

Social Work Students' Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Practice

by

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Abstract

Anti-oppressive practice is a commonly accepted concept in social work education that concentrates on alleviating oppression and advancing social justice. The goal of this research is to highlight the social work students' perspectives on anti-oppressive practice and to uncover their experiences of anti-oppressive practice in the field and classroom.

A comparative case study based on photovoice was conducted with social work students from Canada and Finland. A diverse group of graduate and undergraduate students participated in this research. Qualitative interviews were conducted with research participants in conjunction with the photovoice discussion. The social work students' responses were coded and summarized, with major themes emerging as a consequence.

Research findings indicate that most social work students who participated in this study have a positive view of anti-oppressive practice. The majority of participants position themselves as anti-oppressive social work practitioners, however, some perceive the anti-oppressive practice as purely theoretical, as opposed to be a part of practical social work. Also, all students demonstrated awareness of oppression and recognized the importance of anti-oppression. Differences that were found between student responses in samples from Finland and Canada are discussed.

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Introduction

The ideas of anti-oppression and anti-discrimination are prominent in contemporary social work research and practice, and widely engaged in social work curricula. The literature provides an overview of the main premises of an anti-oppressive paradigm. Starting as a radical new concept, anti-oppressive practice (AOP) has since evolved and made its way into social work practice, research and education. Social work students are exposed to an anti-oppressive perspective in the classrooms and, possibly in their workplaces, field placements or voluntary placements.

The following study focused on social work students' perspectives of anti-oppressive practice. Two groups of students were engaged in a comparative case study. The first group was recruited at the University of Tampere in Tampere, Finland, and the second at the University of Manitoba.

The students participated in a photovoice project. The photographs taken by students reflected their perspectives on oppression and anti-oppression. These images were discussed in groups. The student discussion was digitally recorded and analyzed to learn about the answers to these questions.

Research questions

The primary goal of this research is to determine how the two groups of social work students, who are both undergraduates and graduates, perceive an anti-oppressive perspective and see its practical application in Canada or Finland.

The research questions for this study are:

- i. What are social work students' perceptions of anti-oppressive practice?

How do they conceptualize it as a theory?

- ii. How do the students see themselves as anti-oppressive practitioners in the social work field?

- iii. What is the social work students' experience of social work education related to anti-oppression?

- iv. What are the similarities and differences found in perspectives on AOP of students from Canada and Finland?

Overview and Purpose of the Study

There are several reasons for conducting this research. The literature is abundant in explanations of anti-oppression and related concepts, descriptions of projects or services conducted from an anti-oppressive perspective, and conceptualization of anti-oppression education for social work students. However, little is known about the students' own perspectives and reflections on anti-oppressive practice.

A comparison between two groups of social work students in Finland and Canada can provide a view on AOP from another perspective. Most of the AOP knowledge has been generated in societies with a long term multicultural tradition and colonial past, such as North America, Great Britain, and to some extent Australia. On the other hand, multiculturalism is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland. Besides the traditional minorities of Sami and Finns of Swedish origin, Finland was introduced to multiculturalism around 20 years ago. Women's oppression also has a different history in Finland, with women's position being historically more equitable than in Canada. These differences offer a potential for rich cross-cultural dialogue.

The participatory action methodology (Padgett, 1998; Rogers, 2012; Strier, 2007) used in this research provided the social work students with an opportunity to present their perspectives, reflect on their experiences, and engage in creating visual images. The students were able to take roles as co-researchers and gain an insider experience of social work research.

Knowing the students' perceptions of anti-oppressive practice and their experience of anti-oppression in social work education, recommendations towards improved teaching of anti-oppressive perspective can be made. Understanding students' views on anti-oppressive practice as they are becoming social work practitioners can contribute to the knowledge base in social work and fill existing gaps in understanding of AOP in both countries.

1. Literature review

1.1. Anti-oppressive practice in North American research, education and practice.

1.1.1. Understanding oppression in social work theory and practice.

Attention to various forms of oppression and discrimination has been present in social work for a long time, but grew within the last few decades. It is now firmly embedded in social work theory, research, education, and practice. The International Federation of Social Workers (2013) proclaims in its Ethical Principles Statement that “social workers have an obligation to challenge social conditions that contribute to social exclusion, stigmatization or subjugation, and to work towards an inclusive society.” Other ethical principles include the responsibility of social workers to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of “ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs” (IASW, 2013), and recognizing diversity. The CASWE (2012) Standards for Accreditation include the requirement: “Social work students

have knowledge of how discrimination, oppression, poverty, exclusion, exploitation, and marginalization have a negative impact on particular individuals and groups and strive to end these and other forms of social injustice” (p. 10).

Understanding oppression is crucial in modern social work, because it is considered to be an underlying cause of many social problems. Oppression is a complex social phenomenon which can take various forms and exists on personal, cultural and structural levels. Bishop (2002) argues that all oppression has one root. It stems from the desire of an oppressive group to benefit from the resources of the oppressed. Various forms of oppression are sustaining each other, and it is not possible to end one form of oppression without ending them all. Even though Bishop (2002) avoids creating hierarchies of oppression since they cannot be quantified, she views classism somewhat separately. Class is the final product of using privilege and oppression. “The other oppressions are building tools; class is the wall” (p. 84).

Establishing oppressive relations includes creating a social “norm” and labelling those who are different from it as inferior. The negative stereotypes imposed on subordinated groups can eventually become internalized (Mullaly, 2002). Members of these groups start viewing themselves as deviant and sometimes behave according to the imposed stereotypes, reinforcing their oppression. For example, some violence against Aboriginal women in Manitoba perpetrated by Aboriginal men contradicts the cultural norm and is a result of a stereotypical portrayal of Aboriginal men as violent (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). Maracle (1996) elaborates on internalized racism and imposed patriarchal norms. She writes about her experience as an Aboriginal woman, describing sexism coupled with racism that leads to violence against Indigenous women. Maracle (1996) considers dehumanization inflicted on Aboriginal people by their colonizers to be the reason for violence.

Internalized oppression makes clients feel that they have much less control over their lives than they actually do (Brown, 2007). It is an obstacle to people's liberation because of the imposed belief that the only way to be a proper human is to be like the oppressor (Arges & Delaney, 2006). Oppression is a consequence of inegalitarian social structures in which the privileged groups unfairly benefit from the subordinated ones. Discrimination, social exclusion and negative stereotyping are tools for maintaining and justifying privilege (Dominelli, 2002). These tools are forms of violence which are necessary to keep subordinated groups under control (Bishop, 2002).

1.1.2. The key concepts of AOP.

The concept of anti-oppressive practice is prominent in social work knowledge generated in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Anti-oppressive practice unites the opposition to oppression of different groups, such as women, racial minorities, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, those of lower socio-economic status, LGBTTTQ people, and other groups. The concept of anti-oppressive practice was preceded by post-modern and post-structural theories, as well as structural social work (Baines, 2007). In the beginning of the 1990s attention was paid to all forms of oppression which resulted in the formation of a new anti-oppressive perspective (Collins & Wilkie, 2010). AOP has since evolved into a philosophy or, as Thomas and Green (2007) put it, a "way of life", an "active stance and way of being in the world around us" (p. 97).

Anti-oppressive social work advances social justice by challenging the traditional power relations and structures, as well as mainstream social service practices. The traditional approach social work sees the source of social problems in individual pathology, operates within the oppressive system without trying to change it and does not welcome a critical perspective. The

AOP approach opposes this conventional model of social work practice by refusing to individualize social problems and linking personal to the political instead. AOP recognizes oppression within social work itself and acknowledges that social workers often are the agents of oppression (Baines, 2007; Dominelli, 2002; Rogers, 2012; Strega, 2007). Concepts of privilege, power and oppression are central to AOP (Yee & Wagner, 2012).

A notion of power is frequently used to understand oppression and hence, AOP. Power relations are connected to oppression and can be traced not only to the larger society, but also in social work practice and research (Barnoff & Coleman, 2007; Dominelli, 2002; Rogers, 2012). Strier (2007) argues that social work is shaped by oppressive relations. The encounters of social workers with their clients, the organization of work within the social service agencies, and relations between the agencies and the state are hierarchical and marked by power imbalances.

Globalization, neo-liberalism and workplace restructuring provide contexts for current anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 2002). Changing workplace conditions in social work reflect an increased influence of neo-liberal values. Few opportunities exist for social workers to voice their opinions and shape the policies of their organizations (Smith, 2007).

Dominelli (2002) describes “power over, power to and power of” (p. 17). “Power over” refers to the relations of dominance and societal division of people into those who are “normal and those who are not. As a result, oppressive processes of “othering” and imposing occur. “Power to” or “power within”, as originally conceptualized by Starhawk (1987), represent people’s capacity to carry out actions. “Power of” is used in a context of individuals coming together for a specific purpose. Bishop (2002) refers to the latter using Starhawk’s (1987) term “power with” which is an attribute of co-operative cultures and interpersonal relations.

Patai (1998) and Mullaly (2002) note that the distribution of power is complex. Patai (1998) strongly objects to viewing the members of subordinated groups as passive, powerless victims. According to Mullaly (2002), it is not possible to draw a straight line between those who have power and those who do not, because all persons have multiple identities. There are very few people who entirely belong to a group of the oppressed or to the oppressors. Therefore, even those from the most subordinated groups wield power as well, or have certain privileges in some situations (Mullaly, 2002; Tuason, 2005). Also, the presence of multiple identities means that members of the oppressed groups are different and should not be treated as a homogeneous group. Baines (2007a) suggests that social work practitioners use their privilege for the sake of helping the clients. Baines (2007a) presented an example from practice, in which she described how she used her “white, middle class privilege in the form of [her] lawyer-like advocacy skills” (p. 63) to help the client. Gormley (2005) described using white privilege as a means of making the voices of people of colour heard within an academic environment. However, one needs to be careful to not justify and sustain white privilege, or assign it a positive meaning because of its possible advocacy use. When white privilege is used to help out people of colour in a given situation, the power inequality remains, and those helped may be patronized (Enders & Gould, 2009).

In a compilation of academics’ and professionals’ experiences of oppression and privilege, several authors (Megivern, 2005; Tuason, 2005; Lo, 2005) emphasize the importance of seeing one’s own privilege despite belonging to an oppressed group. Through personal stories, they provide examples of feeling oppression, then discovering their middle-class, white or able-bodied privilege and becoming increasingly aware of their role as agents of change. Barsky (2005) uncovers the concept of assumed privilege, providing his example of hiding and revealing

his homosexual identity. “Coming out” causes him to lose his assumed heterosexual privilege every time he discloses his sexual identity in different social environments, but also provides opportunities to advance social justice for the LGBTTTQ community. As Deines (2005) and Delgado-Romero (2005) demonstrate, assumed white privilege can occur in people of mixed racial ancestry, who nonetheless look Caucasian and speak the normative way. In these cases, identity struggles and a desire for a more equal society caused the authors to consciously relinquish their privilege on multiple occasions.

Mullaly (2002) identifies the principles of AOP as social transformation, realistic expectations (towards eliminating oppression), critical self-reflection, and support and study groups to foster liberation. Dominelli (2002) emphasizes the importance of social workers’ ability to reflect on their values and identity as crucial to their relationship with clients.

An anti-colonial framework is a significant part of AOP. It recognizes multiple ways of knowing and strives to bring them into the academic environment. An anti-colonial perspective sees spirituality as an integral part of Indigenous knowledge (Shahjahan, 2009). In a study which involved spiritual-minded scholars, Shahjahan (2009) demonstrated a connection between AOP and a spiritual stance. The scholars’ spirituality led them to integrate non-western approaches in classroom teaching. Thomas and Green (2007) define one meaning of AOP as a perspective which values the sacred knowledge of Indigenous peoples.

The notion of cultural competence is closely connected to AOP. Cultural competence or cultural sensitivity is understood as paying deliberate attention to the differences and similarities of diverse clients in designing and implementing social programs. The social workers who operate from the perspective of cultural competence should be aware of their own cultural

background, as well as the racial, cultural and ethnic groups of their clients. They need to be empathetic and commit to working with diverse groups in an ethical manner (Este, 2013).

Another similar concept is cultural safety. This term emerged in nursing work with the Maori population in New Zealand. Cultural safety means a safe environment for people, in which their identity is not denied or challenged (Williams, 1999). However, ambivalent attitudes exist towards cultural competence. Some authors (Bishop, 1994; Freeman, 2007; Mullaly, 2002) point out the importance of knowledge about history, but not about culture; and others see the need for more radical anti-racist approaches to replace cultural sensitivity practice (Strier, 2007).

Dominelli (2002) is skeptical about teaching cultural competence, and suggests that social workers ask service users about their culture on a one-to-one basis. According to Ford (2000), social workers who are striving towards culturally sensitive service should avoid superimposing their experiences by building mutual understanding rather than trying to understand their client's cultural background. Freeman (2007) cautions social workers about providing culturally specific services, and points out that only an insider of the culture should be offering services based on traditional knowledge or practices.

On the other hand, several studies (Kelley & MacLean, 1997; Parrott, 2009) demonstrate the importance of a culturally competent approach to better serving the clients' needs. The studies speak particularly about serving elderly clients and hospice patients. Language barriers, religious differences, dietary preferences and other cultural factors contributed to unmet needs in mainstream services. On a larger scale, a lack of cultural competence causes confusion in social workers. For example, incidents of domestic violence or child abuse may be overlooked or mistaken because of implied cultural factors; or given too much attention. As a result, inappropriate interventions which are either excessive or insufficient occur (Dominelli, 2002;

Parrott, 2009). Therefore, Parrott (2009) emphasizes the need for increased inclusion of culturally sensitive approaches along with AOP in the social work curricula.

Language is a powerful tool for maintaining or resisting oppression. Oppressive language is not always intentional and goes beyond obviously offensive words. Even officially defined and appropriate sounding terms can be depersonalizing, dehumanizing, excluding and discriminatory (Thompson, 2006). Changing the words used to refer to subordinated groups is a political act which contributes to conveying a different message about them (Freeman, 2007; Mullaly, 2002). Thompson (2006) emphasizes the political nature of words, stating that language does not only reflect, but also constructs oppression.

1.1.3. The application and practical relevance of AOP.

As Barnoff and Coleman (2007) point out, AOP is largely theoretical and tends to focus on community work. It is not always clear how anti-oppressive principles can be applied in clinical practice. Gray, Coates and Hetherington (2007) even claim that AOP “remains a theory in search of a practice” (p. 56) because of its highly interpretive nature.

According to Dominelli (2002), an AOP practitioner who is working with individuals gives his or her clients an opportunity to “explain their lives in their own ways” (p. 86). The clients can create the discourse of their own lives and see how oppressive systems influence them. The AOP practitioner does not take a “normalizing” stance and attempt to fit the clients’ stories within the dominant perspective.

Even though AOP can be used towards working on changes in individual behaviour, individuals are always viewed within their social context. AOP employs the feminist “personal is political” idea to blur the boundaries between individuals and society (Dominelli, 2002).

However, a study conducted by Barnoff and Coleman (2007) demonstrated the value of personalized acts of resistance. The study which took place within a feminist social service agency provided insights on social work practitioners' perspectives of what constitutes anti-oppressive services. The workers identified empowerment and capacity building as their important tasks. Also, they pointed out that educating service users and other social service providers, and advocacy and authentic engagement with service users were anti-oppressive strategies in social work practice. Mock (2005) refers to a concept of "personal compassion" (p. 159) which is closely related to authentic engagement described by participants in Barnoff and Coleman's (2007) study. Acts of personal compassion take the ideas of AOP to common oppressive situations which take place during everyday interactions between people. They may include outspoken acknowledgement of unfair treatment and offering emotional support to people who experienced it, or, as Furman (2005) describes, also trying to send a message to perpetrators of discrimination.

Faced with conditions of workplace restructuring, many social workers decide to serve the best interest of their clients by employing practices that are not coherent with their agency policies. They violate the policies trying not to attract any attention from their supervisors and keep their records in order. Even though Callahan (2010) argues that this approach is not as effective as organized public action, Smith (2007) presents it as a tool of anti-oppressive social work in an environment of rigid policies and low job security. Baines (2007a) supports the "personal is political" framework, but suggests using it for small changes in the social service system as well.

AOP in social work with Indigenous people bears distinct features to cultural safety, cultural competence and cultural appropriateness. Cultural knowledge is essential to understanding the service users' experience and helping them heal (Freeman, 2007).

Kumsa (2007) describes the concept of essentialist AOP, and, as she names it, a transformative AOP as a step forward. The essentialist stance includes rigid boundaries between "us" and "them", the oppressors and the oppressed, insiders and outsiders. The groups are seen as mutually exclusive. The concept of "other" is strong and fundamental to essentialist thinking. Kumsa (2007), an Oromo refugee from Ethiopia, speaks about working with Oromo women from an essentialist anti-oppressive perspective and moving to a different, inclusive and transformative stance afterwards. She challenges the binaries and boundaries in AOP, arguing that there are multiple identities in the oppressors and the oppressed. Rigid boundaries hinder understanding and acceptance among various groups. The process of "othering" needs to be replaced by uniting efforts in order for AOP to become a transformative perspective. On the other hand, Mullaly (2002) considers "othering" on behalf of oppressed groups as a necessary and natural part of their liberation and advises social work practitioners to support it. Mullaly (2002) states that voluntary segregation from the mainstream society may help the oppressed groups to form their unique positive identity.

Understanding oppression is important not only to social workers, but to the oppressed groups as well, and consciousness-raising is a powerful tool for starting liberation. Social workers can contribute to the service users' understanding of oppression by fostering their awareness, and by helping them connect to other people who experience a similar form of oppression. Self-help or activist groups of people who share the experience of oppression create space for education and awareness-raising of the oppressed (Mullaly, 2002).

Developing empathy and building alliances for the purpose of social justice can result not only from understanding oppression, but also understanding one's own privilege. Megivern (2005) describes her personal experience of coming from an economically disadvantaged background, but possessing white privilege. Only after this privilege became visible to her, was she able to move beyond her poverty struggle to identify with people who are living with race-based oppression.

A historical perspective helps subordinated groups to understand the origins of their oppression, and sometimes see how society operated without such oppression. For example, Bishop (2002) suggests that the stateless communities of ancient Europe were largely egalitarian and non-patriarchal, but relatively advanced in technology and art. They made their living from agriculture and used iron only for tools rather than for weapons. These communities were conquered by the warlike invaders from the Northeast, who were authoritarian and patriarchal. This theory of ancient history, along with the examples of pre-colonial First Nations' democratic social structures demonstrates the possibility of building a society entirely different from existing oppressive ones.

A historical perspective empowers the oppressed to achieve liberation through creating their own image of self and celebrating their uniqueness as opposed to becoming equal by meeting the oppressor's standards of a "real human being" (Arges & Delaney, 1996). In addition, history usually contains events which can be glorified, showing the strengths of the oppressed group and used as a source of pride. In historical discourse it often becomes clear that people are oppressed not because of their inherent characteristics or the "natural" order of things, but because of the dominant group's desire for power. Positive stereotypes can also be built upon to change the image of the subordinated group among members of the dominant group (Mullaly,

2002). Freeman (2007) gives several examples of this approach by retelling the myths and history of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquis) people and offering them as an example of pride and glory. These stories can be helpful in dealing with historical trauma, as well as the Indigenous-appropriate interventions. Brown (2007) states that putting social problems in historical perspective can help to view them in a broader societal context and, as a result, separate them from individual deficiency.

When subordinated groups are adopting a conventional approach and focus on their single sources of oppression, they create division and competition. Members of these groups compete for resources which they perceive as scarce, and in doing so distance themselves from their objectives (Bishop, 2002). Therefore, Mullaly (2002) calls for coalition-building across the subordinated groups which can have transformative power. Coalition-building has a potential for creating social change at the structural level. In addition, alternative services and organizations, and active participation in political life can create structural changes from an anti-oppressive perspective. Arges and Delaney (1996) call for the liberation “of the oppressed by the oppressed” (p. 14), and Bishop (2002) argues that assuming leadership is a necessary part of every group’s liberation. Hence, social workers should be cautious not to assume the role of “liberators.” Instead, non-expert and postmodern approaches, which recognize people’s agency, work better with oppressed populations.

In the globalized environment a structural level of social work reaches beyond nation state borders, as do the oppressive systems. Harrison and Melville (2010) claim that 85% of the world is affected by the dynamics of colonialism. However, modern post-colonial thought is cautious about an essentialist divide between “North” and “South” or “the West” and “the rest.” A process of “othering” and simplifying is visible in concepts such as “Western culture” and

“other cultures.” Such a homogenized view may promote the image of “other cultures” being passive victims and neglect the transformative power they have. Post-colonialism denies viewing subordinated nations within the framework constructed by their oppressors. Instead, it goes beyond this framework to recognize people’s agency.

Bishop (2002) describes the role of allies as necessary agents in countering oppression. Allies are members of the oppressor group who are committed to social justice for the oppressed. For example, men who are pro-feminist, heterosexual gay rights activists or anti-racist white people. To become an ally, one needs to be advanced in the process of personal liberation. Being an ally requires reaching beyond one’s own oppression, abandoning an individualistic stance and feeling a connection to all other people. According to Bishop (2002), becoming an ally requires humility, patience, honesty and unbiased attention. The undesired behaviours of an ally include taking leadership, expecting gratitude or emotional support, defensiveness, and trying to falsely claim the roots of an oppressed community. Allies must leave experiences of oppression to the oppressed and instead raise awareness among members of their own group about privilege and becoming an ally.

Currently AOP is prominent in social work education and practice, however, Rogers (2012) states that social work research is less inclusive of AOP values. In most cases a researcher is still viewed as an expert, and a research participant as a passive object of study. In addition, the power exerted by funding agencies removes the control by participants over research even more (Strier, 2007). Strier (2007) calls for rejection of the dominant research tradition, and argues that “social work research design should engender a platform for social liberation through the radical transformation of researcher–participant power relations” (p. 860). Such alternative and more inclusive research strategies include participatory action research methods (PAR),

narrative, and constructivist research. In PAR, the research participants are viewed as the experts of their own lives, and given rights to shape the research topic, design, and the process of knowledge creation (Rogers, 2012; Strier, 2007).

Coleman, Collings and McDonald (1999) offer insights into teaching a course on anti-oppressive practice in a diploma social work program in the UK. They describe a variety of student behaviours in the course. Most of the students were White females, some were Black, and only a small portion of students was male. There were few gay, lesbian or disabled students. The students' responses to the course ranged from intense emotional and cognitive engagement, increased awareness and acceptance, to resistance. Denying racism, and reluctance to accept AOP could be found in both White and Black students. Chand, Clare, and Dolton (2002) presented an analysis of the course which took place in Great Britain as well and engaged a racially diverse, predominantly female group of students. The authors found that racial minority students were more vocal in class and presented their values in a clearer manner than White students. In fact, the White male students spoke the least in class.

