to the structural approach. My certainty left little room to understand why my colleagues would prefer not to engage the structural approach to social work. It was my

confusion about this situation that became the impetus of my thesis. I wanted to find out why students were not adopting structural social work, so that I could 'fix' it.

One of my central goals in this project was to better communicate structural social work so that more people would adopt it. My certainty only left space to conceptualize the disconnect between many students and the approach as having to rest in the mode of communication, rather than in any other potential issues. As this project moved forward the process of this research effectively challenged the position of certainty I held early on. As I spent more time with the creative, committed, and intellectually challenging perspectives and experiences of the students in this study, my certainty unravelled.

My drive towards a coherent structural social work was halted by the discovery of my own struggles with structural social work. My experience of this research project began to show significant parallels with the experiences of the student interviewees. Just as the students started many interviews by sharing their alignment with structural social work, I continued in this project to find myself drawn to the approach as a valuable approach for practicing social work. When the students began to explore some of the tensions they had experienced, in particular in the challenges posed by an increasingly neoliberal society, I started to reconsider my original impetus for this project. I began to reflect on my early understanding of why some students had concerns with structural social work. In these reflections I realized that there was more going on than an issue of communication. Many of the contradictions and paradoxes shared by these students were ones I found I was also experiencing. For example, the position of not wishing to do harm in one's practice was a goal I also held. Yet I held it while establishing a rigid and inflexible perspective on how to

practice social work. This paradox here became apparent to me in this process. Some of the students in this research began to develop strategies to deal with paradoxes and tensions within their social context. The major theme of these strategies was flexibility. These themes challenged my certainty around structural social work as the roadmap of the 'right' way to do social work. I was forced to reckon with the inflexibility and certainty I had constructed early in my experiences with structural social work. The process of this research opened up the possibility of greater flexibility in one's approach. This allowed me to begin to consider the value of a less rigid and certain adoption of structural social work.

The students in this study also forced me to recognize the unfinished nature of knowledge. That, like them, I am still trying to work a lot of this out and that is okay. Not having it all figured out is actually an opportunity as it helps break down the certainty that worked as a barrier between myself and other people's experiences early on in this study. Uncertainty creates a space where I can value a continued dialogue about the challenges of trying to help people and make the world a better place, rather than just search for some final answer to this challenge. I see this project as a step in that dialogue, rather than any final answer to the questions and concerns that inspired it.

In the end I joined the students in this study in a reflection around my allegiance to structural social work, the challenges presented by neoliberal dominance in our society, and an effort to develop new and dynamic strategies that allow me to more fruitfully engage structural social work as my practice. The process of this research has been one of the most fruitful learning experiences of my academic work. The surprising level of change and reflection it warranted in me has even made me look forward to this defence. If the

challenges presented up to this point have been such an exciting opportunity for reflection and growth, I expect today will be another significant step. Therefore I want to say that I really appreciate the work you have all contributed to my thesis and look forward your questions and critiques. I hope to address them as best as I can and continue to draw new insights into this process.

Appendix A:

Research Instrument

Structural social work:

How long have you been in the Bachelor of Social Work program here at Carleton?

Have you learnt structural social work in any of your classes?

What can you tell me about what you have learnt regarding structural social work?

What has been your reaction to these concepts?

Did you learn anything about social transformation or social change in your classes?

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding structural social work?

Post-Secondary Education in Social Work:

Why did you choose to do a BSW?

What do you want to learn but have yet to be exposed to in your BSW?

Social work in today's social context:

Do you see social work as a profession?

What do you think makes social work a profession? Or not?

Do you see those aspects reflected in your social work university education?

Do you think, and if so how, structural social work fits our current social context?

Neoliberalism:

Have you ever heard of the term neoliberalism? If so, what does it mean to you? (If not, offer explanation, and ask them what they think about it?)

Do you, and if so how, think neoliberalism affects your university education?

How do you see neoliberalism affecting your social work practice?