1.2. Critique of AOP.

There are not many known criticisms of anti-oppressive practice. As Wilson and Beresford (2000) argue, "AOP has become one of social work's sacred cows" (p. 554). Being seen as those who "oppose opposing oppression" (de Montigny, 2011, p. 9) is an undesirable prospect for social workers. In addition, Wilson and Beresford (2000) state that most resistance towards AOP is coming from the right political wing. The early backlash against AOP happened in the US and Great Britain in the beginning of 1990s, where feminist and anti-racist ideas were viewed as discriminatory towards White men (Dominelli, 2002).

However, Wilson and Beresford (2000) aim at offering a constructive AOP critique. They point out that the service users' perspectives are left out of AOP, or not viewed as equally valid as an academic perspective. In addition, they find that certain minority and service user groups receive more recognition and attention than others, even though many authors (Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002; Strega, 2007) argue that AOP does not divide different kinds of oppression into those that are more and less important. Mullaly (2002) avoids creating hierarchies of oppression, however, he mentions that not all groups are equally oppressed. This caused de Montigny (2011) to wonder how it is possible to decide who is more oppressed, as there is no unit of measure for human suffering inflicted by oppression.

Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) state that AOP can mean different things to social work practitioners due to lack of agreed upon definitions. This may confuse social workers and leave them unwilling to identify with AOP. According to Yee and Wagner (2012), AOP has become a mainstream ideology itself, being particularly embraced in social work education. Over the course of its development, AOP lost its radical position and became more supportive towards the state than before. The social justice principles of AOP are taught to students in the increasingly corporate environment of the universities which operate according to capitalist and neo-liberal values. Decolonizing AOP attempts can be negated by token creation of variety within the faculty, while not making any real changes to the study curriculum. De Montigny (2011) claims the system of social work education is oppressive in itself, being rooted in authority of the teachers and subordination of the students. Also, universities have the power to judge success.

Yee and Wagner (2012) point out the downfalls of AOP teaching which may cause students to view oppression in a simplified way, or not to encourage them to move beyond their own experiences of oppression. The current AOP education may foster patronizing attitudes in

students, such as seeing themselves as enlightened ones who need to educate the others, and forgetting their own privilege. Oversimplifying oppression leads to creating race, gender, or sexual orientation binaries which hinder the creation of coalitions. In addition, simple and comfortable anti-oppressive discussion is dangerous, as it silently fits into the oppressive systems, and loses its potential for transformative action.

Even though AOP includes perspectives of various subordinated groups and recognizes the connections between their oppression, some social justice concerns remain largely unresearched. For example, AOP has shown limited attention to multiple forms of colonization which do not involve Western European societies (Yee & Wagner, 2012).

Mullaly's AOP-related term "false consciousness" which relates to internalized oppression is condemned by de Montigny (2011) as being exclusionary and disrespectful. Recognizing someone's consciousness as false creates grounds for hierarchy where the anti-oppressive practitioners are deemed superior, and those who do not share their views are inferior.

Critical consciousness raising (CCR) is another criticized AOP concept. De Montigny (2011) concludes that CCR contributes to creating a divide and a patronizing relationship between those who had their consciousness raised, and those whose consciousness is yet to be raised.

Ultimately, de Montigny (2011) is skeptical of "ubiquitous oppression" (p. 25) as a source of all problems. He brings up death, loss, disability, and existential crises as independent and often unavoidable sources of human suffering. Therefore, oppression is only one aspect of human interactions. Seeing social relationships through the lens of oppression can lead not only to an overly simplistic perspective, but also to resting in confidence of this perspective. Instead,

de Montigny (2011) suggests that social work consider aspects of human lives that do not fall under categories of oppression, power and privilege.

1.3. The Finnish context of AOP.

Anti-oppressive practice in Finland is shaped differently from the North American and English-speaking context. The Finnish welfare system is based on the Nordic model of social welfare. It includes extensive government support, tax funding, and a proactive approach to social problems (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2006). Social expenditures experienced a steady growth in Finland from 1960 to 2004, even though the 1990s recession was marked by increased means-testing for unemployment insurance and health care cuts. However, in the first decade of the 21st century the negative effects of economic crisis were mitigated and growth continued (Niemelä & Salminen, 2006).

Laws against discrimination are outlined in the Finnish Constitution, Finnish Criminal Code, the Men and Women Equality Act, and the Equal Rights Act (Aaltonen, Joronen, & Villa, 2009). According to the Finnish Constitution, no one can be discriminated against because of their sex, age, origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinion, health, disability or other personal attributes (Ministry of Justice, 1999). In addition, the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and includes provisions for affirmative action (Ministry of Justice, 2004). Legislative regulations on discrimination can also be found in the Finnish Criminal Code. Punishments such as fines and prison sentences can be inflicted on an employer who is guilty of discrimination. Refusal on discriminatory grounds to provide service can result in similar punishment. Ethnic agitation and defamation also are criminal offences (Ministry of Justice, 2008).

Prohibition of gender discrimination has received the most attention in Finnish legislation. It is mentioned separately in the Finnish Constitution and the Non-Discrimination Act (Ministry of Justice, 1999; Ministry of Justice, 2004). Moreover, the legislative provisions on gender equality are outlined in a separate piece of legislation, called the Act on Equality between Women and Men. This Act regulates the non-discriminatory treatment of women primarily in the workplace and education. The main purpose of the law is not only to ensure gender equality, but also to improve the position of women (Ministry of Justice, 1986).

An authority of Ombudsman for Equality oversees the issues of gender discrimination and is guided by principles of the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Gender minority legislation and discrimination were central to the Ombudsman's work in 2011. Other concerns include discrimination because of pregnancy and family status, the differences in pay between men and women, and equality plans in the workplace and education (Ombudsman for Equality, 2012).

The universal access to daycare for parents can be considered a significant provision towards women's equality, and has been in effect since 1990 in Finland. Daycare fees are based on income levels, but even for high-income families they do not exceed several hundred of dollars per month (Jimenez, 2009).

A National Discrimination Tribunal was established under the Non-Discrimination Act. "The Tribunal's function is to give legal protection to those who consider they have been discriminated against or victimised" (National Discrimination Tribunal of Finland, 2009, p. 4). The Tribunal reviews matters of ethnic discrimination which relate to employment, social services and social security, education, housing, military service, and health care.

Immigration from non-Western countries is relatively new in Finland. Unlike other Scandinavian and Western European countries, Finland did not experience the influx of foreign workers in the 1970s and 1980s. The major reasons for immigration were marriage to a Finnish citizen, asylum seeking and return migration of ethnic Finns from the former Soviet Union. The 1990s civil war in Somalia and the Yugoslavia wars have driven many refugees to Finland. This marked a beginning of a new era in Finnish multiculturalism (Alitolppa-Niitamo, Söderling, & Fågel, 2005; Forsander, 2003). Currently the most prominent immigrant community can be found in Helsinki, where immigrants constitute 10% of the population. The biggest immigrant groups are from Estonia, Russia, Somalia, China, and India (Forsander, 2012).

The most frequent reasons for discrimination in Finland are age and ethnic origin (Aaltonen et. al., 2009), and racism is the most obvious form of discrimination in Finland. People of colour constitute only two percent of the population, and are highly visible. They are subjected to racial slurs in public places, face difficulties in finding jobs, and experience social isolation and elevated police attention (Abu-Hanna, 2012; Egharevba, 2009; Hashi, 2013). Negative attitudes to Muslims are high in Finland, as compared to other European countries (Sakaranaho, 2010). Mammon (2010) argues that the highest level of negative attitudes towards immigrants is found in young men, people with lower levels of education, and elderly men. In addition, the economic crisis of 2008 contributed to worsening of public attitude towards immigrants.

Many African immigrants are afraid to seek police protection from violence or to ask their local welfare office for help due to fear of being stereotyped, not listened to and because of the general mistrust of such state services. Lack of Finnish language proficiency is another barrier to receiving the services needed by immigrants (Egharevba, 2009). Unemployment

among immigrants, especially those from visible minority backgrounds is very high, and many immigrants who participate in the labour force earn low wages. In addition, their employment is often temporary (Forsander, 2008).

Forsander (2008) argues that immigrants are granted basic security in Finland, but not the opportunity for equal participation. The culture of the “other” is seen as a deficiency more than a benefit. The services for immigrants include psychological support, housing, social and health services, advocacy, and integration or safe return to the country of origin (Sarvimäki, 2007).

The office of an Ombudsman for Minorities was established in Finland in 2001 “to advance the status of ethnic minorities and foreign nationals in Finland and prevent and address ethnic discrimination” (Ombudsman for Minorities, 2011, p.15). The Ombudsman for Minorities is contacted when an instance of discrimination is believed to be happening. The traditional minorities such as Romani and Sami, as well as the more recent immigrant minorities, belong to her jurisdiction. The Ombudsman intervenes when members of minority groups face difficulties in receiving proper services, when instances of hate speech happen in the media or the members of minorities are discriminated against in their workplaces. The Ombudsman is contacted mostly by Romani people regarding housing issues. Other large client groups include Russian, Sami, and Somali. In 2010 and 2011 the Ombudsman for Minorities created regional offices across Finland that provide advisory services to those who encounter discrimination.

The Ombudsman contributes to the promotion of equality by advocating for anti-discriminatory legislation, meeting with minority organizations regularly, participating in development of activities of minority groups, and providing awareness-raising lectures and

training. The Ombudsman also participates in international events. In addition, the Ombudsman deals with issues of human trafficking (Ombudsman for Minorities, 2011).

Indigenous issues in Finland concern the Sami populations, concentrated mostly in Lapland (northern Finland). In this regard Finland collaborates with Sweden and Norway, which are also home to Sami populations. In 2008 it was proposed that the three countries create shared Sami legislation. Initiatives are implemented towards supporting Sami language (Aaltonen et al., 2009).

It became apparent in the research participants' responses that the Romani population in Finland faces issues similar to the Indigenous population. The Romani originate from India, and their arrival in Finland is estimated to be 500 years ago. Throughout history they were subject to persecution and discrimination, in which the church played a role until the 1800s (Romano Missio, n.d.). While their situation may have somewhat improved in the 20th century, the Romani also suffered human rights abuses. Their language and culture was perceived negatively, and there were attempts made to assimilate the Romani through schooling. Only in the 1970s the first anti-discrimination law came into place, and Finnish authorities made a conscious effort to improve the situation of Romani people (Ihmisoikeudet.net, 2013). Although ethnic and racial discrimination is outlawed in Finland nowadays, the Romani are subjected to it. Aaltonen et al. (2009) describe cases of Romani clients being denied service in a store or a restaurant, and state that Romani children face problems at school. Romani children have higher than average rates of interrupted schooling. Since the Romani are stereotyped as dishonest, they face difficulties in finding work and in their workplaces.

In 2014, Finland was ranked second in the world in the Global Gender Gap Report rankings (World Economic Forum, 2014). Through recent years, Finland consistently achieved high scores in these rankings, occupying the top positions along with Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. These Scandinavian countries are held in high esteem in the report as those who “have closed over 80% of the gender gap and thus serve as models and useful benchmarks for international comparisons” (p. 19). The rankings are based on; (1) economic participation and opportunity, (2) educational attainment, (3) health and survival, and (4) political empowerment (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012).

Even though Finland has closed most of its gender gap, full gender equality is not yet achieved. Kailo (2000) argues that mechanisms of male hegemony are embedded in the Finnish national epic, Kalevala. The epic bears a great cultural significance and is well known to almost the entire Finnish population. Kailo (2000) connects the manifestations of sexism and discriminations against Sami in the Kalevala to the current resentment of multiculturalism. Women and Sami are consistently labelled as “the other” and opposed to the Finnish male norm. Sexism in Finnish culture is similar to that in other Western European countries: “Only virgins and mothers, women who act to reproduce the patriarchy and remain fully under the men's control, are evaluated positively” (Kailo, 2000, p. 26).

In comparison, human rights issues in Canada are regulated by human rights commissions and human rights tribunals. Ombudsperson institutions, labour relation boards, and courts also are part of the human rights system. Unlike Finland, Canada is a federation, therefore human rights institutions operate on provincial and federal levels (Eliadis, 2014). Human rights are regulated by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Canadian Human Rights Act (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Aboriginal issues are the most prominent matter of human rights concern in Canada today. The missing and murdered Aboriginal women statistics, the underfunding of child welfare agencies on reserves, the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare services, and the legacy of residential schools are pressing current issues for Canadian society. The situation is exacerbated by high rates of poverty, substance abuse, and inadequate housing in Aboriginal communities (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2015).

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (2015) stated that women are disadvantaged in the areas of income and employment, and women suffer more from domestic violence than men do. On the other hand, women in Canada surpass men in education, as more women graduate from high school and enroll in a university. Canada was ranked #19 in a most recent Global Gender Gap report (World Economic Forum, 2014).

The Finnish National University Network for Social Work proclaims that “in society social work carries out a task based on its ethical foundation which includes promotion of social justice and equality, alleviation of inequality and defending of the less well-off. Everything starts from the principle of human dignity” (SOSNET, n.d.).

Social work education in Finland has been established for several decades, starting as part of social policy and educational programs, and becoming an independent field of study in the beginning of the 1990s. Only a university Master’s degree entitles a person to a social work position. There are six universities in various parts of the country where studies in social work can be completed. College-level or diploma studies for social welfare professionals are available as well (Seppänen, 2008). There is no rigid legislation of social work education, so the

universities are able to autonomously develop their curricula and place an emphasis in different areas (Niemi, n.d.).

There is an option of post-graduate specialized studies available to Finnish students. After obtaining their master's degrees students can proceed to a Licentiate degree. There are five fields of study in these programs, one of them being Social Work in the Field of Marginalization. Within the doctoral program, "Marginalisation as a target problem in social work and social services" (p. 16) is a distinct area of study (Seppänen, 2008).

As opposed to the well-developed holistic notion of anti-oppressive practice in English-language sources, Finnish literature uses a multitude of terms to address different kinds of oppression. AOP is mainly connected with immigrant and refugee work, as well as multicultural social work. Marginalization is more often used as an umbrella term, but is mostly used in the context of addressing the challenges of multiculturalism (Lumio, 2009; Valtonen, 2002).

A Research Programme on Marginalisation, Inequality and Ethnic Relations was established in Finland in 1999. The programme arose as a response to the challenges of growing racism and xenophobia. In 2004, the programme consisted of 21 research projects in various subjects, including social work. The projects dealt not only with oppression based on race, ethnicity and religion, but also on sexual minority issues (Rantalaiho, Hedetoft, Solomos, & Eräsaari, 2004).

Conclusion

The existing discourses of anti-oppressive practice have been outlined in the literature review section. The increased quantity of anti-oppressive writing is obvious over the last 15-20 years. Newer books and articles tend to use the anti-oppressive terminology more often. This

trend testifies to the growing popularity of AOP and its becoming a major approach in social work.

Understanding oppression takes place before opposing oppression. Therefore, the literature review examined oppression as an introduction to AOP in general, and in Finland in particular. Structural and feminist social work approaches became a foundation for AOP. Such authors as Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Audre Lorde, Anne Bishop and Robert Mullaly are frequently cited in AOP literature. The radical and influential book by Bishop (2002), *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression in People*, can be considered a classic of the AOP literature.

AOP has borrowed such feminist ideas as the “personal is political”, and coalition building. From structural social work, AOP took the emphasis on macro-level action, opposing capitalism and neo-liberalism as oppressive systems, and the struggle towards radical transformation of the society.

AOP critically deconstructs societal relations. It questions all “norms” which were considered a natural way of being, and deems them to be socially constructed. AOP brings in a historical perspective to demonstrate how oppressive relations have shaped society, and that they are not necessary for social functioning. AOP does not create hierarchies of oppression, since all forms of oppression are connected.

Much writing on AOP has been done, among others, by Lena Dominelli, Donna Baines and Roni Strier. These authors developed the concept of AOP, showing how it can be used at all levels of social work practice. There are also other related concepts in social work, such as anti-discriminatory practice, culturally sensitive practice, cultural safety or more specifically anti-

racist practice and an anti-colonial perspective. AOP includes indigenous knowledge and recognition of spirituality.

Despite its wide popularity, recognition and acceptance, AOP has not escaped being subject to critique. One of the most influential critical papers by Wilson and Beresford (2000) points to AOP's failure to include the service users' perspectives and to sufficiently avoid prioritizing oppressions. In addition, de Montigny (2011) stated that factors other than oppression are responsible for social problems.

For this comparative study between Canadian and Finnish groups of students it is important to understand the context of oppression and AOP in Finland. Some information about the Finnish welfare system, social work education, anti-discriminatory initiatives, and diversity is reviewed. Many historical factors present Finland as a unique country. The multiple and profound differences between Canada and Finland have the potential to provide a rich cross-cultural dialogue, building on understanding of the students' views on AOP in different contexts, and offering insight into students' learning of AOP. Filling some of the existing gaps in knowledge of students' perspectives on AOP can help the students to engage in best practices in the field. A comparison of two groups of students can highlight the similarities and differences in views on AOP in Canada and Finland, and can help identify the further gaps that exist in understanding of social students' concepts of AOP. Contrasting the perspectives of Finnish and Canadian students may illuminate the assumed or taken for granted AOP elements in both cultures, and improve the awareness of their suitability to the local context.

2. Methodology

2.1. The research methodology.

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study methodology. The two cases which are compared are current social work students in two countries. The first student cohort is enrolled in a Finnish university, and the second cohort is enrolled in a Canadian university. Each of these cases is represented by a group of students who agree to participate in the research.

A qualitative method of study suits the purpose of the research because the research topic deals with students' own perspectives rather than other objective or independent realities. The aim of the study is to understand the ways the social work students view and experience AOP. In addition, qualitative methodology more readily allows for participatory research. The research can be designed in a way that gives the research participants more control over the knowledge produced and equalizes the researcher-participant power balance (Padgett, 1998). Qualitative methodology allows the capturing of peoples' perceptions from the inside, but in turn requires the researcher to be empathetic and avoid bias (Shaw & Gould, 2001). Strier (2007) points out that "qualitative, 'bottom-up', interpretive methods may be suitable for reflecting the experience of oppression" (p. 861).

In addition, Swanborn (2010) indicates that a case study is a suitable method for studying social processes in a broad and exploratory way, avoiding prior hypotheses. Yin (2009) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18).

Case study enables the researcher to pay attention to the differences in participants' views and perspectives by focusing on social processes (Swanborn, 2010). Blatter and Haverland (2012) note that case study methodology enables the researcher to learn about "difficult-to-observe cognitive aspects of individual actors (for example, their problem perception)" (p. 20). This is particularly relevant to studying the social work students' perspectives on AOP.

Blatter and Haverland (2012) argue that case study methods are suitable for a thorough examination and explanation of social realities. A case study enables the researcher to take multiple perspectives into account. Qualitative case study is also "case centered" as opposed to the "variable-centered" quantitative approaches.

According to Campbell (2010), a "comparative case study examines in rich detail the context and features of two or more instances of specific phenomena" (p. 174), and according to Yin (2009), case study methodology is suitable to studying the contemporary phenomena which cannot be separated from their contexts. In this study students' perspectives on AOP were viewed in two situations, and in two distinct cultural contexts. "The goal of comparative case studies is to discover contrasts, similarities, or patterns across the cases" (Campbell, 2010, p. 174). The differences in students' perceptions of AOP can contribute to cross-cultural learning.

Several authors (Blatter & Haveland, 2012; Swanborn, 2010) point out that in the comparative case study the cases selected must possess both common and differential characteristics. The commonalities between the cases ensure comparability, and the differences make the development of new knowledge possible as a consequence of the comparison. In this study, both groups of social work students share a common field of study and possess field work experience. The environment in which they work and study is significantly different culturally

and historically. However, both Canada and Finland are developed countries with an established social work profession. Therefore, it can be implied that the circumstances related to living in a different country and being part of a different nation and culture, which in turn create a different context of oppression, may be accountable for the differences in students' perceptions of AOP.

Swanborn (2010) conceptualizes the case study approach as intensive. Applying such an approach means studying the research phenomenon in depth and within its specific context. Also, Creswell (2007) recommends using various sources of information for a case study. In this research, information is drawn from participant interviews and the photographs that they provided.

2.2. The research methods

The comparative case study was carried out through a photovoice research method. Photovoice was originally developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris for a study with rural women in China (Wang, 1999). Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, and Pula (2009) state that photovoice is “founded on the principles of feminist theory, constructivism, and documentary photography” (p. 687). It provides an opportunity to the research participants to define their own issues of concern through pictures and enact a meaningful critical discussion regarding these issues. Photovoice belongs to participatory research methods, and recognizes the research participants as co-creators of knowledge. Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, and Havelock (2009) prefer the term “co-researchers” to “research participants.” The research process creates an empowering environment which allows the participants to construct knowledge through experiences, and gathering and analyzing the photo data. Wang and Burris (1997) identify three main goals of photovoice:

- 1) To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns;
- 2) To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and
- 3) To reach policymakers (p. 185).

Photovoice is often used for, but not limited to, conducting research with marginalized communities. It has become a more frequently used research method over the last few years (Powers, Freedman, & Pitner, 2012).

Photovoice groups are similar in size to focus groups. The recommended number of participants is 8-10, however, somewhat smaller or larger groups are acceptable. The number of group meetings vary across projects "from one time to dozens" (Powers et. al., 2012).

The photovoice method has evolved along with photographic technology. Past photovoice studies (Herengarther et.al., 2009; Palibroda et. al, 2009, Wang, 1999) described giving out disposable cameras and film to the co-researchers, film development, and teaching co-researchers how to use the cameras. As photography extensively moved from film to digital technology, photovoice facilitators turn to digital aspects of photography as well. Powers et. al. (2012) suggest giving out digital cameras to co-researchers. However, in this research the specific populations of Canadian and Finnish social work students have to be taken into account. Most students carry smart phones with built-in cameras on them, and using a camera does not present a difficulty to them. Therefore, the students were asked to use their own equipment to produce the photovoice images.

3. Description of the research procedures.

3.1. Recruitment and Interviewing.

The social work students were recruited by disseminating information about this research through e-mail and faculty postings, and classroom announcements. Participation in research was limited to undergraduate and graduate social work students with relevant voluntary or paid work experience, or field placement experience. The length of experience was not considered in selection process. After the Research Ethics Protocol for this research was approved by the Research Ethics Board, the first cohort of participants was recruited in Tampere, Finland. It was originally planned to recruit seven or eight participants from Finland and Canada each for qualitative focus groups in this case study, based on the most efficient amount of focus group participants outlined by Powers et al. (2012).

The researcher visited Tampere, Finland, in May 2013 to conduct a focus group interview with the six social work students who were willing to participate in this study. This date was chosen based on academic term timing. Since the spring term lasts until the end of May in Finland, the students could be engaged in the beginning or the middle of May. However, the unique features of Finnish educational system caused a small number of students to be present at the university when the interviews were conducted.

These students were recruited through research posters and personal networks. However, only four participants were interviewed face-to-face. Three participants formed a focus group, with one being unable to attend, and another one cancelling at the last moment. The researcher traveled to a small town near Tampere to conduct an individual interview with one participant who was unable to come to the focus group. Another participant was interviewed through Skype,

since they had become available after the researcher left Finland. Finally, yet another participant was recruited from the University of Helsinki and interviewed via Skype in June 2014.

There were seven participants interviewed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with all interviews being conducted face-to-face. Two participants formed a small focus group, and the remaining five were interviewed individually. These participants were recruited by posters put up at the Faculty of Social Work advertisement boards, making announcements in classes, and through personal networks. Recruitment of the second group of students in Winnipeg extended from September 2013 to March 2014. All students who indicated their willingness to participate in this research were interviewed.

The students who consented to participation in this research were asked to take photographs which represented their views on oppression and anti-oppression. The pictures had to be taken prior to the group meeting of the participants and the researcher, where these pictures were discussed, and a group interview followed. Therefore, the students had to sign the research consent form to research participation at least several days prior to the meeting. This was achieved by sending out consent forms to students by e-mail.

The face-to-face meetings were held at private locations in Finland, and at the University of Manitoba in Canada. The researcher accommodated the students' wishes and traveled to where they wanted to meet. The meeting in Tampere was arranged with help from a third party. A graduate social work student from the University of Tampere who visited Winnipeg in 2012 agreed to help with organizing the research.

Once the participants were recruited, they had to be informed about the research, ethics, and potential risks. Participation in the study posed minimal risks to all persons involved.

However, breach of confidentiality could put those students who shared their workplace or education system experiences in a vulnerable position. Therefore, the confidentiality of participants was carefully safeguarded. The group meeting recording and transcripts were stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected file, and all printed matter was kept at the researcher's home. All materials were accessed only by the researcher and the research supervisor, and will be destroyed after thesis defense. All identifying information was deleted or replaced in the materials used for presenting the study results. For example, the students' names were changed, and they were assigned nicknames. Sometimes information about the participant's ethnicity, country of origin, or occupation was concealed, as these characteristics could be identifying even without mentioning a participant's name.

Photographs provided by the students will be kept by the researcher for three years for the purpose of further publication and presentation of this study. There was an option for the students to be credited for their photos when the photos are used. However, in this case the students' participation in the research will no longer remain confidential. The students were also asked not to photograph people's faces, other than their own. Most participants complied with this requirement. One photograph that was presented by Tarja and included a group of people was accepted for this research, however, this photo was altered by blurring people's faces.

The photovoice and focus group discussions were digitally recorded. Students were informed about this, and they had an option to consent or decline being audiotaped. If a student did not want their interview to be recorded, but still would like to participate in the research, individual arrangements could be made. However, this option was not used, since all students agreed to being audiotaped. Research participants could refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from participation at any time without any negative consequences to follow. These

provisions were outlined in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 1) which had to be filled out by the students before the research began. In addition, research participants were reminded about this option before the interviews began. Such a situation did not emerge during the interviews, however, several students asked to skip their turn as to be able to think the question through, and then came back to answer it later. The interviews lasted one hour on average, although some were as short as 30 minutes, and some went on for over two hours. The major part of the interviews was dedicated to discussing the pictures that research participants took.

3.2. Data Analysis Methods.

The data analysis began with completing verbatim transcripts. The researcher listened through each interview carefully and recorded it in detail, including the non-verbal communications and grammatical errors. According to Gibbs (2007), transcribing one's own interviews can further familiarize the researcher with the data and help generate new ideas regarding the data analysis.

While all communication conveys meaning and is important to include in the preliminary transcript, non-verbal cues such as “ums”, pauses, giggling or whispering were cleaned up in the final quotes, presented in Findings section. Repetitive words and unstructured sentences were also deleted in order to isolate the participant's thought from interference and distractions that their spoken language may present. While transcribing and listening, the researcher became familiar with the data, and some major commonalities and differences between the two student cohorts began to emerge.

The transcripts were forwarded to the research advisor for review. Feedback was received regarding the amount and quality of data. After the transcripts were ready, a generic method of

coding and memo-writing techniques (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006) was used for data analysis. According to Creswell (2007), this stage of research can be characterized as analysis of themes which involves analyzing data for specific themes and providing data to support them. Hence, the transcripts were examined for prominent themes. Recurring themes were identified and put together in a list. By the end of the analysis this list of themes underwent some minor modifications with certain themes being put together, and the other ones eliminated. Manual open coding was used to highlight the themed content and group it together. The transcripts were colour-coded, and information corresponding to each theme was put in a separate document. The raw data were then used as a basis for theme description. These themes along with the transcript quotes and photographs are used in presentation of the results. Six prominent themes and many subthemes were identified in the participants' responses. Photographs are used to illustrate the students' narratives.

The data were analyzed by direct interpretation. According to Creswell (2007), this form of data analysis is a "process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways." In this research, data were split into multiple themes, and then the themes were presented as coherent text using quotes from multiple participants given in a multitude of contexts. Responses from students from both countries were compared and contrasted, and conclusions were drawn.

4. Findings

Introduction

The research findings will be discussed in this chapter, including information on participant demographics, showcasing the photographs that study participants took, and

presenting recurring themes found in research interviews. This outline of research findings allows for offering context for social work students' voices, and then providing these voices unchanged in the format of photographs with participants' own words to accompany them. Research participants are seen as co-creators of knowledge who exercise their agency in choosing facets of oppression and anti-oppression that they feel are important. In the following section of findings data is being interpreted by the researcher, common topics are identified, and conclusions are drawn.

Prominent themes have emerged in every interview, showing similarities and differences in the participants' approaches to anti-oppressive practice. Context and language have influenced the students' perspectives. The participants have also externalized and internalized the experience of oppression, and presented it from the macro and micro levels. Some participants were willing to discuss oppression in their lives and illustrate it with examples, while others only discussed oppression as a societal or global phenomenon, and did not speak about their own experiences.

All participants demonstrated their distinct and elaborate perspectives on oppression, social work practice, and the education they received. Both similarities and differences emerged between the perspectives of participants from Finnish and Canadian cohorts.

4.1. Demographic characteristics of research participants.

The demographic composition of social work students who participated in this research provides a context and perspective to their answers. For the sake of preserving the participants' confidentiality, they were assigned randomly selected nicknames that also represent the diversity of participants' origin.

Thirteen participants were interviewed for this research. Seven of them were taking their social work programs in Canada, at the University of Manitoba, and six in Finland, mostly at the University of Tampere. Only one (Aino) was enrolled at the University of Helsinki. Ten were graduate-level students, with Zarmina from Canada, and Tarja and Joonas from Finland being undergraduate students. In addition, Aino and Sanjeev were PhD students, both being from Finland. Sanjeev was an international student, studying at the University of Tampere.

Research participants came from diverse backgrounds. Among Canadian participants, one was an Aboriginal person, one Asian, one African, one Middle-Eastern, and one South American individual. Five out of seven were from visible minority groups. Three of the participants were first generation immigrants, and none identified as a refugee. One Canadian participant was Caucasian. There were three men and four women. One student identified as being in a sexual minority group, and one disclosed being Muslim.

Caucasian individuals were clearly underrepresented among participants in this research. The Finnish cohort of participants was less ethnically diverse, with only Sanjeev being from Southeast Asia. Two men and four women were recruited to participate in this research. None of the Finnish participants identified as being from sexual or religious minority groups.

Interviews were conducted in Finnish with most participants from Finland, although the initial plan involved using English as a primary language of the research. However, it became apparent in the interview process, that Finnish can be used and can provide an additional potential for the participants to express their thoughts. Being an international student, Sanjeev communicated in English. There was one focus group with three participants, one face-to-face interview, and two Skype interviews.

The language of interviews was English with all participants in Canada. Two out of seven participants were non-native speakers of English, as was the researcher. This led to a slowdown in communication in one case, however, the participant's English skills were sufficient for the expression of their views.

Research participants had social work experience in a variety of areas, and many worked in more than one area through the course of their careers, volunteer work and field placements. Three were hospital social workers, two were employed or did their field placements in child and family services, one worked in corrections, three had experience in addictions and mental health, one worked in the field of homelessness, and two helped immigrants and refugees. In addition, two participants did research work and program development. All participants spoke at length about oppression, as they experienced it, observed it, or countered it. Most stated that they have provided anti-oppressive services and consider themselves to be anti-oppressive social work practitioners.

4.2. Photographs taken by the research participants.

The participants have presented unique and diverse photographs, most of which are showcased in this chapter. Unfortunately, the contribution by Felix is missing, as he had serious technical issues with the device that he used for taking photos. However, Felix answered the interview questions in detail, showing a well-informed perspective on the subject. Although the participants were instructed to take five to seven photos that are related to oppression, some presented fewer, and some had more.

Photographs are presented in the chronological order of participants being interviewed, and the participants' words are presented verbatim. The first three participants, Sini, Tarja and

Joonas, were part of a group interview. Liz and Julie also were interviewed together. All other participants met with the researcher individually.

Photos by Sini

1. Thai massage.

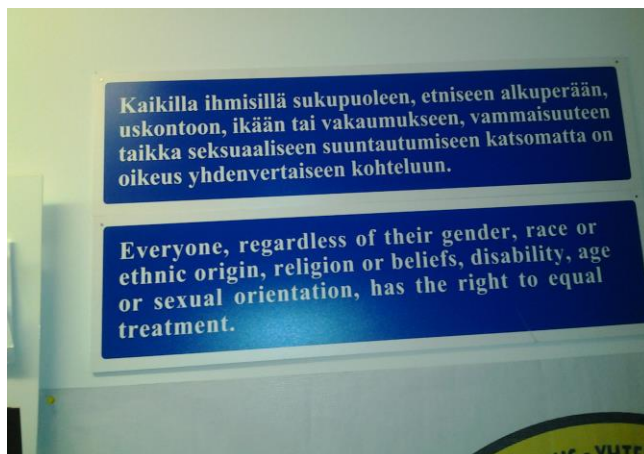
Figure 1



This is a picture from the Thai massage parlour. And I chose it because one can often get more than massage from the Thai massage parlours. Not always, but often. And often the people who are employed there are not employed willingly. And it could be that human trafficking is often connected to these places... Or sometimes... We cannot generalize, but still... And maybe the wider question relates to this, it is about what kind of esteem are we giving to people who work as sex workers, in prostitution... And how this is a part of the society.

2. Equal treatment poster.

Figure 2



This picture is from my workplace. There is this... What is the name of this campaign... The discrimination-free space campaign, according to which different offices, companies and workplaces can proclaim themselves the kind of places where nobody can be discriminated

against, and then in these places there always is this... citation from the UN Declaration of Human Rights. It is coming straight from there. I took this [picture] because it directly relates to this topic, and in a way because... When this poster is on the wall, it is difficult to bypass it, because in so many workplaces ... gender, religious, or sexual orientation equality is not a given.

3. Destroyed toy hare.

Figure 3



And then this is the hare that is destroyed. This is probably that kind of a symbol, not sure what this symbolizes, but I chose... I took this picture because... this is a picture of destruction and how the small and the weak are oppressed and destroyed.”

4. The bars.

Figure 4



This is also from my workplace. And here there are prison bars, and behind the bars there are two ex... ex-criminals which are now working with current criminals, and if one would think about discrimination of a certain group, then to me it is... In a way it is like being at the same level with people, so the people actually help each other, it is not coming from above, and then it works best of all. And this is what these people are actually doing.

5. Prison tattoos.

Figure 5



These are the prison tattoos. ... It is probably that... People can come from very different backgrounds, and this can be sometimes visible right away, this difference can be visible, it can be there since birth, or it can be acquired or chosen later in life. But then these different people should be able to work together.

Tarja also commented on this picture,

It comes to mind that the society makes it difficult for people with tattoos, and how you are being categorized because of the tattoo. Because I also have a tattoo, and others were wondering how could I do this and if I am a social worker, how can these two things even work together. ... Or does it make me less trustworthy or a worse person, or what is the meaning of it? Maybe usually it is the understanding of diversity or respecting it.

Sini added,

It feels like in Finland people start slowly learning that if you were born a certain way then it is okay, but then choices, things you have done that set you apart from others, are to many [people] more difficult to accept. And then there are the borderline examples, because if you think that something is people's choice, and some think that these are the things that a person cannot change, for example, sexual orientation.

6. Together against fascism for the free space.

Figure 6



I'm not sure which group or organization put up this sticker. It says together against fascism... on behalf of the free space. I chose this one because it is important that we speak about the civil society and the fact that people do things themselves, and they do not just wait for something to come from the outside. We should literally take power into our own hands and oppose what makes us feel bad.

Photos by Joonas

Figure 7

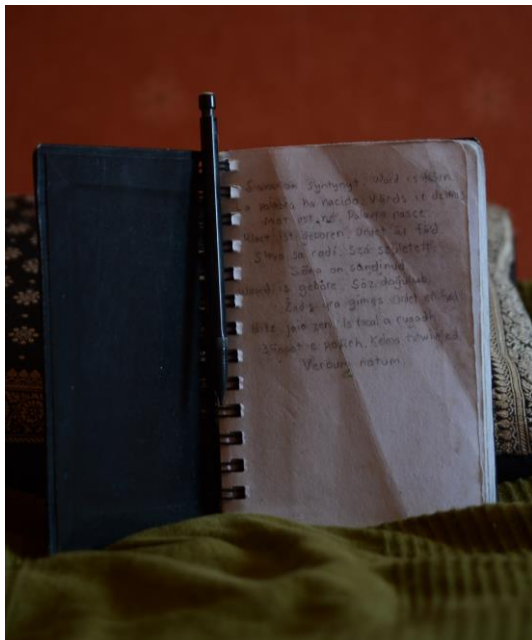


1. Garden.

This is from my, or our, yard. There is perunamaa [potato garden]. Or maybe there is something else planted as well. ... It is good to produce your own food, so that people do not have to work for little pay somewhere in the world. ... Because today we bring destruction and then oppress the animals and the workers who get very little wage for their labour. This is a question of food business.

2. The word is born.

Figure 8



This is my diary and there are many... I used Google translate for this, because I speak Finnish and English, but not the other languages of these writings. ... I was thinking that this picture represents the idea of the freedom of speech. And then we can talk about literacy, its meaning or the number of people who maybe cannot read or write, then these people are easy to oppress, because they do not have an opportunity to influence [their realities].

3. The black dog.

Figure 9



Here is an animal that is discriminated against and oppressed. It is black and on top of that female. ... There is also depression. It is sulking. But here it looks clearly into the bright future.

Photos by Tarja

Figure 10



1. Student gathering.

This [picture] is from the last week's social work student gathering in Helsinki. There is this kind of event where the students come together to eat, drink, and sing. ... The students come together from those cities where social work can be studied. We spend time together and, probably, develop the common spirit. Because in social work we do not always act in common spirit or have the same ideas about certain things. It relates to oppression in a way that resisting oppression is one of the social work tasks....

We create a network and get acquainted with each other. I believe that for the most part we have similar values. And we all want to do something, for example, we

talk about the social work structure that is happening in Finland a lot, where a social worker does not have an influence. Maybe we have a desire to make a difference... And maybe the collaboration and networking help us understand how to work together for or against these things.

2. Don't eat meat.

Figure 11

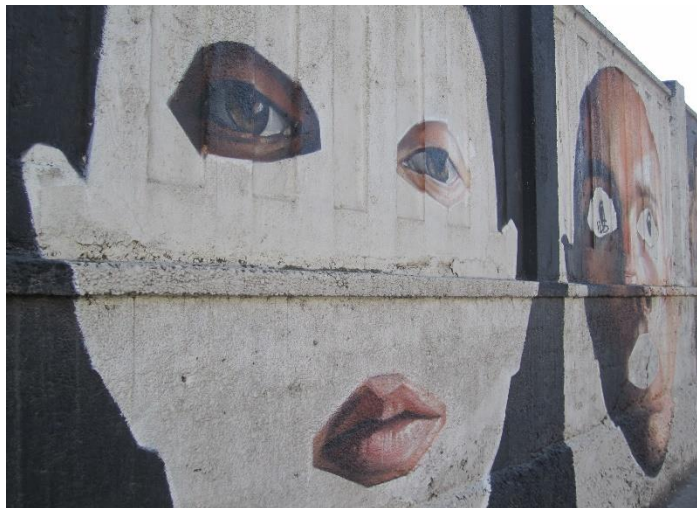


“This is from Copenhagen. We were couchsurfing¹ at a Danish girl’s place. And this girl, as you can see from the picture, is vegetarian and lesbian. And this picture, which was quite funny to me, was on the fridge door. ... She gave us her keys... And it was a very natural communication with this person, everything was very usual, as it should be. It was not an issue that she is going to spend a night at her girlfriend’s place, and there was this poster on the fridge, we thought it was funny, but some people can be offended by it. ... I was couchsurfing there, and to me this is the way to get to know different people and through this to gain knowledge and understanding... We are all the same, and all different. And then this removes discrimination and racism towards these people.”

¹ Tarja refers to the Couchsurfing project that helps travelers meet and find a host for a few nights. This project is very popular in Europe. More information is available at couchsurfing.com.

3. Graffiti.

Figure 12



important to me, and also meeting different people.

Sini also commented on this picture:

It also makes me think about how graffiti and street art belong to this topic because there are no clear boundaries, for example, what is culture and what is art, and the space is given to different ways creating it and enjoying it... This is an example of how space can be given to different cultures.

This is a picture from Croatia... This is a graffiti wall. This street is a modern art museum², so this is a road, and on its sides there are these artistic, great graffiti painted. This is one of those graffiti, which is, to me, unbelievably gorgeous. It is very clear. There is a white person and a black person. And parts of their faces are mixed up. ... I think this is an anti-oppressive picture. ... It refers to the fact that we are, in essence, all different, but the same. ... And the global citizenship is a fascinating topic to me. Getting to know different cultures is

² Tarja is most likely referring to Zagreb's Museum of Street Art.

4. Volunteering.

Figure 13



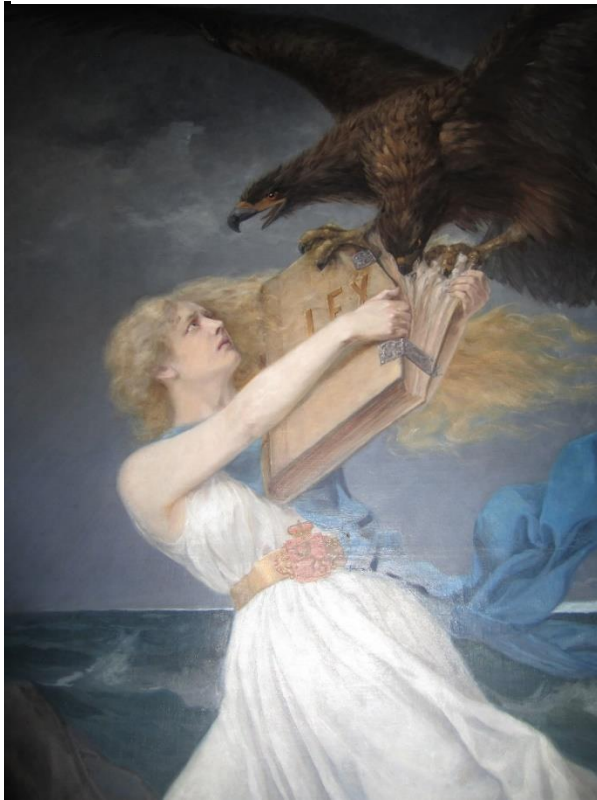
[The picture was modified to protect the

identity of persons portrayed].

This picture tells about how I was volunteering in Italy. I participated in the EVS, European Voluntary Service, and this program involves everyone volunteering at a destination country, all foreigners then come together. ... The students, their groups are usually a very positive place for foreigners. I have noticed that in Finland many people approach foreigners with anger, and this goes especially for foreign men. There this mentality that “they come here and take away our women and jobs”, and if, for example, you go to a bar with a foreign man, you’ll be hearing [bad things] about it. This is not a very positive thing.”

5. Nationalism.

Figure 14



I was visiting the national museum for the first time in my life. And I got this picture from there, because this picture is well known from our history books. ... [It] shows how Suomenneito³ protects the book of laws from bad Russia. ... It is the Russian eagle, the one with two heads over there. ... We know the history. We were under the Russian rule. ... A kind of nationalism, the national frenzy arose in Finland. People were very patriotic and wanted Finland to be independent. I think about what does it generally mean to be Finnish, and it was always said that we are a very homogenous nation. We easily talk about us and the Finnish sisu⁴ beliefs, our homeland, and this way we forget that we had immigration for a very long time, people came here and our language has changed. Different things are from somewhere else, and immigration can be credited for this. ... If we speak about nationality or ethnicity,

then it is clear that Finnish people are quite openly racist towards Russians and the Romani. All other racism is hidden. But this remains, and we make jokes about it.

³ "Finnish maiden", a human representation of Finland.

⁴ A Finnish word for inner strength and perseverance; an important cultural concept.

6. Begging in the street.

Figure 15



[This is a] picture from Helsinki. There is this beautiful sushi place and there's a couple enjoying the sun in the outdoor terrace. And there at the corner is a Romanian Romani⁵ panhandler. She has a scarf on her head to protect herself from the sun, and she collects money. There's also the thing that Finns are openly racist towards this ethnicity. This is also a form of discrimination. ... Romani panhandlers in Finland are enabled by European Union, because we

have our own Romani ethnic minority, who are quite wealthy and they have the Finnish citizenship, they have the right to social security, and they are not on the streets. But then the Romani who come from Romania, who do not have the right to social security, because they are not here, and they can move freely. And now it can be seen every year on the street that the Romani panhandlers appear.

Sini also commented on this picture:

And these Romani come to Finland because back in Romania, or where they live, I did not ask, but it has to be somewhere in Europe. Things are so bad there that you cannot make a living in a better way, or they believe that they will get more money, and a better life there, they come here to the richer countries to beg, because in their home country the situation is desperate.

⁵ Tarja assumes that this person is of Romani ethnicity, but has arrived to Finland from Romania, and is not a Finnish citizen.

Photos by Maija

1. Domestic violence services.

Figure 16



I tried to find something to take picture of at my workplace. It is a social service agency, and there are all the ads in the world. And there is this poster, where there is one way to help in Finland in a situation of violence against women. ... This is the patriarchal violence against women. ... But the other oppression is that in Finland there is also violence against men on many levels. Women act violently towards men, and men act violently a lot towards each other. This is seen as

an entirely different social problem than violence against women. Even though it is equally unacceptable to use violence in any form, there are different attitudes in society towards violence. Who creates violence, and who suffers from it. ... There is an advert that says if a woman suffers from violence, she would know where to get help. But if a man suffers from violence, would he know where to get help? And would he get it at all?

2. Respect.

Figure 17



I found this today's morning by my workplace, there's a pizza place. Somebody decided to write on their window that they demand respect. I thought that spray painting often is related to marginalized people. This is the space of many young men, who are discriminated against, and this is their voice against the discrimination that society inflicts on them. They return it, they refuse to take it. ... They have their own space where they act and demand respect.