Do you think your social work practice will be political or objective? (be clear as to what political and objective mean in this study. Political = taking a particular position on issues

based on values and beliefs, such as social justice. Objective: remaining neutral in social work practice)

Appendix B:

Ethics clearance

From: **Leslie_MacdonaldHicks** (leslie_macdonald-hicks@carleton.ca)
 Sent: January-26-11 3:27:54 PM
 To: Elizabeth Whyte (ewhyte@connect.carleton.ca)
 Cc: Sarah_Todd (SarahTodd@Cunet.Carleton.Ca)
 Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for the submission of your ethics protocol form and revisions. Your ethics protocol has been cleared. Your clearance is in place until May 31, 2011. It may be renewed upon submission of the Annual Status Report.

I will prepare your ethics clearance form today and it may be picked up from my office located at 510B Tory. If you are unable to pick up the form please provide a mailing address so that it can be sent to you.

Please note that all researchers are governed by the following conditions:

Annual Status Report: You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

Changes to the project: Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

Adverse events: Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

Suspension or termination of clearance: Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and the Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Leslie

Leslie J. MacDonald-Hicks
 Research Ethics Board Coordinator
 Carleton University
 510B Tory Building
 1125 Colonel By Drive
 Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6
 Tel: 613-520-2517
 Fax: 613-520-2521

This email communication, including all attachments, may contain private, proprietary, privileged and/or confidential information and subject to copyright. It is intended only for the person to whom it is addressed. Any unauthorized use, copying or distribution of the contents of this email is strictly prohibited. Please delete this email and notify the sender immediately, if you are not the intended recipient, and have received it in error.

Appendix C:

• **Closure of ethics file**

From: **Leslie_MacdonaldHicks** (leslie_macdonald-hicks@carleton.ca)

Sent: May-11-11 2:07:50 PM

To: Elizabeth Whyte (ewhyte@connect.carleton.ca)

Cc: Sarah_Todd (SarahTodd@Cunet.Carleton.Ca)

Dear Elizabeth,

Thank you for your Annual Status Report. Your ethics protocol has been closed. Your ethics protocol file will be kept until May 2015. After this date the file will be sent out for secure destruction.

Should you require information from the protocol you may contact this office for the file.

Should you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Leslie

Leslie J. MacDonald-Hicks
Research Ethics Board Coordinator
Carleton University
510B Tory Building
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6
Tel: 613-520-2517
Fax: 613-520-2521

This email communication, including all attachments, may contain private, proprietary, privileged and/or confidential information and subject to copyright. It is intended only for the person to whom it is addressed. Any unauthorized use, copying or distribution of the contents of this email is strictly prohibited. Please delete this email and notify the sender immediately, if you are not the intended recipient, and have received it in error.

References:

- Aggias, K. (September 2010). Student to Practitioner: A Study of Preparedness for Social Work Practice. *Australian Social Work*. 63(3) , 345-360.
- Alcoff, L. M. (2000). Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience. In L. Fisher & L. Embree. (Eds.), *Feminist Phenomenology*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Barry, A & Osborne, T. & Rose, N. (Eds.). (1996). Foucault and political reason : liberalism, neo-liberalism, and rationalities of government. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.
- Bottomore, T. B. (2003). The Frankfurt School and its critics. London : Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Carniol, B. (2005). Case critical : social services and social justice in Canada. Toronto : Between The Lines. (5th ed.).
- Carniol, B. (1992). Structural Social Work: Maurice Moreau's Challenge to Social Work Practice. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 3(1).
- Cooper, K. & White, R. (2012). Qualitative research in the post-modern era: contexts of qualitative research. Dordrecht; New York: Springer.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. (2011). The Sage handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage. (4th ed.).
- Fook, J. (2002). Social work : critical theory and practice. London : Sage Publications.
- Fook, J. & Pease, B. (1999). Transforming social work practice; postmodern critical perspectives. London: Routledge.
- Forrester-Jones, R. & Hatzidimitriadou, E. (2006). Learning in the real world? Exploring widening participation student views concerning the 'fit' between knowledge learnt and work practices. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31 (6).
- Foucault, M. (1977). Discipline and punish : the birth of the prison. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York : Pantheon Books. (1st American ed.).
- Foucault, M. (1997). Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-1976. New York: Picador.