3. Origins.

Figure 18



This is a tree that I have planted. This is an abstract picture. There is a thought that people are oppressed based on a different skin colour or nationality, or gender, or... disability. It is the same way like we plant trees, that tree does not choose where it is being planted. It is done by the people who are around. Just the same way the oppressed person never chooses where they are born, or into which gender they are born, into which religion they are born. ... But when people have ideas that bring in the categorizing, stereotypes and

prejudice, in a way people manage to oppress others on this basis.

4. Dark hand and light hand.

Figure 19



This is probably the anti-racist picture, there is a dark hand and a light hand. ... This is a symbol of humanity. And humanity is an idea that we are all people in the end and we all have the same needs. But these ideas and categories where we put people, even though we are the same, we are all one people in the end... Regardless of our skin colour.

5. Women's situation.

Figure 20

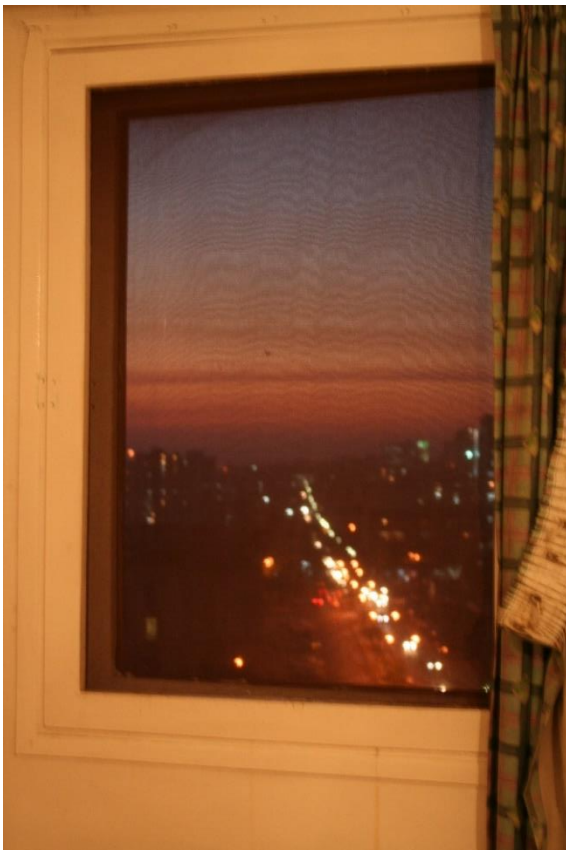


[This picture refers to] the women's position

in different developing countries, but now I am talking about Finland, and women do not participate in the language courses, they stay at home instead. Also, you can see in this picture that this woman is already working in the morning. ... But at least she may be able to provide for some of her family. ... It can also be a resource that she gets to work, and there are social connections, there can be many. Also, there is the influence of her own view of herself and her role. Is this role determined by the cultural rules of a woman's position, or does this woman determine it herself? What is the anti-oppressive approach there? But also, looking at this picture and the work she is doing, obviously the economic violence relates to that too, because her wage is very small... But that is her livelihood.

6. The window.

Figure 21



This is a symbol of many things. ... There is the city, Maputo. ... There are people who belong to different social classes and different ethnicities. There is violence against women, and this is a prominent theme in street art... Domestic violence and violence against women is discussed. ... This is a controversial picture. On the one hand, it is a symbol of hoping for the better, and there is the awareness about these things. And they try to do something about it, so that this oppression does not continue, but on the other hand, the whole society structure does not support what they are trying to do. Maybe those are the social workers or whoever trying to do something. ... And then there is something that cannot be seen in the darkness. How is it even possible that the people who

managed to get away from this, they are not poor, they are middle class. How many of them close their eyes to get away from this reality, how it really is. There is a lot of work to do. Just like in all other countries, of course.

7. Women's work.

Figure 22



Here I thought that if these clothes are hanging there, somebody had to put them there. And usually it is a woman who takes care of the home. There is a little better wage from the people who can afford to hire a homemaker. Who then has a family to take care of. ... It is good when the job is available, but there's this universal notion of what is women's work, and what is men's work. I think it is quite meaningful that femininity is related to these clothes, and most probably this was done by a poor woman.

8. The doll.

Figure 23



This picture reminds me of the time when I was at the primary school, I was six years old, and we had four dolls there, one of which was dark skinned. ... I do not know whether it got there, at that primary school, by mistake... Or whether the point was to try and teach us about multiculturalism. And then it can be found in this picture that I took in Finland... And there is an African man's hand and this light doll which he was looking at without excitement.

This also works as a manifestation of multiculturalism.”

9. The unknown.

Figure 24



I don't know what these names are... But it may be good not to know, you cannot know a lot of the other person's background, do they live on the street, or where are they living, at their accommodation or home. Then you cannot really make assumptions. There is this ignorance. On the one hand, ignorance creates discrimination. But on the other hand, this ignorance can help finding the common humanity.

10. Fruit shop.

Figure 25



This can be understood in many ways, but one point of view could be that it is a social injustice that somebody sells these goods, the lollipops, oranges, these little things in a tiny shack in the slums district. ...But again, the other point of view could be that there is something to do, some work, and it gives you control over your life. ... You have something that you can do.

Photos by Aino

1. The closed window.

Figure 26



I'd like to say about this that... There are anti-oppressive and oppressive practices in society. I wanted to portray a window and not a door, because if you think about the many things that are closed or far away from certain population groups in society, for example, immigrants or people from the developing countries, they cannot fulfill all those things that other people [can]. In a way, if a person who belongs to a minority group, it can be that they do not have the knowledge about the services available to them or their own rights. They do not have any social contacts or networks either, that could give them this knowledge or offer support... You can open the door and go out, but not all people even have the opportunity to look out of the window. These society ways are strong and excluding to people.

2. A possibility for change.

Figure 27



This is the arena⁶ which includes a small colosseum. ... I have heard the stories about a whole family being executed there by fighting against a lion, and I thought that this was entertainment. But nowadays the Verona opera festival is held at the same place, so this is the same place where families were killed. ... Now it is a beautiful and charming place, and the music was playing there beautifully, so it came to my mind that civilization changes and the knowledge changes, and so there is a possibility to change these oppressive practices. ... It is a warming thought that now people can change, and the society can change, and so the places and their meaning can change.

3. The space in between.

Figure 28



If there are the humiliating and unequal practices, and they exist in the society, then they can also take place in the social work environment. I am interested in these spaces, for example, if a customer or a family in a difficult situation, or who are a minority come to the social service worker's

⁶ The picture portrays the Verona Arena (Arena di Verona).

office... Usually the worker sits there as an expert, and then the client gets the message that this space creates the unequal position, that the worker is being an expert there and is the one with power... If we think about an immigrant family, then the worker speaks their first language, and the family does not, and there is a table in this picture, so this space is... Social work itself has a responsibility to consider these unequal practices that are out there, and in this space as well.

4. Reciprocity.

Figure 29

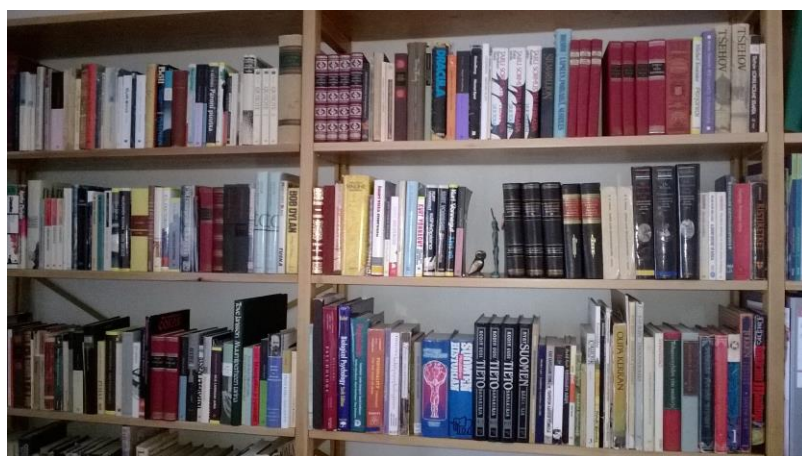


It is possible to create the space and situation where there is an opportunity for reciprocity or the genuine dialogue, so that the worker listens to the client, and genuinely concerns about the client's well-being. If a worker can create... this environment, they can help an individual client, but they can also get the important knowledge about the

client's life, and how these can be brought to the upper level, so there is a possibility for structural social work. The space in between can be removed.

5. Building of knowledge.

Figure 30



I think that the discriminatory practices could be changed greatly if there was more knowledge... The bookshelf portrays knowledge, but it also portrays... In Finland there are many social sphere projects, the EU⁷ projects, we do things like developing some kind of anti-racist work. These are good practices and how they are done, there is the youth education and school social work, but then many

⁷ European Union

of the good practices end up on a bookshelf, many projects are forgotten... It is important to build knowledge, but it is also important to find the channels that can be used for sharing knowledge, this is the way we can create anti-oppressive practice. There is knowledge, there are the projects, the people have the willingness, but... the collaboration, the awareness raising did not yet succeed entirely. At least in Finland. ... Let's not just shelve these positive anti-oppressive practices, let's bring them to the society.

Photos by Sanjeev

1.Heterotopia.

Figure 31



This is the picture where this girl is showing us a schematic. And it is a heterotopia which she is showing. ... By heterotopia I mean a kind of spatial location of a certain community, or a location of certain people in a place. If you juxtapose them, a place with other places, they might be deemed to be opposite. For instance, the culture of that space, that place, could be very different from others. So, it's like a library in a university where you would see lots of books. Or maybe a cemetery

where you will see past decades which are coming together, or maybe people are coming together. So this girl is showing the schematic of the community called [research site⁸]. It is a site of extreme population. Its power, space and knowledge, they are intertwined. And how the subjectivities of the people inhabiting these places are changed. Cause and events are actually produced in three concepts. ... In a middle of her hand. There are some blue spaces. ... There is a blue box inside, and there are various other boxes outside. So, it is showing the spatial location of the [research community]. [research community], who used to stay in various islands.... So these people used to live there for centuries. And they had no outside contact with the outsiders. ... They had their own kind of culture, they had their own society, and they were living happily before 2004⁹. ... So what government did, government began to visit the islands of these people and put them at particular place. ... And now these people are surrounded by various other people who do not know [research community] and they had different kind of culture, they had different

⁸ Sanjeev names a specific location. The names of this location and the community associated with it have to be taken out of this text in order to protect Sanjeev's confidentiality.

⁹ [Research site] was devastated by a tsunami in 2004.

kind of society, which was a modern society.... The government wants to make them modern, to instill the rationalities of the modern people.

2. Relic of consumerism.

Figure 32



This is a relic of consumerism that was triggered in the community of [research community]¹⁰. [Research community] used to live in their spaces, and they used to live from hand to mouth. And their society was very independent ... So after the catastrophe government gave them monetary aids... A lot of money was pumped in [research site] society. And [research community] had no idea what to do with the money. So, this is how they had a feeling of coming to these new spaces that they are primitive people, their

mode of production is outdated, and they are materially inferior. They are secondary to the non-[research site] population. So they started purchasing stuff like cars, mobile phones, and things like that. Now I'm looking at two questions. One is, why did [research community] purchase these things, and what good did these things do to them? Which reflects at the broader questions of justice, oppression, or anti-oppression. [Research community members] purchased these things which they never wanted to. The reason was that they thought that these things are a symbol of being advanced, development. So they started purchasing those things. ... And they spent their money they got in compensations on material good, and there was consumerism in the society. After some time they realized that they can't handle this technology. So all the money that they spent... in purchase of some goods is just wasted. And the point that I'm trying to make over here is, how [research community] are negotiating their subjectivities. Like, their own [view] of their prior subjectivities, and new subjectivities, that were harmonized on the basis of, of their stay, like the time, that they spent several years in these so-called heterotopias of deviance, if I may say so. They were overhauling their subjectivity. And their freedom was not... their choice of freedom, their so-called freedom was not that free.

¹⁰ The [research community] are the indigenous inhabitants of [research site] that are currently part of [another country].

3. The Virgin Mary.

Figure 33



[There is] a continuum in my pictures. And that's how the identities are created. How the ideas are changed. How people think that the concept of agency I'm referring to here, that what I think, whatever I think right now is not my free will. And my socialization, or various factors contribute [to this]. ... Indigenous people are, if you look at the religious component in their life, they're animist... They associate the concept of god with nature. Now I'm looking at how their ideas were corrupted by the

missionaries who came there with their new ideas and, and reformulated the meanings, or reconstructed the cognitive understanding of the [research community]. So this picture of Mary over here is a symbol of the corruption of [research community members'] ideas. They were not Christians, they had their own faith, so it has historical roots. ... And if you look at the changes that are coming to the [research community] with the colonization, then there is the corruption of their ideas. I mean, they are not the [research community] they used to be. And whatever actions they are doing now, they have their history in the colonial period. ... This is how outsiders came and just imposed their religion on these people, and corrupted their own ideas.

4. Housing.

Figure 34



“These are the houses that are constructed for the [research community]”. When describing the photograph, Sanjeev stated that the houses are not suitable to the research community's traditional housing patterns and interfere with them practicing their culture. The research community members are used to communal living, while the houses built for them by the government force the individualism on them. In addition, these houses are built of

non-indigenous materials, so the research community cannot do their own repairs, and have to depend on the external population, as well as use money. Sanjeev finished his description with these words, “And it is an oppression to the community, because the community don’t have a free choice. They have to accept the things, or they have to just perish.”

5. Nudity.

Figure 35



Sanjeev told that the research community did not practice wearing clothes in their everyday life, but now they are being forced to change this cultural norm. Sanjeev argues that nudity has not only cultural, but also a functional value for the research community. He also points out that nudity was not sexualized in this community. However, wearing clothes is perceived as civilized behavior by the outer society, hence the research community members are pressured to change their cultural norms. Sanjeev stated, “It is an

oppression, when you impose your own cultural values on other people. Those values are a lie, [they] have no meanings.”

Photos by Liz

1. Celebrate diversity.

Figure 36



The two photos that I did take certainly represent where my area of focus is, a lot of area where I spend a lot of my time, which is on the Fort Garry university campus, in the Tier Building. So what I was predominantly focusing in on with this sticker that said “celebrate diversity”, which I really, really like, and I think that it speaks to many different areas of diversity, and... to the openness of it. This is actually on the Social Work Students’ Association’s door, so what I

really like about the students is that they certainly bring in this openness and this inclusion. And to really acknowledge that that there is diversity on campus, but also within the Faculty of Social Work as the student population. You will notice that there is a sign that does say “University of Manitoba” in this picture as well. I would like to say that... Being in the Faculty of Social Work, really it is to be... offering support. Here in Manitoba, in Winnipeg we have a large population of Indigenous peoples, the largest in Canada, in fact. And so really we’re taught in our, um, in our programming in school that we are most probably going to be offering support to Indigenous population. However, I think it is really important to remember that we are working with a diverse population, people who do experience marginalization in our society... However, our program, I feel, still has work to do in terms of colonial practice... We do still need to be acknowledging the ways that we, perhaps, are not open to. A lot of people who experience marginalization... In a way we practice [it] in our curriculum as well. I just think that it’s really interesting, the juxtaposition of the words that we have there, and that ultimately we are in social work to be supportive and help all people, so that all people can, live the life they would like to, in a positive way perhaps.

2. People united.

Figure 37



So this picture I think is for the washrooms? I think it’s to acknowledge that there is a washroom that anyone could use, and really a part that stands out is that there is a washroom accessible for those with disabilities. So for me this photo represents two ideas, two levels. So one, again, it’s, the Faculty of Social Work, really that we are there to promote that sense of inclusiveness... I guess that difference is not the bad thing, it’s not the negative thing. Trying to be open to people, whether it’s gender-wise, ethnicity, sexual orientation,

however... This photo, I think it’s interesting because the physical structure itself is something really important in terms of how we send a message to people about whether they’re included or excluded... I know that [the Faculty of Social Work] did make that accommodation for having a washroom that was accessible to those with disabilities, physical disabilities, however, I think that the physical structure itself still sends a message that it is still colonial, since it’s a very old building itself... As an Indigenous person, for me the circle is a really important symbol. And that’s our way of talking about how we’re all at the same level... and that everyone, again, is to be included. I think if we were to have a building structure, and it’s more of a one level building, it just to be accommodating, to send that message that there really isn’t any kind of power differences, and trying to address things like that, trying to address perhaps visual cues that

everyone could relate to... Just recognizing that the physical structure where we're learning our theory, our practice, and how those networks that we connect with still [are not sending] that message that everyone is included.

Photos by Julie

1. Flora House.

Figure 38



This picture is a Flora house, it's in the North End of Winnipeg. It is near Selkirk Avenue. And this program caters to children and youth, it's a place that is supposed to offer an opportunity for them to have safe activities before and after school, and during summer months. They focus on promoting math skills, English, computer skills, just basic core skills that children would need, that they may not be getting at school... But primarily it's the safe place for children to be off the street in a more dangerous area of the city. And how this represents anti-oppressive practice to me is, it is providing a niche within the community to allow children to have a safe learning environment, and a safe place to play, maybe a

safe place just to be... And promoting excellence or learning in that area of the city.

2. North End Renewal Corporation

Figure 39



This is the North End Community Renewal Corporation, Community Education Development Association. This is also, of course, in the North End of Winnipeg, on Selkirk Avenue as well... They are promoting anti-racism, inclusion, and overall anti-oppressive approach to involving the community... To me their basic mandate represents what I see as anti-oppressive practice at the community grassroots level. It's fitting in [a]niche or area, place in that

North End of the city where they work with more marginalized individuals, likely requiring assistance in a place that's open to all.

3. North End Women's Resource Centre

Figure 40



This is the North End Women's Resource Centre. Again, on Selkirk Avenue... How it represents anti-oppressive practice to me is that it caters to women who may be in trouble either from violence in relationships, at risk of losing their housing, or needing transitional housing. Women who are dealing with addiction issues, with parenting issues. To me, it meets the need of women... This is North End, not of course all Winnipeg women. But it's in an

accessible location related to the other resources that are around... It fits my definition or meaning of anti-oppressive practice, having something accessible to people... Unfortunately it's a big area that needs lots of resources.

4. Salvation Army

Figure 41

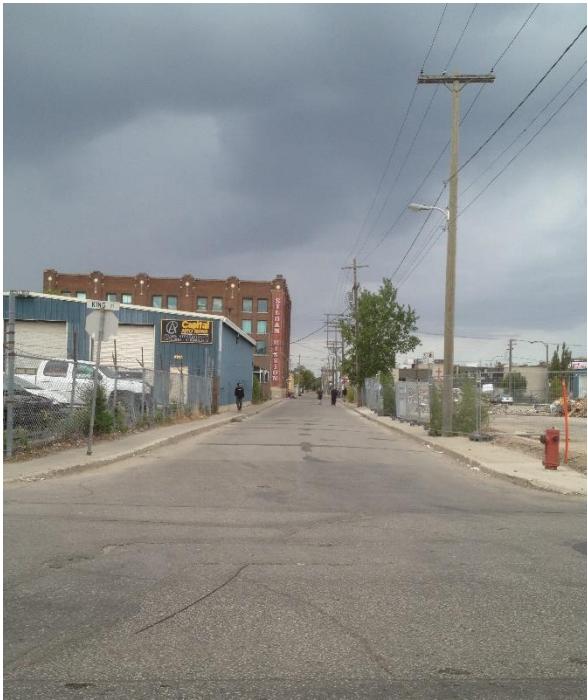


The Salvation Army. This is the Booth Centre. More specifically, I'm trying to capture the Salvation Army logo, not necessarily the place... To me the Salvation Army represents a bigger inclusive charity group, even though there's religious affiliation with it. Their approach is helping people, marginalized people, without asking a lot for themselves, because I know that they're the only group that the CEO is paid almost nothing compared to bigger charitable organizations, such as the United Way and other places... So to me that puts it at their concern and their monies that they collect are for the people that

they're saying they want to help. And of course, this building is the homeless shelter, one of the homeless shelters in Winnipeg. It offers people a place to stay, having a meal... It's somewhat marginalizing people to say they have to go into a building, but to me I also see as empowering, because that gives them access to services, resources, things that they need, if they want to access that.

5. Siloam Mission

Figure 42

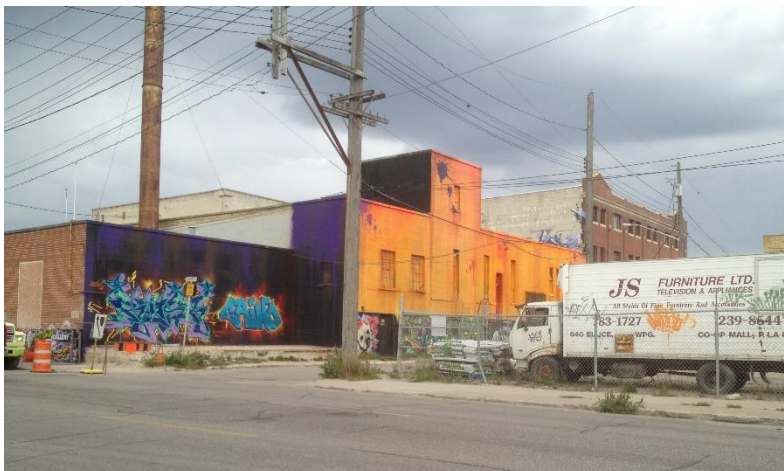


It's Siloam Mission, a homeless shelter... Siloam Mission is, to my knowledge, the only homeless shelter that doesn't charge. The other one, Booth centre, that is Salvation Army, they do charge for you to stay the night. ... Siloam mission is free. You don't have to pay anything, but you have to line up every night... And you have to be out, I believe, by 7:30 in the morning... You have to be out pretty early. And then that's it. They also do quite a bit of programming in other community outreach programs, and support. So homeless shelters... They're not keeping people homeless, but... I've met quite a few clients in my few short years that choose to be homeless. They don't want to live in a house. They don't want to work, and they actually have quite a bit of resources and inner

strength... to be able to survive on the street... without being in a home, or having a job, having money So to me, Siloam Mission helps to empower someone to seek housing and seek other resources.

6. Graffiti programming

Figure 43



So this is some graffiti. This is on Higgins Avenue. This is the Winnipeg Graffiti group association. ... This program serves children and youth, giving them sort of a creative outlet, and a place to use their art in a safe

way, not on a garage. So it gives them an opportunity, and then inside the building they have programming where they are trying to develop artistic abilities. But I just thought it was nice, it's an interesting piece of art versus tagging and all that kind of stuff. ... How that relates to anti-oppressive practice is that... Trying to meet an obvious need, that there's people, children, youth, adults out there that do have artistic ability, especially with, I guess, spray painting and other airbrushing abilities. To allow them to legally express themselves through their art. In a way that they are allowed to, not just anywhere.

7. [Julie included a close-up of the graffiti from the same location].

Photos by Christine

1. Dreamcatcher circle.

Figure 44



I thought of this dreamcatcher that I had for ten years now. And in terms of anti-oppressive practice and anti-oppression, I think, everyone together within a circle, we are all... different parts of a dreamcatcher. It's like all the different parts in the world. But I think bringing everyone together, and sharing knowledge within a circle would help address some of the anti-oppressive practice and issues that we have. ... I mean, dreamcatchers in general are supposed to be catching the bad dreams... So, I guess, it can be interpreted as different levels in addressing oppression. So, that's how I interpret this one.

2. Looking out.

Figure 45

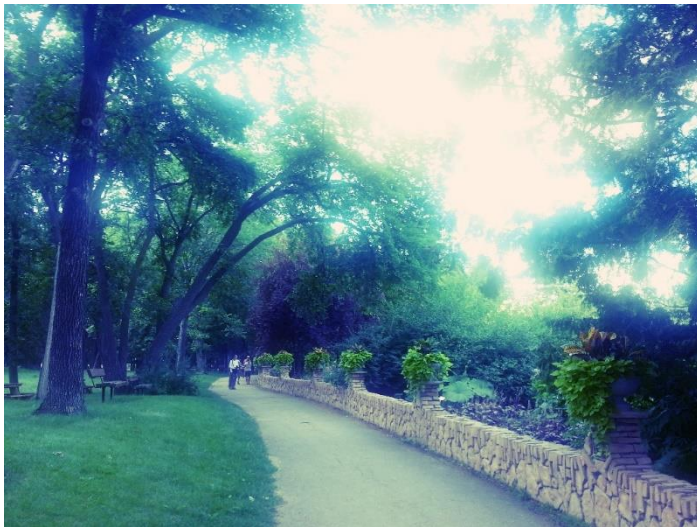


So this is, basically, looking out into the world from a building... I believe understanding people's perspective and experience is... Going inside of a person's life through their lens, throughout in the world would have to be... a better understanding of what oppression means to them. And that's where I got this idea of looking out, but being in at the same time.... I think it does represent to a positive thing... That there is no darkness when it comes to... Helping people understand what the oppression experiences are. It's not a negative thing, it's an eye-opener. ... That's what this picture is about. And it's a little blurry, because... I decided to add effects, make it a little bit blurry... You know, if people come in it might be a blur to them, so I think part of it is opening up their eyes [to] what we consider normal... It's so normalized for people to use certain

language... So I think part of that blurriness is to... open up their eyes just a little bit more. And the issues that we have here, and oppression.

3. The path.

Figure 46



This picture was taken in Assiniboine Park... I think if we were to address oppression in this world, we must follow a certain path... We must work together and walk along together in the path... There will be bumps, and challenges, and rocks, and things like that.... It's really a journey... to educate. It's a journey for everybody. And I think, if we walk along similar paths, and have similar beliefs, we walk all on the same path. To me it represents... A form of happiness, where in a world there's no stereotypes, no

prejudiced attitudes, no preconceived notions... Just everything is beautiful, and people are just happy, walking this path.

5. Diversity.

Figure 47



We all are planted in different parts of the world... We all are different, there is different flowers, as you can see here... We all grow up differently, we all grow up through different experiences, as do plants too. But, as a flower arrangement, everyone is brought together. All these flowers are brought together, and they become beautiful. So, bringing people together as well can address oppression... I think that bringing a uniqueness and different perspectives is what would help with anti-oppressive practice. Because if people didn't have different experiences, people wouldn't be able to come together to address challenges that we experience in this world.

Photos by Chris

1. The market.

Figure 48



I took that picture in Pattaya, in Thailand... I did not really realize, that Pattaya is a place where a lot of sex trade is taking place. ... It looks very colourful, the letters have different colours. It looks very alive and vibrant, but within the vibrance and the busyness of the place is the sad reality that a lot of sex trade and a lot of human exploitation is taking place within that area. And it's just really-really sad to see the dynamics of it. ... When I see Thailand... the word

'market' comes to my mind, in a sense that it's very commercialized. And they're selling tourism in the most maximum way, and sometimes at the expense of their most impoverished people, who are sometimes forced into sex trade. And it's really sad to see the correlation of tourism and sex trade, as there seems to be a huge connection, and when I see the word "market", I'm thinking about human flesh being sold. Not because they want to, or they feel empowered by doing that, [but] because they need to, mostly, and perhaps for survival means.

2. Ruins of Angkor Wat.

Figure 49



The ruins of the Angkor Wat, which happens to be the largest religious monument in the world, or the largest religious site in the world. I chose that picture, because it shows a lot of dissonance. When I spoke with Cambodians, or they prefer to be called as Khmer people, they always talk about the Angkor Wat and the city of Angkor, which is the ancient city in Siem Rip, as a reminder of Cambodia's glorious past. ... I spoke with a lot of locals, and they

shared with me their insight about how helpless they feel, and how powerless they feel, Cambodia being controlled by Thailand on the other side, a richer, more powerful country, and Vietnam on the other side, which is another more prosperous and more powerful country. ... [The Khmer] feel like all of their businesses are run by the countries in two borders, their resources are exploited, and the people are exploited, or politics are significantly influenced by these two neighbouring powers, and they feel very helpless to resist it. So, it reminds me of the dissonance of Cambodia's glorious past, their powerless present, and their hopes to get back to the days of Angkor, as a lot of people have told me that what keeps them going is the hope that maybe, some day, their people would be united again, and they will gain strength, and they will be able to reclaim what is actually theirs, and be proud of themselves as Khmer people, or Cambodians.

3. Crocodile show.

Figure 50



I thought a crocodile show will be to showcase the crocodiles, but I did not realize that it looks like a showdown of two human beings, two men... And many crocodiles within wet pool. They were trying to tease the crocodile, they held a crocodile in the mouth, in the tail. A crocodile's mouth opened wide, and this guy, as you can see in the picture, has placed his head within the crocodile's mouth... And he did not do this just for once, he did this maybe six times, four to six times throughout the one and a half

hour show. People were tossing coins or bills. He would grab them by using his mouth, and he would go back to the crocodiles to insert his head in the crocodile's mouth. ... People were cheering, people were happy, people were scared, they were happy, they were excited, and these two guys were trying to please the tourists. And trying to put their lives in danger. ... Why would a person, a human being, risk his life for a few dollars? And maybe I'm talking from a Eurocentric kind of perspective that what is three bucks¹¹ to throw in the pool, and maybe that amount of money means a lot for people there... I just can't believe that you could go to this extreme for a purpose of entertainment. ... People were crazy thrilled, looking at this kind of spectacle which, I think, is very oppressive, and it endangers a life of a human being, I don't think any amount of money can actually be an enough sort of compensation for somebody to risk his life for the sake of entertainment.... I was anxious that what if the crocodile snaps and bites his head, and what will happen to his skull, it will terribly be broken. And then I'm thinking about what's going to happen to his family, he looks like he is in his forties, if he has a wife, he has kids... Is the park going to compensate them? Is he insured, if they have the worker's comp, do they have employment insurance, do they have those kinds of benefits that a lot of Canadians do enjoy? ... I'm sad with the fact that the majority of the people find it entertaining. I don't think this is entertaining. I think this is a very sad scenario of the reality of poverty, and how tourists from wealthy countries, such as Canada, can enjoy entertainment scene like this at the expense of risking the lives of people from a more marginalized, poor Third World country.

¹¹ The show entrance fee

4. Carved Buddha.

Figure 51



It's actually a very fancy sculpture woodcraft place or store, where they actually do the handmade crafts... When I went to the shop where a lot of tourists buy their souvenirs, they say it's one of the most high-end souvenir shops in Cambodia, because they are very expensive. So, a Buddha head like that would probably cost around 250 Canadian dollars, if I convert it to our currency. ... It seems to me that there's a lot of work that has come with this. A lot of skill, a

lot of expertise, a lot of time, as a process would take weeks to finish, and it's a very expensive one, it's sold. Considering that the labourer's hand had to craft a sculpture, many sculptures in a day... And knowing that most Cambodians, including labourers within woodwork places like this do not get paid very well. From... my understanding, a lot of people get paid less than a hundred dollars a month... And I just find it hard to understand why they're not well-compensated, when in fact, handicrafts or woodcrafts like this are being sold at the most expensive price that they could. So it seems to me that there is a lot of oppression and exploitation in terms of labour; it seems to me that a lot of very skilled people are not well-compensated by what they are worth receiving in terms of, of salary... A lot of them invest their skills and their expertise to do a very good job, because I was amazed how hard-working this person is, and to see his co-workers are all hard-working men and women... But they're working hard for whom? It seems to me that it's actually the Chinese or Vietnamese owners of these huge factories, that are actually benefitting from the very cheap labour of people, who are very skilled in what they're doing, and I don't think that these people are well-compensated, so it's just the sad reality. ... They are very hard-working, and they are sweating in the very hot temperature inside, it's very dusty... We don't know if they ate lunch or if they have a snack break, if they have washroom break and all of that. And when we came in, it was introduced as if it was a touristy thing to roam around and see how people work... If I put myself on this guy's situation, that I'm sweaty, I'm not comfortable, I'm trying to finish this work, it's dusty, I look kind of dirty because of the dust that I have accumulated throughout the day, and there are tourists taking pictures of me. ... I don't think that's a very respectful workplace if you're being showcased, as if you're part of the product. You could tell in their faces they're annoyed, they don't want to see people

observing and looking... But what can they do, they're labourers in the area. [The management] basically make money out of people coming in watching.

5. Downtown Seoul.

Figure 52



People can get killed if they tried to kind of cross the border between the North and South Korea, and their relatives, that they don't see each other, and generations don't even know how to unite with their families from the other side. It's just really-really sad. .. Seoul itself is beautiful, modern city, and to think about the sad past of how the superpowers could actually divide countries and divide people. And I'm not saying I'm not blaming it on the superpowers because they definitely

had their own vested interests. But it's just really sad to see people who are less powerful, people, who are smaller, who are less armed, people who are less wealthy are always the ones suffering the consequences of maneuvering, of manipulation, and the actions that are done to serve the best interests of the superpowers. ... South Korea is heavily dependent on the United States for their armed forces, and backing them against North Korea's nuclear and missile weapons, whatever they have, and the tension is never at ease, and there's always ongoing threat about one trying to conquer the other. ... When I think about this gloomy, dark, oppressive kind of situation, I think about the families that were divided, I think about... Koreans, who think about their history and how sad it is, and how many people died. I think about the divide, I think about the loss. ... I don't think that progress has actually masked the historical oppression that these people have gone through. It seems to me that this dark, gloomy picture still symbolizes the oppression that is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of South Koreans.

6. Colonial past.

Figure 53



So that is in Manila... I took that picture when I was riding the horse carriage. ... [This] is a picture taken from Intramuros, and Intramuros happens to be the walled Spanish city, the citadel... The Philippines was colonized by Spain for 333 years, it was colonized by Americans for 42 years, and it was colonized by the Japanese for three years. So, going back to Intramuros, this somehow preserved walled city in the heart of Manila, makes me remember about the oppressive

history... One of the things that I always feel very sad about is... In ancient times, the Phillipino women had very high positions in society, some of them were chiefs, some of them were priests. They could demand a lot of things, they were highly revered, they walked ahead of men when they were in social, because it shows how valued they are, they had the right to divorce their husbands if they are not sexually satisfied by them, they had the right to own properties, they had the right to become leaders, they had the right to become chiefs, they had the right to hold very prestigious positions. And Intramuros, which actually shows how powerful the Catholic influence was, the Spanish influence was, has taken a lot of that power from Phillipino women over the years of Spanish colonization, and some of those effects are still being felt today. ... I still want to believe that Phillipino women nowadays still have a very good place in Phillipino society, they are still well-respected, [there were] two women who were presidents of the republic, and it was never an issue... But I think, more than the loss of feminist ideologies, a lot of losses have taken place, the loss of identity, the loss of language, the loss of culture, the loss of heritage, the loss of national pride... Which is a result of, of numerous colonizations that have taken place. So the walls of Intramuros are the replica of hundreds of years of oppression from the hands of powers that were more powerful... I could still feel the heaviness of what happened hundreds of years ago. Just by going through the walled city.

7. Reflection.

Figure 54



[This] picture is very special to me, because it just doesn't show the Angkor Wat, but it shows a reflection of the Angkor Wat in the pond, or that man-made sort of lake... that the ancient engineers have built for the emperor back in the day. The imagery is very special in a sense that it reminds me of who we are as individuals, as a collective, as a community, as people. It seems like all of us have gone through different phases of

oppression in our lives in one way or another. And that experience, feelings, and the thoughts that come with it, [are] always reflected somehow. When we look at ourselves in the mirror, look at our photographs, our memoirs, our notebooks, our journals, diaries, something that we possess. When we think about our experiences, we cannot help it, but to think about the reflection that comes with it, like the mirroring, like the imagery of how we actually felt. Because a lot of these oppressive experiences can be very clear. When you look at this imagery, the [pond] actually represents quite a clear reflection of the Angkor Wat. And I think it's the same thing with us as people. When we think about our experiences, when we're all alone by ourselves, in a bedroom, on a plane, when we're driving, when we're on a bus... We think about our experiences and the things that we've gone through in life. We see a reflection of those experiences, we see a reflection of ourselves, we see a reflection of oppression. And along with that reflection comes feelings of pain, sadness, heaviness, regret, maybe shame? Some guilt and a struggle. Struggle to overcome, sometimes struggle to forget, and sometimes struggle to just move on, and continue with life.

8. King's Palace and a floating market in Thailand.

Figure 56



Figure 55



[During the interview Chris and the researcher have agreed to place these two pictures side by side. As Chris said, “I think that would speak for itself. Because it's such a huge contrast, it's like day and night”].

[About the picture on the left, Figure 54]:

[This] picture was taken inside the Grand Palace in Bangkok, in Thailand, which is technically the official residence of the monarch. I think Thailand, it has a law that nobody can say anything negative about the monarch, because people can actually be imprisoned for saying anything negative about the monarchy, the king, and royal family. ... I think it's amazing to see how grand is the palace, because to be honest with you, I haven't seen a place. as grandiose... This is just one tiny section of the palace, everywhere you go is coated in gold, with lots of gems and it's very beautiful... majestic, it's very regal.... It looks very grand, like, the name itself, Grand Palace, is an exact representation of how grandiose it is. And the king lives in another palace. So this is his official residence, but he has another, private residence. ... It's a huge complex, it's many, many hectares, which is amazing. ... I know that they have structures within, like, Buddhas that can stand for two stories of a building that are coated with 18-carat gold. And there is a lot of gems everywhere, like, ruby, jade, different kinds... But my only reflection on that is, I wish that more Thai people could actually enjoy the wealth. Many Thai people who have to resort to sex trade... The guys that I've seen have put their heads within the crocodile's

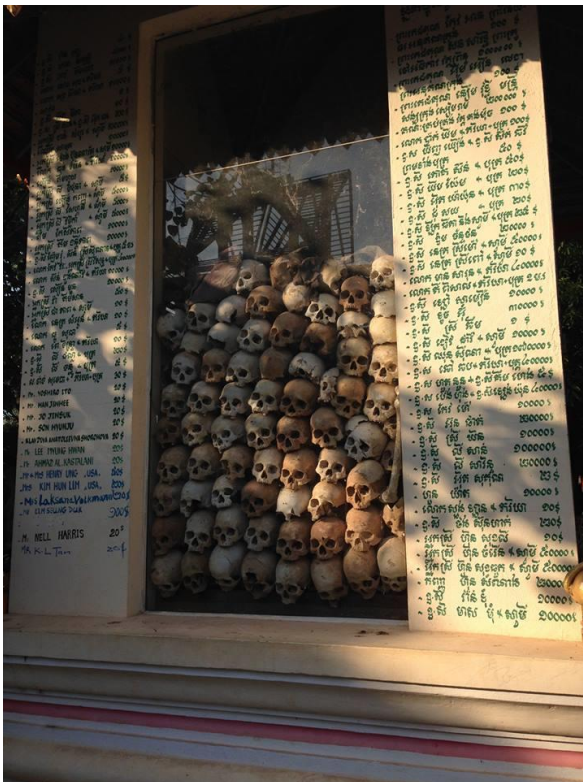
mouths... If they can take a little bit more share from the pie, because certainly they have a very wealthy country.

[About the picture on the right, Figure 53]:

So, that is in the floating market in Thailand. You can see that water is very dirty, lots of tourists were very happy, because it was quite an experience, we were in this little pumpboat, and a lot of tourists were taking pictures, it was a very exotic experience. ... That is a person's home that is going towards the floating market... It's just really sad to see the rampant poverty, and there's a Thai flag being waved, and what does that symbolize. I think it symbolizes that the resources are not distributed, and these are the people who are not getting enough share from the pie. And these are people who are suffering, and these are the people that are still trying to make ends meet, and these are the people that are being oppressed by the process, especially the mechanism of tourism. I would assume that these are the people who work their hardest in the tourism industry, and... I heard that mostly the people who sell their goods in the market are people within the area as well, and I think a home like this would capture that great divide between the rich and the poor in Thailand.

8. Khmer Rouge.

Figure 57



[This] is one of the monuments standing for the killing fields... That's the story of Pol Pot, the dictator that Cambodia once had, who was educated in Vietnam, and actually went to France to study communism, then back to Cambodia. He's the leader responsible for killing millions of people. ... What Pol Pot wanted to do was a social cleansing. He wanted to eradicate, many people to start a new race, which is the Khmer, or what he considered as authentic Cambodians. And to start a new nation that is free from all the external influences of Thailand, Vietnam... other powers around Cambodia, which is a little bit difficult to understand. He himself was educated outside of Cambodia. ... So the tour guide that we had actually told me that he lost his mother during the Khmer rule. His mother was one of the people who were tortured and

killed. And so were his grandparents. He does not know if his mother's skull or the skulls of his grandparents were actually in that big window, or it's in another sort of like a concentration camp... He does not know where they are, and he doesn't know where they're located... It's just a very heavy feeling when I visited that place. ...

I couldn't imagine the power of political ideology, of how it can break, how it can destroy, it can destroy to an extent of actually killing a nation. ... It seems to me that political ideologies are very powerful, to the point that they can dictate the course of the nation. And whether people can move forward or not. The picture just shows how oppressive the past has been, and it clearly shows that this is one of the significant factors why a lot of Cambodians still struggle with journey through that path towards progress. And to be hopeful about the future when most of them are in fact very much connected to very traumatic, very oppressive past. It is ingrained in their collective consciousness, so it's hard to move on having that in mind.

9. Heroes.

Figure 58



It's an obelisk at the heart of Manila. ... It's very fascinating; this is the most important monument in the Republic of the Philippines... Because Doctor Jose Rizal, the man within the monument is [the] national hero. ... It's actually the Americans who have installed him, it was Americans who decided that he be pronounced as a national hero, although Andres Bonifacio, another national hero is considered by many critical scholars as more worthy of the title. ... It was something that a

very powerful superpower decided for [the Philippines].

10. Homosexuality.

Figure 59



[This] picture was taken in Cambodia. And it shows a sculpture of two men. It made me reflect about homosexuality. In my grad school, the journey, I was always very interested in studying about the intersectionality of oppression, it affecting gay men with multiple marginalized social locations, and, when I went to Indochina, particularly Cambodia, Thailand, it seems to me that there is a huge acceptance... of homosexuality and gay identity... So you could feel that there is

a lot of social tolerance, it's somehow normalized, not really to the most ultimate level, but you could see that there is more acceptance and openness towards same-sex relationships and gay identity, or I should say, queer identity in general.

11. Love.

[This photograph was altered to protect the identity of a person shown]

Figure 60



I took that picture in Hong Kong. ... And, it says, "Say I love you" [refers to the writings in the picture]. I added that imagery because I find the concept of love to be very complex. ... It seems to me that this whole "love"-concept, which is mostly symbolized with a big heart is a journey that is not easy for everyone. That there are people like myself who have less options, and people like myself who have less access to that highly idealized concept of love. In a North American setting I find that a racialized gay man myself, and who has a lot of feminine attributes, I am not as, as valued as [the] gay men who can actually represent a movie Brokeback Mountain. You have to be straight-looking, you have to be very masculine, you have to look like you can pass as a

straight white man with blue eyes and blonde hair... Myself, I cannot pass as straight, I cannot pass as white because I'm Asian, I'm coloured, I have a lot of feminine attributes, I'm, I'm not considered as valued as those who can be Brokeback Mountain. ... I think love is a very complex concept that is somehow defined by people who have more access to that, and mostly defined by straight people, and within the gay community defined by gay men who fall within the top of hierarchy, because it's always gay men who can pass as straight and more white have more power, and are considered to be more valuable. And then you have the lesbian women who are white, who are very educated, and then as the pyramid goes down, then you can see that trans people... Most scholarly articles are done by either gay white men or lesbian white women... And I haven't seen a lot of representation from marginalized queer people like myself.

11. Manila Cathedral.

Figure 61



This is the Manila Cathedral. Phillipines being 97% Christian, 96% Christian, majority are Catholic... The church has a very powerful position in society to the point that historically the church had the power to remove presidents from office... And to dictate how the Constitution would look like, as they had representation. Latest is the controversial reproductive health bill which the Catholic church tried to stop, but the times have changed. And I could say that the church's influence has dwindled, and it has been far less comparing to back in the day... But it still is a very powerful structure in [Phillipino] community and society... Being a gay man myself, I think at times that the church can be very oppressive towards people, who do not conform within the parameters of what the church considers to be right, as opposed to sinful. So, I love the architecture, but

when I reflect, thinking about my own social location, as a marginalized gay man of colour, who comes from a family with a low socioeconomic status, I feel like... I'm not one of those people that the church considers to be good people.

12. Objectification.

Figure 62



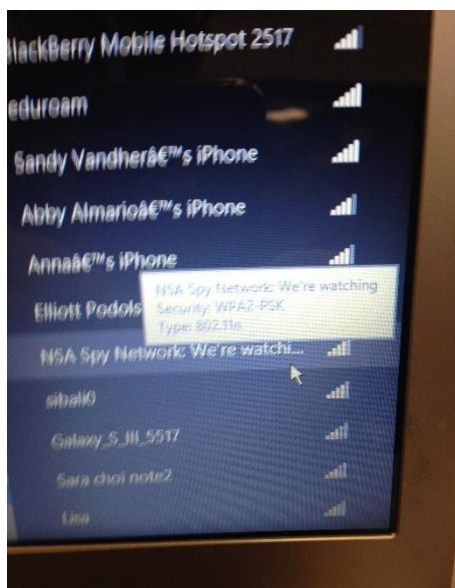
That is a modern kind of sculpture that got its inspiration from the ancient archeological structures that they have in Cambodia, and one of the things that I just want to highlight is, there is an overt objectification and sexualization of women. ... And unfortunately, this practice continues with the tourism industry to the modern era... People who are in sex trade, still majority are women, and they're considered as part of the tourism commodity, which is a very sad reality, that is happening in that

region of the world. I think that picture captures the oppression of women in Cambodia, Thailand, maybe Vietnam, neighbouring countries... And it seems to me that historical past is also supporting that statement that it is highly or deeply embedded in that culture.