- Garman, N. B. (2006). Imagining an Interpretive Dissertation: Voice, Text, and Representation. In N. Garman & M. Piantanida. (Eds.). *The authority to imagine : the struggle toward representation in dissertation writing*. New York : P. Lang.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press.
- Healy, K. (2001). Reinventing Critical Social Work : Challenges from Practice, Context and Postmodernism. *Critical Social Work*. 2(1).
- Hick, S. & Fook, J. & Pozzuto, R. (Ed.). (2005). *Social Work: A Critical Turn*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Pub.
- Jeffery, D. (2007). Radical Problems and Liberal Selves: Professional Subjectivity in the Anti-oppressive Social Work Classroom. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(2)
- Jennissen, T. & Lundy, C. (2011). One hundred years of social work : a history of the profession in English Canada, 1900-2000. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Lam, C. M. L., & Wong, H., & Leung, T. T. F. (January 2007). An Unfinished Reflexive Journey: Social Work Students' Reflection on their Placement Experiences. *The British Journal of Social Work* 37(1), 91-105.
- Leonard, P. (2001). The Future of Critical Social Work in Uncertain Conditions. *Critical Social Work*. 2(1).
- Leonard, P. (1997). *Postmodern welfare : reconstructing an emancipatory project*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.
- Lundy, C. (2004). *Social work and social justice : a structural approach to practice*. Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, N.Y. : Broadview Press.
- Mudgett, P. J., & Belanger, C. H. (2008). Canada and the United Kingdom: Higher Education Policy and the Knowledge Economy. *Higher Education Perspectives*. 4(1).
- McSweeney, F. (2012). Student, Practitioner, or Both? Separation and Integration of Identities in Professional Social Care Education. *Social Work Education: The International Journal* 31(3).
- Milz, S. (April 2005). Canadian University, Inc., and the Role of Canadian Criticism Review of Education. *Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*. 27(2), 127-139.
- Moreau, M. J. (1989). *Empowerment through a structural approach to social work : a report from practice*. Montréal : École de service social.

- Mullaly, R. (2007). *The new structural social work*. Oxford ; Toronto: Oxford University Press. (3rd ed.).
- Murray, K. M. & Hick, S. (2010). *Structural Social Work: Theory and Process*. In S. Hick et al. (Eds.) *Structural social work in action : examples from practice*. Toronto : Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Oakley, A. (2005). *The Ann Oakley reader : gender, women and social science*. Bristol, UK : Policy.
- Oakley, A. (2000). *Experiments in knowing : gender and method in the social sciences*. New York : New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton.
- Ollsen, M. & Peters, M. A. (May 2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313-345.
- Pollack, S. & Rossiter, A. (2010). NEOLIBERALISM AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUBJECT: Implications for Feminism and Social Work. *Canadian Social Work Review* 27(2), 155-169.
- Poole, J. M. (2010). Progressive Until Graduation? Helping BSW Students Hold onto Anti-oppressive and Critical Social Work Practices. *Critical Social Work*, 11(2).
- Research Ethics Policy and Advisory Committee. (2011). *Guidelines for Compensation and Reimbursement of Research Participants*. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York : Oxford University Press.
- Rose, N. (1996). Governing 'advanced' liberal democracies. In. Editor, Barry, A & Osborne, T. & Rose, N. (Eds.). *Foucault and political reason : liberalism, neo-liberalism, and rationalities of government*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.
- Rossiter, A. (2001). Innocence Lost and Suspicion Found: Do we Educate for or Against Social Work? *Critical Social Work*, 2(1).
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Urciuoli, B. (2010). Neoliberal Education: Preparing the Student for the New Workplace. In C. Greenhouse (Ed.). *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- van de Sande, A. & Schwartz, K. (2010). *Community-Based Research: A Structural Perspective*. Ottawa, unpublished.

Watts, J. (August 2006). The outsider within: dilemmas of qualitative feminist research within a culture of resistance. *Qualitative Research*, 6(3).

Weaver, R. D., & Yun, S. H. (2011). Analyzing the attitude of undergraduate students toward poverty and impoverished persons: Does social work education make a difference? *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 31(1), 3-20.

Wilson, T. (2008). Reflecting on the Contradictions: Governmentality in Social Work Education and Community Practice. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue canadienne de service social* 25(2).