Photos by Hector.

1. Privacy.

Figure 63



We all heard of the NSA spying on USA citizens. There are various ways in which this is oppressive, from the fact the government is seeing things intended as private to the much more complex issue of social engineering.

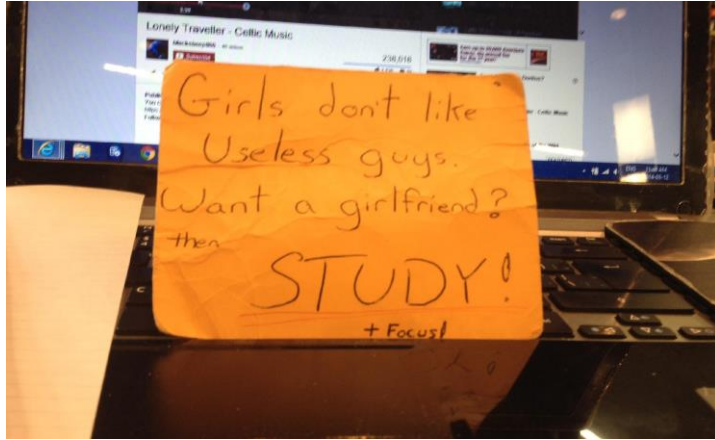
I come from a culture that has more open ideas on what's private so that's something that doesn't concern me too much. However, social engineering is something that bothers me.

It seems to me that by denouncing such activities, we have become aware that governments really are watching us and observing what we do or say.

If the government sees something they don't like they could be watching you even more closely and ultimately you wouldn't want to speak freely.

2. Social Expectations.

Figure 64



[Hector explained that this sign was made by a young man to help him focus on his studies. Hector approached the man and asked for permission to take a picture of this sign, which the man gladly allowed].

When I first saw this sign at the library I was impressed by how much meaning it had. Men and women have different social expectations and as such they dictate how you behave or what your goals ought to be.

In this case, this male has a perception that he should be able to provide for his girlfriend (a common, but not always universal perception). This has meant that he needs to be reminded of this should he ever want to have a girlfriend.

While this doesn't mean that he must abide by these expectations, it does mean that he could be expected to do so by other members of society.

3. Helping.

Figure 65



It's tricky to evaluate how much helping professionals actually "help" people. In many cases, the professional doesn't have the skills needed to accomplish the job. In others, the helper confuses their own problems with those of the people they're trying to help. It's summed up in that saying "a blind person guiding another."

There's a strong need for qualified (not just academically, but in their life choices, too) professionals to be

in the field.

There's jokes of CFS workers who have their children apprehended as well. How can someone like that get other people to get their children back? What sort of moral authority are we talking about? More importantly, what can they teach clients when they don't follow their own advice?

4. Labels.

Figure 66



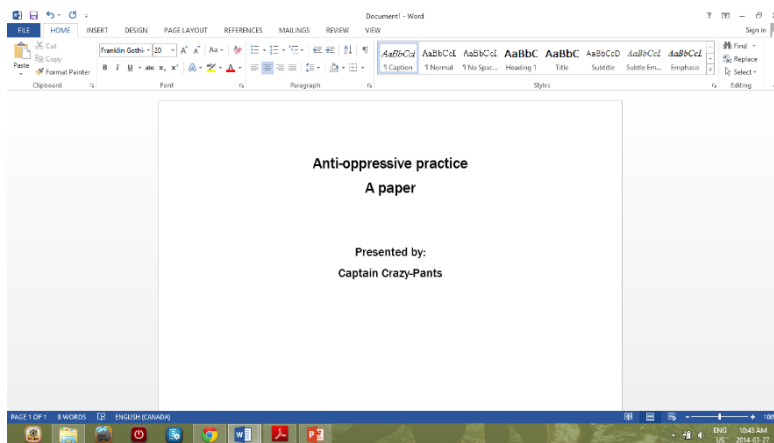
I find [it] amusing how worked up social workers get about labels. The rationale is that they brand people with a certain unwanted quality and then the person loses their identity and instead see themselves as just that label. I agree with that to certain extent.

My problem comes from the “holier than thou” attitude that comes alongside that. I don't think any profession that uses labels uses them to be mean or belittle people. They do it to help people, the best way they can.

I think social work has lost sight that there's more players involved in such decisions and by that I mean these are political decisions. People are not labelled for other reason than someone has to pay for their treatment and medications. If we want this to change, then we need to reform [how] treatment is funded and how people are granted access to it.

5. Anti-oppressive... Practice?

Figure 67



I think this is the fundamental reason why people experience so much oppression. Social workers are constantly pondering about the concept of anti-oppression, but what does that mean in practice? How can we do assessments that are anti-oppressive if recent graduates don't even know how to assess someone?

On the other hand, social workers themselves are too happy to reinforce social constructs that reinforce oppression. For instance,

men are told to need to be more emotionally present. One time, after a client decided not to show up despite having previously confirmed his presence, I said out loud “I’m angry.” Immediately I was surrounded by three women as if I had said I would kick something. People cannot honestly express themselves if every time you say something you’re “punished.”

Anti-oppressive practice will remain as pretty, abstract papers until social workers start to practice what they preach.

Photos by Zarmina

1. Contrasting kitchens.

[The photos depict somebody’s private territory, therefore they are not included here.

Two very different kitchens were photographed, one was in very good condition, and the other was in need of renovation].

Zarina emphasized the differences between living conditions for the middle class and the poor people who may be receiving social assistance. She stated that this reality is oppressive, and low income families continue to be marginalized.

2. Food availability.

Figure 68



The next picture that I had is a picture of a supermarket. As you can see, tons of fresh fruit. It’s clean, it’s accessible, there’s tons of deals, and everything. ... When I walked into neighbourhoods that are really wealthy and well-off, you’ll see big Superstores, Safeways, lots of accessible fruits, vegetables, healthy foods. Then I walked into neighbourhoods in the North End, even Selkirk area, and you see little shops, and to be honest, there was very little fruits, if that, vegetables, very little, and the produce are not kept, and is not as fresh... Very expensive, so again, the families that cannot afford the fresh produce, are made to go to these convenience stores, because they can’t travel half an hour to go grocery shopping, because, a), they don’t have a car, how are they supposed to? And usually they have kids, how do you expect them to take the bus in -50 [weather] to be able to afford the types of

foods that we have such easy access to? ... So we have these enclaves within our society, and again, it's the more impoverished neighbourhoods that we create barriers for them to be able to access healthy, and cheaper foods.

3. EIA system.

Figure 69



Health and Social Services Centre.... Pretty nice building! The reason I took that picture is because, when critically assessing our EIA system in Manitoba, actually, Canada as a whole, we are oppressing individuals even further. And the whole ideology behind that is that it's the last resort. And so, we have families who are getting money that isn't even meeting their basic needs. The rent [allowance] has not gone up since 1997. And, as we both are aware, inflation goes up every year. If you are giving someone 280

dollars to find a home, and to pay their utilities, I'm sorry to say, but there is nothing that you can find in Winnipeg that can be that. For a bachelor [apartment], EIA is, I think, 589, and that's their rent, food, bus fare, everything. Again, who's the population that accesses EIA, it's usually single moms with children. The reason behind that is, if they were to go to work for the minimum wage, now their medication is not covered, who's going to babysit their kids? Of if they were to get childcare, they wouldn't be even able to afford that, so, technically, they have very limited choices rather than being in there, and that is EIA. We are basically punishing them for the barriers that our system has created in the first place.

4. Accessibility.

[This photograph depicts a Winnipeg sidewalk covered with snow. It is missing due to the technical issues. Zarmina was unable to forward this photograph to the researcher].

When describing this photograph, Zarmina expressed her disdain at the lack of accessibility for people with mobility issues, since the piled up soft snow on the sidewalk will render them unable

to move around independently. She stated, “Our society is built in a way to... oppress further people, that are... targeted.”

5. Bus stop.

Figure 70



It's a picture of a bus stop. .. People who have the means or able to have a car, especially in our weather condition of being in -40s, -50s, this year [2014] our winter was really cold. Unfortunately, that's not the case for many families who are living under the poverty line. They're unable to afford a car, especially families on EIA. And so, they take the bus. And with our winters, as you can see, it's not heated. The glass is kind of open... I have, as a student, I took the bus once, and, especially in the cold days buses are

always late, it can be over half an hour late, and you're standing there, with your children, grocery bags, over that length of time. With no heat. And so, why are these individuals being mistreated? They're part of our society, and we should, as such a cold winter city that we have, we should have heated bus stops.

4.3. Prominent themes in research findings.

Research participants' responses can be analyzed along six main themes that emerged in their interviews. Each theme is divided into sub-themes for a more precise analysis of the participants' thoughts. These themes are described below.

I. Defining Oppression.

Research participants were not given a definition of oppression, and instead they were asked to provide one of their own. As a result, oppression was described in surprisingly diverse ways, although all participants had a clear idea of what they mean when they talk about

oppression. Zarmina said, “Oppression is when, basically, one group of people gets privilege or they get more access to resources by bringing down another group of people.” Aino connected oppression to “one group of people being less valuable than others.” These people can be denied access to certain things and the attitude towards them can be seen in how they are being talked to or looked upon. Tarja considered oppression as “[making] someone different”, and also spoke about a different value attached to groups of people. Christine emphasized preconceived notions and making assumptions about people. Felix mentioned stereotyping and pointed out that they are “forces of oppression, designed, maybe, by the few to control the rest.”

Maija pointed to oppression happening on different levels, “between individuals or on the society level targeting an individual, or a group of people. Oppression can be based on gender, religion, citizenship, skin colour or ethnicity. It is what you say and how you use it.” However, Sanjeev considered oppression to be a structural phenomenon, and gave examples such as poverty, imposition of cultural values, colonization and oppressive government policies.

Felix provided an extended description of oppression:

I understand oppression from the structural level... In a sense, that individuals face some structural constraint in achieving their desired goals. Those structural constraints could be based on policy, based on how the organization is structured, based on the hierarchy of the organization... But also, I see oppression based on discrimination... Based on injustice, based on lack of equal participation, denial of rights.

Several participants spoke about oppression as an obstacle for people to reach their full human potential. Julie stated that it is “not allowing a person to really fulfill their life.” Similarly, Liz said “I envision a force, like it’s... some kind of pressure that doesn’t really allow for

someone to be fully who they are.” Hector summed up oppression as “when society tells you what to do and how to do it, and doesn't let you make your own individual choices.”

Some participants noted that defining oppression may be difficult. Sanjeev stated,

To operationalize oppression is a very tricky question. Because some action in one society could be just a neutral action, but in other society the same action could be an act of oppression. But still we can have some universal things that we can say that, on the basis of these things we can say that this act is an oppression, this is not an oppression. Well, I say that anything that deters a person from attaining the justice that person should have, or, or that was the... deters the person from achieving his or her full humanity, is an act of oppression. Or that has some kind of negative impact on that person, or an act that makes a person uncomfortable is, I think, an act of oppression.

Chris also felt that oppression may be difficult to define due to its complexity. However, he offered some definitions of his own, such as “power over and power under” and “exclusion of people. Also, Julie characterized oppression as “someone having more power, an imbalance of power.” Having power is directly connected to having a voice, as Liz noted, “those who don't have a voice, are the ones who are oppressed, and marginalized, ignored.” Joonas commented on lack of literacy as being oppressive, stating that illiterate people do not have power and influence.

Interestingly, very few research participants noted the intersectionality of oppression. Only Tarja and Joonas spoke about this phenomenon. Tarja said that oppressed groups can at the same time be oppressing somebody else. All participants supported their definitions with various examples of oppression, both at the individual level and structural level. Commonly used

examples by Canadian social work students were colonization of Indigenous peoples, discrimination against immigrants, visible minorities and refugees, homophobia, and poverty. Students from Finland spoke about treatment of Romani people, and also discussed racism towards immigrants and visible minorities and homophobia.

A. Describing oppression across two languages.

Describing concepts of oppression in the language came up as a challenge in this research. Since the interviews were conducted in two countries and in two different languages, it was necessary to explore the terminology used by research participants.

The term “oppression” was somewhat elusive for Finnish students. As Sini said “it is a bit of a challenging concept because there is no direct translation to Finnish” and Maija thought that there are not a lot of Finnish equivalents. Sini noted that Finnish rhetorics is different, because the anti-oppressive work is rarely talked about in terms of avoiding oppression, instead the conversation centers around “approaching people like people”, meaning to take the humane and respectful approach. While creating equality is part of social work goals, the rhetoric emphasizes hearing people’s voices and approaching them with dignity.

Sini stated that in Finland, oppression is operationalized as discrimination and social exclusion. She also specified that oppression is always negative, but “discrimination can be positive or negative. There is the clear difference between them.” Tarja mentioned the “us” and “them” rhetoric that is emphasizing the differences, and both Tarja and Sini named “othering.” Tarja and Maija talked about “marginalization.” Aino and Maija offered “subjugation” as another term they use to describe oppression. In addition, Tarja and Aino mentioned “racism.” Maija considered “suppression” and “violence” to be terms relevant to oppression, and Tarja added “prejudice.” Sini and Tarja also discussed hate speech that is a commonly used term for

verbal manifestation of racism or other discriminatory attitudes. While Tarja disagreed with the term, implying that it is sugar-coating “oral discrimination and racism”, Sini thought it is a good blanket term for all verbal displays of discrimination that target many different groups.

Participants from Finland often offered oppression-related terminology in English after they had provided some Finnish words, and proved to be very familiar with English terms. Most Finnish social work students were very precise and narrow in terminology, not venturing outside of synonyms for the word “oppression”, or closely related concepts.

There were many similar terms that participants from Canada mentioned, such as discrimination, marginalization, racism, social exclusion, bias, and suppression. They added new terms too and tended to associate a wider array of words with oppression. For example, Felix mentioned “minority” and “ghetto”, Zarmina offered “dehumanized”, Christine added “labeling” and “the -isms” (ageism, ableism). Liz, Chris and Julie spoke about “imposition of power.” Christine and Felix referred to “privileged”, “unprivileged”, and “lack of privilege.” Julie noted that verbalizing the ideas behind anti-oppressive practice can sometimes be a challenge. She implied that while everyone is aware what anti-oppressive practice is, people may not think about it often.

B. Oppression Symbols and Metaphors.

Many participants chose to speak about oppression through symbols and metaphors. The nature of this research provided an opportunity for using metaphors during the photovoice process. Several participants chose to portray things that indirectly represent oppression. For example, Joonas presented a picture (Figure 9) of a black dog, describing it as an oppressed being, who nonetheless is looking into the bright future.

Sini took a picture of a stuffed toy hare that was ripped apart (Figure 3). She said, “this picture of destruction means that the little ones and the weak ones are oppressed and destroyed.”

Christine demonstrated the concept of everyone being together in a circle with her picture of a dreamcatcher (Figure 44). She also presented a picture of a path, saying “if we were to address oppression in this world, we must follow a certain path... We must work together and walk along together in the path... There will be bumps and challenges, and rocks.”

Maija took a picture of a little tree in a pot (Figure 18), saying that just like “a tree does not choose where it is being planted... Oppressed people “do not choose where they are born.” Maija’s comment refers to social location as well, stating, that a person does not choose their circumstances. She listed characteristics that oppression can be based on, such as citizenship, skin colour, gender, disability, and religion.

Zarina provided a metaphor for social justice and privilege, saying, “For example, if a person with disabilities and I are racing, it wouldn’t be fair to start at the same spot. I would understand that they need to be ahead a bit. Just to equalize that.”

Chris discussed his picture of Angkor Wat [Figure 54], an ancient temple in Cambodia, being reflected in a pond:

It seems like all of us have gone through different phases of oppression in our lives in one way or another... And that experience, feelings, and the thoughts that come with it... is always reflected somehow. ... And we think about our experiences and the things that we've gone through in life... we see a reflection of those experiences, we see a reflection of ourselves, we see a reflection of oppression. And along with that reflection comes feelings of pain, sadness, heaviness, regret, maybe shame? Some

guilt and a struggle. Struggle to overcome, sometimes struggle to forget, and sometimes... struggle to just move on, and continue with life.

Chris' insights show the evocative potential of visual imagery. He provided more detail later in the interview about the historical and cultural significance of Angkor Wat to the Cambodian people, emphasizing the meaningful nature of the place, and also elaborated on his own feelings of oppression.

II. Political Factors.

When participating in photovoice discussions and answering the interview questions, social work students emphasized various aspects of oppression. Some participants view oppression as a political or macro phenomenon, while the others concentrate on the microlevel.

A. Oppression coming from the government.

Governments are institutions with the highest power in society. The government's power is claimed to be used towards the best interest of its people, but it may be a tool for creating and maintaining an oppressive social order. Throughout history governments inflicted terror, colonization, and annihilation, both physical and cultural. Social work students from Canada and Finland identified political factors and government policies as a source of profound and overarching oppression. Some participants spoke about governments being at fault directly, while the others concentrated on the consequences of government actions. The students spoke about this kind of oppression as being difficult to resist, and one that is a fundamental injustice. It leads to greater inequality in the country, as well as perpetuation of discriminatory societal attitudes.

Chris spoke about corrupt governments that compromised the well-being of their nation. Here he provides his opinion on the usurpation of wealth in Thailand, a country he has recently visited, illustrating his point with a picture [Figure 56] of an affluent royal palace, decorated with gold and jewels:

Despite the conflicts, looking at all of these golden structures, I just wish that more common Thai people can have a little more share from the pie, how wealthy their country is... And I wish that people don't have to resort to prostitution, people don't have to resort to risking their lives.

A similar sentiment can be seen in Sanjeev's remarks about the double standard that the government in his country of origin employs towards its citizens:

Prime Minister is giving out the very provocative statement, that there is no free lunch. If we're going to give them this thing for free, and then they're going to be acclimatized to such kind of thing, they would be sedentary, they won't be doing anything. But if you look at the stance of that Prime Minister on another matter, then it is centric to economy. There is the big businessman, who went bankrupt, and Prime Minister is saying that we must help this guy.

Sanjeev's observations are about government priorities in his country. The Prime Minister's stance serves to keep the poor in poverty, while backing up the rich, and, therefore, maintaining class difference.

Tarja mentioned the substandard treatment of the Romani¹² people by the Finnish government that went together with negative stereotyping and racism:

Romani people were clearly oppressed in Finland, and now, when it is desired to provide them with help and education, and everything else, the problem is that many Finns, or many other Finns have an issue with them. But also it's that they cannot, they are not able to accept help from white people, because the treatment was so bad in the past, so there are multiple issues related to that.

The research participants also mentioned totalitarianism and genocide as radical forms of political oppression. For example, Chris spoke about the Cambodian genocide of late 1970s, the tragic impact of which is still felt today. Also, loss of cultural identity is often a result of oppressive government actions, and is highlighted in the following section.

B. Colonization.

Discussion about oppression by the government ties in with colonization. Research participants enrolled in both Finnish and Canadian social work programs mentioned the past and present effects of colonization. Chris emotionally expressed his feelings about the historic oppression that his country had to endure:

¹² Romani people are an ethnic minority in Finland and other European countries. They arrived in Finland from Sweden in the 1500s. Throughout the centuries they were denied rights by the government and church, up until the universal enfranchisement in 1917, when Finland became independent. Nonetheless, the Romani continued facing prejudice, and their issues were not attended to. Currently there are about 10,000 Romani people in Finland (Tiilikainen, 2007).

A lot of losses have taken place, the loss of identity, the loss of language, the loss of culture, the loss of heritage, the loss of national pride, the loss of... many things that I could ever think of as [mentions his ethnicity], which is a result of numerous colonizations that have taken place. I could still feel the heaviness of what happened hundreds of years ago.

Sanjeev emphasized colonization that takes place in the 21st century and is being inflicted on the research community by the government in his home country. The research community members are given no choice but to abandon their traditional ways and adjust to a modern lifestyle, “And if you look at the changes that are coming to the [research community] with the colonization, then there is the corruption of their ideas. I mean, they are not the [research community] they used to be.”

Finally, Liz drew attention to another aspect of colonization that is embedded in her everyday experience of attending the Faculty of Social Work at the old University of Manitoba building:

The physical structure itself sends a message that it is still colonial in a way, since it's a very old building itself. For me coming as an Indigenous person, for me the circle is a really important symbol. And that's our way of... Just talking about how we're all at the same level.

This statement by Liz makes it clear that the physical structure of the building can make Aboriginal people feel unwelcome by creating a Eurocentric atmosphere, and not acknowledging the Indigenous presence.

It is evident that the social work students spoke of their own experience of colonization, and showed concern about colonization in other nations, however, students from Canada elaborated on this topic more than students from Finland did.

C. Religious oppression.

Participants in both countries also mentioned religion as a powerful institution that has an oppressive potential similar to that of governments and can be used as a tool of colonization. Maija pointed to religion as a means for exclusion, “I think that... In a certain sense, faith and ideas bring oppression and divide people in a quite radical way, and exclude some people.”

A quote from Chris illustrates this idea; “being a gay man myself, I think at times that the church can be very oppressive... towards people, who do not conform within the parameters of what the church considers to be right... as opposed to be sinful.” Religion can be a powerful tool of colonization and acculturation, helping to construct other belief systems as inferior. Sanjeev spoke about the role of Christian religion in contemporary imposition of culture and marginalization of a research site nation, illustrating his words with a picture [Figure 33] of Virgin Mary:

They believe more in nature, or they associate the concept of god with nature. Now I'm looking at how their ideas were corrupted by the missionaries who came there with their new ideas and, and reformulated the meanings, or reconstructed the cognitive understanding of the [research community].

Sanjeev also described that the research site inhabitants are made to feel “primitive”, and culture loss is taking place among them right now. Their story is similar to the situation of numerous Indigenous nations throughout the world.

D. Societal attitudes and biases.

Attitudes, stereotyping and bias towards certain groups may not necessarily be entrenched in legislation and only exist informally. Nonetheless, these are powerful forces of marginalization. Societal attitudes and preconceived notions alone are sufficient to support the oppressive social order. Students from Finland and Canada emphasized equally the importance of attitudes held in society. Felix from the University of Manitoba and Tarja from University of Tampere give very similar examples of societal biases and effects that they cause. Tarja spoke about the Romani people who are an ethnic minority in Finland and are being discriminated against by the majority population, “Well, in a way they were already brought up with the thought that Romani people are bad and dangerous, and they are useless. And maybe... Our generation is slowly moving away from this.”

Felix discussed the attitudes held towards refugee youth in Winnipeg. As he explained, refugee families often come from war-torn zones, but once in Winnipeg, they are placed in gang-ridden neighbourhoods. The refugee parents have to spend a lot of time at work, while their children face difficulties at school and are left with little support in the new environment:

That is structural oppression for me, because if you think that these kids have been exposed to something like that... They are already going through some trauma... You should separate them, put them where they can have a different kind of life and they won't be exposed to that... [...] So it becomes kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy, oh, these people are already bad, so when you start behaving towards that, [...] we say so. That's the kind of people they are.

Maija from Finland offered her personal perspective on societal attitudes, "Everybody has the same needs, but... In the end, it is just... those thoughts and the categories in which we put people, even though we are the same, we're all the same people after all." In this quote, Maija expresses her valuing of "common humanity", a concept she introduced in her interview. "Common humanity" is found in all people and is a powerful force against prejudice. It means recognizing human similarities as being more important than differences, as well as recognizing that all humans deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Finally, yet another Finnish student expressed hope for the future, taking a look into the past. Aino described the possibility of change, taking the Verona Arena, an ancient Roman amphitheater, as an example [Figure 27].

She explained that the building functioned as a place of torture and execution in the past, but now it is a joyful place where cultural events are being held. Aino stated, “This is a beautiful idea that now people can change, and society can change, and so the places, the meaning of those places can change.”

E. Indigenous rights.

Indigenous nations throughout the world suffered colonization, cultural imposition, genocide, and many continue to be oppressed by governments. The topic of Indigenous rights and issues came up more often among the sample of University of Manitoba students than with students participating in Finland. Oppression, as discussed by Canadian students, was related to the effects of colonization on the Aboriginal peoples. According to Liz,

When I think of oppression, it goes to legal steps. ... Being Indigenous, my bias is always legal documentation such as the Indian Act. That just is full of oppressive, oppressiveness... to First Nations peoples and their way of life in so many different ways. Everything from what to call them to their everyday life, whether they were allowed to leave their community. They needed a pass from an Indian agent to leave, not being able to practice any ceremonial activities. Oppression was residential schools, and that the children were not allowed to speak their own language, and, being punished if they were to do so.

Liz spoke about historical and present-day oppression. She gave a personal example of her interactions with a supervisor at work, “It just felt really awkward that everything she had to talk to me about usually was First Nations, and it usually was misinformation.”

Several other participants who live in Winnipeg acknowledged oppression towards Indigenous people. Felix, a foreign-born social work student shared his impressions:

I love that Canada’s, you know, very compassionate, and peace-loving, but when I came here, I saw what is happening to the Aboriginals. I look at it as a stain to the Canada image in a way, because I just... I think, if that issue was to be resolved, Canada can do it, if they really want to do it, they will do it. So... that is an oppression for me as well. You know, the experiences what I’m seeing, what the Indigenous people are going through.

Chris provided an example from his workplace:

I'm a registered social worker, and I see that people who... In Winnipeg, Manitoban context, First Nations people are not treated as well as white patients, clients. I feel like there is more judgement towards First Nations people, that they are not fit to parent, or they're alcoholic, or they have diabetes, or they have sexually transmitted infections, and it's very quick to judge.

On the contrary, participants from Finland identified a lack of contact with the Indigenous population. Joonas stated that he never had contact with a Sami¹³ person in Finland, and Tarja briefly described the situation regarding Indigenous population as follows:

Of course, there are issues, there is a conversation about alcohol use, for example, and child welfare, well, this is likely to be visible among other [social work] clients, but not here. And I don't see that we would have something discriminatory to the Saami in our public conversation. We do understand that they want to preserve their culture, and... There are the media, their own... radio and tv, and everything like that, but this is approved of.

F. Structural and global factors.

Structural and global factors of oppression may be less institutionalized than oppression by the government, but may be more severe than societal attitudes and biases. However, the structural factors cannot be viewed in isolation from other forces of oppression. Global poverty, the divide between developed and developing world, wars, violence, starvation, lack of literacy and health care, corruption, and environmental deprivation are examples of structural and global oppressive factors. Research participants referred to structural forces that bring oppression

¹³ The Sami people are Indigenous people of northern Scandinavia. They occupy parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The traditional Sami subsistence activity is reindeer herding. There are several Sami languages in use nowadays. The Sami were historically mistreated, but in the recent years their position in Finland has improved.

globally and locally. As Sanjeev stated, “Oppression is... rooted in the structure.” Aino elaborates on the effects of structural oppression:

So many things are closed or, in a way, so far away from certain population groups in society, for example, if there is an immigrant or a person from a developing country, then they are unlikely to be able to fulfill all of those things that, that other people can... Those people who belong to a minority group, it may be that they do not have enough knowledge about something, like services or their rights. Maybe they do not even have any social connections or networks which could give them this information, or provide support.

Joonas provides an example of oppressive realities that impact people’s lives on a large scale, taking their voice away and making them unable to stand up for themselves. He said, “Let’s talk about literacy, its meaning or a certain amount of people which may not know how to read or write, it is so easy to oppress them, because they do not have the opportunity... to influence.”

This quote by Joonas, illustrated by a photograph of his notebook with writing in many languages [Figure 8], showcases the vulnerability of people who lack access to basic education, as these people usually lack the opportunity to get out of poverty.

F.1. Poverty.

The most prominent factor and a vivid result of structural oppression is poverty. The majority of research participants associated poverty with oppression and spoke about it in some

way. Sanjeev considers social problems to be stemming from poverty and lack of education.

Maija provides an example, pointing to a picture [Figure 20], that she presented for this research project, and discussing the position of women in developing world, “What this picture shows is that she is always at work, but of course the economic violence relates to this, because they are paid very little, and the job that they are doing... Their living conditions are what they are.”

Chris also pointed out the realities of the developing world, discussing a crocodile show that he attended in Thailand [Figure 50]. The show involved men putting their heads in crocodile mouths in order to earn some money from the crowd they entertained, “I think this is a very sad scenario of the reality of poverty, and how tourists from wealthy countries, such as Canada, can enjoy an entertainment scene like this at the expense of risking the lives of people from a more marginalized, poor Third World country.”

Poverty affects the developing world in the most profound way, but people in the developed countries suffer from the effects and limitations of poverty as well. Zarmina stated the following about poverty in Winnipeg, “A lot of the families that we do encounter and work with, their way of life is very substandard to the rest of us, and again, that’s very oppressive and we’re marginalizing people even further, and that’s not okay.”

Zarmina expressed her concern at the inequality she encountered during her practice in the field, and recognized the responsibility of the entire society in maintaining this inequality, as well as the role that everybody has in alleviating it.

III. The Role of Social Work in Alleviating Oppression.

The International Federation of Social Workers (2013) states that social workers have an obligation to challenge exclusive and unequal social conditions, therefore making alleviating oppression one of the social work goals. The research participants had differing thoughts on the role of social work in alleviating oppression. Joonas stated, “Social work is, in my opinion, anti-oppressive work.” Julie went in more detail, saying “what, to me, social work should be doing, is to empower people to accept or access, or find the resources and the things that they need for their lives.” Zarmina said that the Code of Ethics (2005) for Canadian social workers embodies anti-oppressive practice. However, Sanjeev held a different view and blamed social work for normalizing structural oppression through working within the structural constraints. He also stated,

But if you look at... radical social work, or critical social work practice, then they talk about fundamental questions, they look at the problems where they are rooted, and they are rooted in structure. But that means another problem. Then you go against the state. For instance, if I look at the NGOs that are working in [Sanjeev’s home country], the kind of work that they are doing that is anti-oppressive. But who is the perpetrator of oppression there? It is the very administration.

However, Felix, a social work student in Winnipeg, asserted that structural change is not necessary:

[I am] not that kind of anti-oppressive social worker... to do the structural change. ...

Because I also think that anti-oppressive practice and the way mainstream practice is done, can be integrated together in a way that would benefit the client more... at the same time, because I'm not saying that the present system is not doing the wonderful job, but it's also good to evaluate, look at what you're doing... Are you achieving the aim? Are you achieving your goals? If not, what else do you need to do?

Felix continued to advocate for incremental change, "I think it's one step to the next, one step to the next, helping in a very small way...helping people [...] the way they think, not the way that I think."

Hector adopted a critical stance, "...that is tricky to evaluate, how much helping professionals are actually helping people. And in many cases the professional doesn't have the skills to accomplish the job. We have blind people guiding other blind people." He continued with examples, such as, "there's a lot of CFS workers, Child and Family Services... That also have their own children apprehended by CFS."

Finally, Sini pointed to invisibility of the role of social work in Finnish media:

When there are those reality tv shows, there is the police, and there's the hospital and the jail... The reality tv stuff. Social workers are closely connected to all these, there are social workers in the hospitals, there are social workers in jails, the police does a lot of work together with social services. Nowhere in these shows social work is visible. It is,

like, cut out of there. It is for some reason not of any interest. But then... there is also the thing that social workers and social work are not interesting to the media except when something horrible happens, when a child dies, because... the child protection did nothing.

This quote by Sini reveals a certain conservatism in the media that does not allow for letting new perspectives in. The tv shows tend to maintain the traditional tropes, and do not risk including a newer social work profession. This contributes to the obscurity of the social work role, as it remains invisible to the general population.

A. Oppressive Practices in Social Services.

- **Towards Clients**

Almost all participants had stories to tell about practices in social services that are oppressive towards clients. Aino voiced her concerns about social workers presenting themselves as “experts” to their clients. She also spoke about lack of authentic engagement in working with clients as being damaging and leading to stigmatization:

If we speak about immigrants, then the ‘oppressive way’ is when the worker is not listening. In a way if the worker is not listening what the client is trying to say, then this client does not receive the service and this can slow down the adaptation process...

Maybe this person cannot get a job or financial support... And then it is being conveyed in this environment to those people that you are different. These differences are being emphasized. ... They may start talking about that this is not the way we do things here or

that everyone knows that all Russians... want to get money from the social service agency, and they do not want to work. ... They go along with the cultural stereotypes.

Felix spoke about lack of cultural sensitivity in Winnipeg child welfare services, “When it comes to CFS apprehending kids... Because of the cultural difference, I would say, there has been so many misunderstanding and wrongful apprehension.” He continued with an example of an immigrant family that had their child apprehended, and their side of the story was not listened to. Tarja noticed that Finnish families are supported more than immigrant families in situations of domestic violence, “We worry so much more [about the Finns] than about the immigrants... We think about immigrants that this is just what they do, and what about it now, let’s wait until the next child welfare alert comes, because that family is at the shelter again, anything could have happened.” She mentioned lack of cultural sensitivity in working with immigrants as well, saying that knowledge about culture in social services is not sufficient.

A Winnipeg-based hospital social worker, Julie, shared her observations about racism towards her clients in the following way:

Indigenous people was a very good example, the blatant racism in hospital. It’s blatant. ... People treat them like crap... If someone... is Indigenous, [they] automatically have judgement, not even knowing anything, and assuming that there are problems. Assuming, instead of... finding things out. They are automatically assuming, oh, it must be [a] drunk or [they] must be on welfare.

Stereotyping and lack of cultural sensitivity seems apparent in the events that Julie has witnessed. Other research participants shared similar opinions, and being distraught at the treatment that Indigenous people receive.

Tarja described the negative attitudes that some social workers in Finland have towards Romani clients, and connected them to the rejection that Romanis face in community service placements¹⁴. She emphasized that there is “joking about and mocking of Romanis and Romani culture” among older social workers, as well as calling Romanis derogatory names. Eliminating these discriminatory attitudes among social service providers is being more difficult because of the lack of willingness to intervene or undermine the respected older workers. Sini provided an example of management refusing to talk to her colleague about homophobic language in the workplace, and supporting their decision with the fact that this colleague is retiring soon.

A Winnipeg student, Liz, gave an example of judgmental attitudes she encountered in a fellow social worker, and she described their mindset as, “Get a job and the whole world would be fine.”

Sini also raised the question of heteronormativity in social services, stating that “if a young client, a man, comes to see you, then you ask him, ‘Do you have a girlfriend?’ You don’t ask him, ‘Do you have a partner?’, or ‘Are you seeing someone?’” In addition, Tarja mentioned

¹⁴ Community service is a form of alternative sentence in Finland. It is an established part of the penal system, and is used frequently.

heteronormative assumptions in child welfare, saying that a nuclear family with a father and a mother is seen as a norm.

A vivid example of oppressive and demeaning practice in social welfare was provided by Felix, who spoke about his experience as a social service provider in Winnipeg:

With this single mom, I think I worked with her, and lost her job, she couldn't work anymore. She's got on social insurance kind of thing. ... She went through so many screenings before she was able to get it. And when she got it, she told me [that] sometimes the social service workers would come to her house unannounced. And then come just to search her house, coming to her bedroom, search everywhere, and she would say, 'What are you people looking for?', and they said, 'Yeah, that's part of our work, we make sure that you're not keeping a man here'... For somebody to come to your house and go into your bedroom... That is invading your privacy in a huge way. ... And not even letting you know that they are coming... That in itself is denial of human rights, so that to me is an oppression.

Felix' example points to a sexist and heteronormative assumption about the client's possible relationship. She is suspected to be in a traditional heterosexual relationship, where a man is a breadwinner and a woman is a caregiver. The social service providers assumed that if she had a male living in her house, he would necessarily support her, and, therefore, she would commit welfare fraud. This points to a conservative residual approach in social welfare, where

the client is being demeaned and suspected, and has no right to anything beyond the bare necessities.

Chirstine pointed out the ageism that her elderly clients faced during her practice at the hospital, “The way they were treated... Not per se threatened, but... having their [driver’s] license revoked because they’re getting older. Or having them take a competence test, because they did something. You can’t automatically assume that it is based on age, or getting older.”

Only research participants from Finland mentioned architectural barriers that interfere with effective provision of social services. Tarja stated that the child and family protection office was not wheelchair-accessible. She also voiced concerns about the availability of documents written in Braille. Tarja said that even though nowadays many places are being renovated to become more accessible, persons who use a wheelchair cannot use all buildings. She also pointed out a lack of private and comfortable waiting space in the child and family services office.

Aino pointed to the importance of space in the social worker’s office, and that space arrangements may emphasize the differences and implicate unequal power relations. Maija stated that,

If the intention is to help... the oppressed people to leave their marginalized position, then... It can fail because... they do not have the energy to go from one place to another. And always have to deal with different people, there is the thing that you end up telling your story over and over again. Well, that isn’t helping you... to stop being marginalized.

Zarmina, a student from Winnipeg, pointed out that insufficient social assistance rates can also be seen as an act of oppression. She spoke about the living conditions that people who live in poverty are facing, and that it is not possible to afford decent accommodation with the welfare money. “And so it’s the type of living conditions that we create for the people who are already marginalized. Which is very unfortunate.” Zarmina illustrated her statement with a photograph of her client’s kitchen that she took at their home in Winnipeg. The kitchen did not have flooring, the cabinets were broken, and it was in need of repairs.

Finally, Chris approached critically his own practice and reflected on his previous interventions:

I don't want to say that I have not oppressed any of my clients, because clearly, there have been practices and decisions, assessments and interventions. When I look back, it looked like it was oppressive. And I looked like I embraced the stereotypical... norms that are actually oppressive, and I used my power in a way without knowing, with the best intentions... That actually created some oppressive outcomes.

This honest self-reflection by Chris demonstrates his pursuit of social justice and best practice. Chris is strong enough to admit he may have wronged some of his clients in the past, and this allows him to learn from his experience and become a better social work practitioner.

- **Towards Employees**

Research participants highlighted that social workers also face discriminatory attitudes in their workplace. For example, Liz stated, “When I think of my experience with this [names the field] program that I was working in. It just seems to, like, vibrate that I was the only First Nations person there. It was always so highlighted.”

Christine did not feel respected in her workplace at the hospital, and other participants who work in a similar setting shared a similar disappointment:

There was oppression as a worker or staff person there... The value of social workers there or social work profession itself, I didn't find it was valued, and I think that's still oppression. ... Don't get me wrong, medical perspective is important, but I think part of addressing oppression is to address social injustices in this health care system as well.

Tarja and Sini also have talked about insensitive comments being made at social service agencies. Tarja voiced concern that homophobic remarks may be frustrating to LGBTTQ employees, and used an example from Sini's workplace, “if I were gay..., I would feel pretty bad, physically bad in that whole environment, if I would have to listen to something like that... I take things really personally.”

B. Anti-oppressive initiatives

Most participants gave examples of anti-oppressive initiatives in social services which range from theoretical perspectives to practical approaches. Sini illustrated such initiatives with a United Nations poster that prohibits discrimination in the workplace, “These campaigns are

coming from the management: there is a lot of those “we’re all different but all equal” campaigns, they are still around, just like we have seen this one picture from my workplace.” Joonas stated that even though he did not confront oppression directly, he has put up thematic posters in his office. Tarja mentioned the anti-racist week being conducted in Tampere along with many other initiatives, but specified, that “this is not social work.” Aino was somewhat critical of the anti-oppressive campaigns, stating, that while they exist, these campaigns tend to turn into shelved knowledge, and do not have a lasting impact. She offered her thoughts along with a photograph of a bookshelf [Figure 30]:

The bookshelf, it portrays the knowledge, but it also portrays the fact that... in Finland there are a lot of projects in the social field, the EU projects, that we do something, like develop some kind of anti-racist work. I mean, these are good practices and how they are done, youth education is done, and school social work, but then a lot of these good practices are being left on the bookshelf in a way, and many projects are being forgotten.

Finnish participants spoke about social services provided to the Romani people. Tarja said that there are initiatives targeted at Romani youth who tend to drop out of school more often than the general population. However, Sini pointed out that there is only one Romani social worker in Finland who identifies as a member of the community and wears the national costume. Tarja also spoke about Romani people who are not Finnish citizens and come from other countries in the European Union. She said that many of these people beg for money on the street,

and “now there is food help for Romani [people]. It is targeted specifically at the European Union citizens who come here. And they are not entitled to the social welfare.”

The Finnish participants also discussed initiatives implemented to help immigrants and refugees. Maija said that “there are many social work clients who are foreigners, who are not able to communicate in Finnish. But they have the right to use a translator.” Tarja mentioned translation services for immigrants and people with disabilities as well.

Aino has been a social worker in a refugee camp for children who come to Finland without parents. She said,

The fact that there are such centres in Finland is already anti-oppressive practice. It’s that in these centres these children are provided with many things, for example, they get health services, good health services, and they may study, for example, Finnish language... And the mental health services, many of the children come... from war. Like, many are from Somalia, Afganistan, Iraq...

Research participants from Winnipeg tended to discuss anti-oppressive services in terms of the local social service agencies. Julie gave several examples of Flora House, North End Community Renewal Corporation, North End Women’s Resource Centre, Salvation Army, Siloam Mission, and Graffiti Art Programming [please see the graffiti done by the last program’s clients in Figure 43].

These agencies cover a range of issues, catering to youth, women, and homeless people. Julie felt positively about the grassroots organizations, saying that “they’re not ignoring the

issues that are occurring in the communities, and trying... in some way to address those.” Julie characterized anti-oppressive social services as being a safe space, promoting excellence in marginalized populations, being accessible, “helping without asking a lot for themselves”, and supporting clients with unconventional life choices.

On the contrary, Liz stated that she does not consider any of the social service agencies that she is familiar with to be fully anti-oppressive:

Klinic... is the closest thing to anti-oppressive practice service provision. In terms of my experience with them with drop-in counseling... Being part of that service, I feel quite comfortable, for me it seems that there’s awareness of ... power dynamics that come with ability, disability, gender, ethnicity to a certain extent.

Christine gave an example People’s First initiative that aims at including all people with disabilities in the community and closing down the institutions. She also described a project that she is involved in: “what we’re trying to do is develop a focus support group based on narratives. And based on these refugees’ experiences, and then share it with the community... What they’ve been through.”

Felix emphasized the importance of culturally appropriate services, stating that,

The programs can be tailored through some of [the] community organizations... for effective delivery of service and for more understanding... Because I think that... some of these immigrants who have been facing this oppression too, they sometimes just don’t want to go to some of the mainstream service providers. Not because they won’t go, but

because they think to themselves that they will not be understood ... or they will be judged differently.

Felix continued with an example of a culturally specific program being implemented in Mount Carmel Clinic. “And this has been working very well because they feel that there, if they are understood,.. they feel that their voices and who they are is more valued and more respected.”

Finally, Aino spoke about her research as being an example of an anti-oppressive initiative. She is involved in developing a “cultural interpreter” program for immigrants in Finland and is willing to “develop the social work practice specifically from the anti-oppressive standpoint.”

C. Personal and Professional Values.

Research participants made it clear in all interviews that they consider values to be very important to social work practice. As Sini stated, “social work is a lifestyle.” Some participants discussed the concept of values. “But overall in our studies values and ethics in practice are quite important, and then we talk about self-reflection. How it is important and maybe it refers to the fact that we are knowledgeable in a way about ourselves and our practice”, added Tarja. However, most participants incorporated values in their discussion indirectly, speaking about their own attitudes or ways of practice. As Felix stated, “if I’m working with someone, with an immigrant, and already there’s that solidarity there.”

Chris mentioned his own value direction, “I would like to say that every day of my practice I strive... I strive and I work hard to be an anti-oppressive social work practitioner.”

Christine stated that it is important to be “aware of what oppression means to us, and sometimes we’re not cognizant of that, sometimes you have to check yourself again, you know what I mean? Sometimes I have to look back and say, ‘What was that? Was that really appropriate?’”

Throughout her discussion, Julie emphasized equitable treatment and lack of judgement, but stated that, “you can never see people [as] completely equal. Because again, you come from where you come from. You’re not, no one is completely impartial.” Similarly, Maija said that she tries to approach “people like people” and avoid “classifying” or defining people based on her own perception, but admits to unwillingly “classify” in the workplace. Tarja shared her experience of being aware of her own prejudice and striving to defeat her biases:

We speak about social workers and I think that we should find the kind of understanding... The humanism and the absence of bias, or at least the ability for it... If there is prejudice, then we should think about how are we [are] actually approaching it. I myself notice how I get to approach certain Romanis and I am trying to consciously change this, I should be knowledgeable about my own prejudice because it impacts the way I am working with people.

However, Zarmina cautioned against viewing equality as treating everybody the same, providing a quote she said was by Thomas Jefferson, “there is nothing more unequal than equal treatment of unequal people.” She elaborated on this quote, adding: “I think we should all be really treated equally, but also remember equity, that there are individuals in society that do need more attention that do deserve more accessibilities than other groups.”

Liz saw continuous learning as a means to improve her practice and said she is striving to “extend [her] awareness as much as possible.” Maija stated that a person who “has seen the world a lot may be able to approach things differently from the one who has only lived in their home country.” This statement is based on Maija’s personal experience of traveling and living abroad.

The research participants also spoke about the values of their colleagues, often being critical of what they saw as unethical behaviour. As Sini spoke about her colleague’s racist language, “I understand that they have these attitudes, I understand where they are coming from, I understand that they were raised differently, but they do not have... the right to do this.” Joonas did not approve of the comments of social work students in his group who were against immigration, and asserted: “they said terrible words, and the social work students’ values should not be like that.” Maija also pointed to a certain conservatism in Finnish social services, “some social service organizations are quite rigid. Things were done there the same way for many years and it can be that the workers were there for many years, and they are used to practicing the same way.”

A unique perspective was presented by Felix who stated that, “if I’m able to help a client achieve his or her goal, I will be fulfilled.” According to Felix, social workers should be motivated by bringing change into their clients’ lives.

Overall, most research participants characterized themselves as, or indicated their willingness to become, anti-oppressive practitioners. They expressed valuing equality and

conveyed their respect for clients' self-determination. Participants from both Canada and Finland were critical of themselves and admitted to being biased or making mistakes sometimes, however, this self-reflection was part of their striving to become better social workers.

D. Speaking up/Advocacy

Speaking up against the injustices is a powerful tool in alleviating oppression.

Participants in this research discussed their own experience of advocating for equality, as well as larger social conversation in the media. As Julie stated,

My idea of being a social worker and working with people is [to] advocate for them...

Give them the tools to advocate for themselves in order that their needs are met, that they are not taken advantage of, or placed in vulnerable situations. To try to be that person, [to] stand up for them if they can't.

Social work students from Finland noted a distinct lack of social work advocacy in the media. Tarja said, "a social worker, at least in Finland, is not making a noise advocating for the clients, but chooses silence and... approval instead." An example of public discussion on drug problems in Tampere was given, where the drug users were discussed as a problem that needs to be removed, instead of seeing them as people in need of help. Tarja stated, that "not even one social worker opened their mouth, there were only deputies or elected officials... and doctors, maybe people from other professions. But I have not seen a single social worker telling about their opinion about this issue." Sini assumed that a reason for this is that media sometimes reject social workers' comments, and that social workers are very careful about speaking up, and

sometimes they are not allowed to do so by their workplace regulations. Tarja characterized this situation as a “culture of silence.”

Joonas spoke about intervening into discriminatory situations, “even if it is a small intervention anywhere, it can be at work or on the bus, anywhere. But the one who is intervening is not really being approved of.” Zarmina voiced a very similar opinion, saying that she is being challenged when trying to advocate her values. Chris also spoke about his actions in relation to intervention in the face of racism:

When we hear a racist judgement or a patient being judged by virtue of his or her social location, they would take a step back, be critical, reflect and try to develop ways, and have to challenge that. Try to educate people that this is not the right approach. Try to educate people that we have to be more mindful about how we perceive people based on our social location, we have to speak our minds. It does not stop with being reflexive, it does not stop with being critical... I sometimes get in trouble, because I always speak my mind. And I say that this is a very judgemental approach, and I'm very vocal about [it] when I feel like it's a judgemental approach, especially towards clients, in particular, clients who have, let's say, First Nations heritage, and... I'm always very clear.

Zarmina gave several examples of intervening in everyday situations that were not work-related. She described a situation of countering racism against First Nations people, “I... really challenged some of those thoughts, but had to be careful, because I did not want to come forceful, because as soon as you get people to... block.. And then they become defensive.”

Maija described her anti-racist advocacy as an anti-oppressive element of the services that she provided in the refugee intake centre. “I always brought these things forward.” Aino voiced a similar thought saying, “social workers can help an individual client, but they also get important knowledge about their client’s life which they can then bring to the upper level, or there is the opportunity for structural social work.”

It is evident that social work students from both countries engage in advocacy and speak up against oppression, both in work-related situations and in everyday life. However, Finnish participants seem to be more actively engaged in a conscious effort of advocacy at their workplaces and communities. They tended to mention public equality-oriented events, while Canadian students did not.

IV. Anti-Oppressive Services.

When being asked about their definition of anti-oppressive services, the research participants emphasized various areas of service provision. The participants’ perspectives can be grouped under six main characteristics, which are: authentic engagement, equality and respect, clients as experts of their own lives, cultural sensitivity, taking the client’s needs and context into account, and universal care.

A. Authentic Engagement.

Authentic engagement entails genuinely caring, listening, and walking in someone else’s shoes. This strategy is applicable in frontline practice with individual clients. As Christine said,

“going inside of a person’s life through their lens [would facilitate] understanding of what oppression means to them.”

Aino, who mentioned lack of attention and engagement from the social worker as an oppressive practice, stated that “there is a possibility to create the space and the situation where there is an opportunity for reciprocity, or the genuine dialogue, when the worker listens to the client and genuinely cares for their well-being.” She considered the way of approaching the client and taking into consideration what they say to be an element of anti-oppressive practice. Similarly, Liz described her strategy of best practice; “I am aware to have a dialogue with someone”, and “really not to play on my own assumptions of someone.” She offered a practical means of starting an evocative dialogue with the client:

For instance, if I don’t have a lot of experience with someone who might be going through some kind of GLBTT issues... I would like [it to be] okay for me to say, ‘I don’t have a lot of background information on this; can you please tell me about your experiences’, and to feel okay to do that and not feel judged. So that for me, anti-oppressive service is a space that is comfortable, that is welcoming. And that people are okay to be themselves, and to be open for about that... Show themselves.

Expressing a similar thought, Felix asserted that “ validating [the client]... is one way of helping them.” Zarmina emphasized the importance of “going that extra mile” and being honest with clients while having to work within the structural constraints of a social welfare system. She gave an example from her practice:

If I am referring a woman to CFS, that's an oppressive system in itself... but being transparent, being a support system, helping that individual and empowering them, we're practicing anti-oppressive right there. And giving them that power back by sharing their stories, and helping them access resources, so they can get to where they need to be to get their needs and goals met, to be able to get their kids back.

Felix shared his anti-oppressive technique of working with clients at the micro-level, saying that it is important for a social worker to be "constantly having a reflection" about their behaviour, and think about how would they like to be treated in their clients' situation.

Finally, Liz described her approach as creating a safe space for a client, since "that might not be something that they would feel throughout the whole program, whether there's, physically, within the structure, or their other relationships with the service providers." This approach implies her lack of judgement of clients and empathy for them.

B. Equality and respect

Treating clients with respect and perceiving them as equals was another prominent characteristic of anti-oppressive social services, as perceived by the research participants. While authentic engagement may encompass respect, it is important to emphasize the empowering potential of a respectful attitude. Sini spoke about her co-workers who have been convicted of crimes, and who are now helping those in trouble with the law. "It is like being on the same level with those people, they really help each other, and it is not coming from the upper level, so this

really works best.” Felix stated simply, that to him, anti-oppressive service means “to... privilege the voice of the client, just to mention that they are respected, they’re listened to.” Also, Maija considered that a social worker “should approach all people equally.” Liz stated that in her practice, she is “just trying to see people as equal, trying to hear their story... to understand them.”

However, social workers need to be careful in balancing equality with providing adequate resources. Aino mentioned positive discrimination and stated that the worker should not “just follow what the law says and give to all [clients] the same, exactly same. Positive discrimination comes from a thought that we give, for example, more time to figure out this situation, it depends what the issue is, maybe this one needs more services or a more frequent service.”

A Winnipeg social work practitioner, Julie, called attention to many issues that arise when dealing with people who struggle with addictions. According to Julie, resources should not be given to clients against their will, because ‘that’s not respecting somebody.’ “If they don’t want that, it means that they’re not ready for that.” Zarmina also spoke against the directive top-down approach, but stayed optimistic, saying that, “But now, I think, the social work is more about... This is kind of a reciprocal type of relationship, a give and take, and the person, it’s very client-centered.”

Finally, Chris asserted the following:

What makes it anti-oppressive is that your client... Would feel that he or she is not just honoured and valued, but you're also honouring where she's coming from, from the back,

from the vast history, or from his everyday life experience and existence, and how this person relates to society.

Chris' quote emphasizes not only respect for the client, but also the need to consider their personal circumstances, which was another prominent theme in the research participants' responses.

D. Taking the Client's Needs and Context Into Account

The personal circumstances of a client are shaped by structural factors, as well as individual ones, such as disability or trauma. Maija, Hector and Julie conveyed that considering a client's personal situation is an important part of social work services. Aino stated that as an anti-oppressive social work practitioner, she strived to "pay attention to everything and see the differences." She was "taking each individual situation into account" as much as she could. Felix asserted that, "Recognizing that oppression exists is one way of actually helping out", and that a social worker should be "acknowledging... whatever present situation [clients] are bringing in." Chris considered the awareness of structural oppression to be crucial to anti-oppressive social work practice:

I think anti-oppressive services... Would mean a service that is very reflexive... Reflexive in a sense that we evaluate our social location, and the social location of the people that we serve, our clients, our patients... So when we are reflective... we are also being critical. And what critical means is that we try to evaluate the oppressive... notions that [are] deeply embedded in our society.

Chris concluded that anti-oppressive services are not “focused on the micro scale”, and that it is necessary to practice, recognizing “the mezzo, macro and exo, systems that, indeed, affect the person's individual functioning.” Chris is convinced that “honouring the truth of oppression” makes a great difference to the social worker’s assessment, intervention and decisions:

It's anti-oppressive in a sense that you are not blaming the person for her own marginalization, but you're trying to collaboratively work with a person and help to slowly... Slowly, not eradicate, because I think it would be very impossible, but slowly walk towards a step that challenges... oppressive structures that surround him or her on a daily basis.

Felix asserted that in working with immigrants, social workers “have to also understand and recognize their family composition and historical background, because that also defines who they are. [Social workers] have to also develop support systems that actually meet the needs, not suppress them.” He also emphasized the importance of recognition of structural oppression.

On the other hand, Julie gave an example of micro level practice where it is important to have knowledge about the client’s situation. According to Julie, it is not fair to assess aging clients’ competencies at the moment when they are not doing well. She said, “To me, it’s about giving people fair opportunities... and then understanding what people’s resources are. With resources and support, it’s incredible what people can do. Really.” She illustrated her point with an example, “you can live alone, have support, and think it’s 1945. Who cares? [...] If you still

know that you need to eat, you need to get dressed, and you know that it's daytime." Hector was critical of this way of reasoning, arguing that having an official diagnosis may facilitate the client's access to resources, and "social workers don't seem to understand the complexity of a labelling system, once you consider insurance and the fact that you need proof to provide services." Hector's rationale was based on his belief that clients who are deemed borderline in their intellectual or mental disability may not be receiving services that benefit them because they are not deemed to be in need.

E. Clients as experts of their own lives

A necessary component of client-centered practice is recognizing the client's ability, knowledge, and experience. Felix voiced the essence of a respectful approach, stating, "I don't look at myself as the expert, I look at them as the expert in whatever situation they are going through. I'm only just there to help them out." Zarmina made a similar point, "It's not about us being the experts, coming in and saying, 'This is what you need to do with your life.' Really, sharing power, sitting there, getting to know them. Every single person has the answers and the keys to their issues, and they know... They're the experts of their own lives." Moreover, Liz shared that she decided to take a Master of Social Work program to "start learning for [herself] to hear from people themselves... how they would like to be treated." She added, "I don't have the answers for someone else's life."

Christine mentioned a participatory approach to service provision as being part of anti-oppressive social work, while Julie spoke of the opposite situation in her practice. "I can think of

a person who came in... Really not attending to medical needs, but not feeling part of the treatment team, part of the decision-making, just being told, like, you're staying. ... Making them stay in a hospital is not respecting how they like to live their life." Liz and Julie took the topic of respecting unconventional life choices further, discussing homelessness by choice. "There are people, I've met them. They're out there, they're truly just want to be off the grid sort of thing", reported Julie. This discussion raised a question of accepting the unconventional and non-normative lifestyles of clients, even though these choices may be difficult to understand for the social worker. It is important, however, to recognize the client's personal agency among the structural factors that may be shaping their lives.

F. Cultural sensitivity/acknowledgement of different cultures

The concept of cultural sensitivity came up in the participants' discussion about work with immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people and ethnic minorities. According to Felix, cultural sensitivity starts with genuine concern for clients, "You have to empathize with these people. ... Getting integrated into this society would be a huge thing for them as well, because they are coming from a different system, a different culture."

Participants from Finland discussed service provision to Romani clients who are an ethnic minority and often face stereotyping in the mainstream society. Tarja identified a lack of acceptance towards Romani culture, as certain aspects of it are not understood by the general population. Sini, a Finnish social worker who sometimes works with Romani clients, described a simple way of bridging cultural difference:

When there are Romani clients, and I don't understand something, why are they acting this way, then I ask them what is this about, and then they gladly tell me about their culture, and they tell why do they need to wear the clothes they wear, and what are those hygiene rules, it is not a taboo for them to talk about these things openly, it is not like sexual things that are a definite taboo.

Another example by Liz demonstrates how important it is for social workers to avoid assumptions about the client's culture:

Someone had to come in to the crisis counselling centre, and he was dealing with going through grief of someone who has passed away, and he was unable to attend the funeral. Because he needed to actually take care of himself, he was going through his own crisis at the time. ... I don't know if he identified as First Nations, as Aboriginal. And I can't even base [it] on appearance, I couldn't assume what his belief was with someone passing, so really, it was for me to take that time to hear what he's learned, how he understands... when someone passes away... what does that look like? And how does his family or his community grieve when someone passes away. And so, really needing to hear that in order to explore what might be helpful for him. Because I [am] First Nation, I know that we don't all grieve in the same way, we don't have the same recognition of when someone passes. And so that helped me be open and mindful, and to not assume.

Practice situations described by Liz and Sini show that in order to hear the client's own interpretation of their culture, the social workers need to be able to initiate a respectful dialogue

about cultural practices and understanding. This dialogue may sometimes be undermined by language and cultural differences. “In a way, there is a language barrier, there are the translators nonetheless, but there is also a cultural barrier. And we are very careful sometimes because of a different culture”, reported Tarja. Therefore, social workers may find themselves struggling to find a balance between being respectful and appropriate, but also being able to openly ask clients questions to elicit their stories.

While Tarja stated that culture explains many things, Maija pointed out that it is not always clear whether certain behaviours are being caused by culture or are related to the individual’s own decision. An example of this was the role of women in different societies. Maija asked a rhetorical question whether women are confined to their home by cultural norms or if they choose this role for themselves. This example serves as a reminder against making assumptions about the other people’s lives.

Zarina described what she considered to be a culturally sensitive practice in her workplace:

Most of our clients are Indigenous. Really having an understanding of colonization, residential schooling, and how that really impacted them [is necessary]. And when we’re doing our assessment, it’s important to have that in mind... and ensuring that we’re referring them to culturally appropriate resources, so they are more comforted and... that we’re not taking a dominant way of assessment. ... They need Elders or things like that... We’re not saying, go to this agency, and it has nothing to do with the culture.

The agency that Zarmina refers to is using culturally appropriate resources for the Indigenous clients. However, it was not clear whether a similar service was available for immigrants and refugee clients with distinct cultural backgrounds.

Community work with immigrants, visible or ethnic minorities requires a cross-cultural dialogue as well. As Felix stated, “Understand these people... It’s just like wanting to find out from another community member or from these people what do they actually mean.”

G. Universal care/Accessibility/Inclusiveness

Universal care on the political level means that “the law determines a certain level where social security is a human right, and nobody is left outside this safety net. Help should be provided”, according to Maija. This has implications for social work agencies that need to assure the services are being provided to the population. Aino gave an example of a range of services provided to refugees in Finland, even though they may not have the official status or residence permit yet. A Winnipeg-based social worker, Felix, specified that his efforts to provide anti-oppressive services to clients include “exposing them to programs and services that I think would be of benefit to them”, and if the clients are not satisfied, Felix provides them with information on what they can do about it. Sini went out of her way making herself available to clients, assuring them that they can call her anytime and ask for help, “It is not like, well, I have reserved fifteen minutes for you, speak fast.”

Finally, Liz characterized an anti-oppressive social service agency as “an environment or place that is completely comfortable for everyone of every population.” This statement points to

inclusiveness and universality. Even though Liz doubted the existence of an agency that would fit these criteria, her statement reflects the ideal worth striving for it.

V. Obstacles for Anti-Oppressive Services

After describing what anti-oppressive social work entails, research participants acknowledged many barriers to providing a service that is truly anti-oppressive. As Zarmina said, “It’s the policies that really can constrain the work that we can do with individuals”, and Hector stated that “It’s kind of hard to be anti-oppressive when... the agency has its own policies, and the policies put restrictions on you.” Christine pointed to institutional obstacles in her practice as a hospital social worker, saying that “there’s so many parameters, you can only do so much.” However, Tarja recognized the opportunity to exercise her own judgement within the workplace constraints, “I cannot do just anything. But what I am doing, I do according to my values.” Zarmina voiced a similar opinion, “We’re bound by policies ourselves. But we can make the differences by the ways we approach individuals.”

Felix provided an example of institutional policies impacting service provision:

CFS... have passionate workers, and they have people who are so much interested in seeing the change in their client’s life. But the... structure is designed in such a way that they do more paperwork than the actual work with their client. That alone limits the amount of work they actually do with the client. ... That’s one. Two, they have so much caseloads that at the end they really can’t actually form a relationship with a particular client. Or even identify the real need of [the] client.

Despite these challenges, Felix did not advocate for a drastic change in the system, saying that it “may not happen overnight” and it “has to go through a process.” He also pointed out that paperwork and record-keeping are positive things, especially when it comes to legal proceedings that may involve social work clients.

Zarmina pointed out that while social workers may try practicing in an anti-oppressive manner, they do not work independently from institutions with different principles of operation, “I think there’s always going to be barriers because you are working with the systems that are very oppressive. For example, if I’m referring someone to EIA [Employment Insurance Assistance], I know that EIA is an oppressive system.” Maija also recognized the need for clients to interact with oppressive institutions, and saw her helping role as minimizing the negative impact of these institutions on clients. Liz identified similar barriers, such as “how supervisor decides who are in the program, how their supervisors decide how to run the program. I’m assuming things like funding affect all of that... There are the challenges of the other people that you’re working with and what kind of service that they provide too.”

Funding was mentioned by several other participants. Maija said, “There are limited resources, and a limited amount of money, so it is not ideal.” Chris mentioned “budgetary issues” among system constraints. Aino pointed out that “the organization has certain financial limitations” that can impact providing benefits to clients, and Hector stated that the agency he worked with could only take in a certain amount of clients because of funding limitations. While

clients who do qualify for the program are not being denied, the criteria they have to meet are narrow and rigid.

Maija reported that while “we do not have the unlimited money”, the policies and regulations may make it a bigger obstacle than it actually is. Maija would like to provide a range of services that are tailored to the client’s individual situation and that go outside the scope of services defined in her workplace regulations. “This available money could be used for other things than what the law allows, with the same spendings, but it is not possible to do that because it is not being viewed in a society as a helping means.”

Winnipeg-based social workers Chris, Julie, and Christine, who work in a similar field, stated that their practice with clients is being heavily impacted by the workplace hierarchy. These participants noted that they do not have a final say in decisions concerning their clients, therefore their anti-oppressive approaches were being compromised. Aino mentioned the workplace atmosphere and collaboration between workers and supervisors are important variables in anti-oppressive practice development.

Finally, Tarja considered the unofficial rules and attitudes that prevail among social workers and in the society, such as the “culture of silence” among social workers in Finland. However, Chris focused on his own practice, reflecting that he may have unwillingly oppressed some of his clients due to embracing the stereotypical norms. Research participants from both countries named a number of obstacles for anti-oppressive practice. Most commonly named obstacles were; the social worker’s own biases, unfavourable workplace atmosphere, budgetary

constraints, organizational and government policies and the oppressive nature of the social welfare system.

VI. Approaching Diversity.

In this research the term “diversity” refers to characteristics that set individuals apart from the mainstream society, for example, race, ethnic origin, culture, sexuality, or religion. Most participants spoke about ways of approaching diversity as being directly linked to oppression and anti-oppression. “Discrimination surfaces when somebody is standing out because of something that is not considered to be the norm or an approved thing”, according to Tarja. The norm, however, is an arbitrary notion determined by society, and is flexible. Sini’s story can serve as an example:

There were many Romanis in [Sini’s hometown], and when I was little I played with Romani children and I went to the same school with Romani children, and then when I moved out, I had questions about how is it that the Romani people are being oppressed, and called all these things. That was foreign to me. Because I was raised in a community where there obviously were the Romani children and Romani families, I guess our school bus drivers were Romani. And our mother and father have made a choice that they will not raise us hating the Romanis or seeing them as different, because, for example, the bus driver was our father’s best friend, and we studied in the same class. And then when I heard about all that... I only had this thought in mind that they are only wearing these wonderful skirts... all this discrimination was not before I moved out of there... It’s probably determined by the community what is considered to be different and what is not.

Sini also stated that “oppression can be viewed on so many different levels, since it depends on who is considered to be different.” Liz considered it important to “acknowledge diversity” by talking about it and making it visible, and also to “promote inclusiveness.” Sini stated that “in Finland we slowly start learning that if somebody is born a certain way, then it is fine, but when it comes to choices, what you have done yourself that somehow separates you from the others... This is more difficult to accept for many.” She noted that there is not always consensus in society on what is a choice and what is not, for example, sexual orientation.

Tarja provided a positive example of accepting diversity. She shared her experience of traveling to Copenhagen and meeting a lesbian woman whose sexual orientation was an ordinary part of her life. Liz gave an example from her practice:

But when I’m in [my workplace]... in an environment where it doesn’t feel like it’s highlighted that I’m First Nations, or whether I’m a woman. ... It just seems like there is... awareness. And no awkwardness. So I think that anti-oppressive practice or service doesn’t have that awkwardness to it.

Tarja discussed stereotypes as a product of lacking knowledge about diversity. For instance, an entire minority group can be judged by the actions of one of its members, as there is an idea among the majority population that all members of the minority group are the same. Also, she stated that not having enough information about diversity in social services causes inadequate service provision. Maija said, “the lack of knowledge creates this oppression. But again, this lack of knowledge can help in finding the common humanity.”

Liz pointed out that the physical structure of the Tier Building where the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Social Work is located is not sending “that message, that everyone is included, and that the space itself perhaps still needs some work to send a message that it is

inclusive.” She referred to the building being an old colonial structure that can make Indigenous people feel excluded, and contrasted it with the Bald Eagle Lodge, a structure built to reflect the Aboriginal traditions. Liz continued,

We don’t need the desks, we just need to put our chairs in a circle format. At first it’s a little bit... students sometimes feel really out of their comfort zone with that... and that really they are, I think, in that mindset of, ‘We need to sit behind our desk and write, and have our own space, um, behind the desk, uh, in order to be in class.’ And so, even having that circle format... can be a very uncomfortable situation at first, because it’s just not part of how we are used to our academic learning. Maybe it is having to consider doing things in a way that we haven’t done before... Or we are not used to doing.

When advocating for a new space for the Faculty of Social Work, Liz expressed that it is important not to exclude anyone and to listen to everybody’s perspectives.

While the social work students from Winnipeg discussed the Indigenous population a lot, the Finnish students spoke little about the Indigenous people of Finland, the Sami. As Tarja stated, “we do not talk about the Sami here”, and Joonas said that he has never encountered a Sami person. This may be due to the fact that the interview was conducted in southern Finland, and the Sami communities tend to concentrate in the northern part of the country that is the traditional Sami land. Also, the Sami population is rather small and often not immediately visible. Sini mentioned *Märät säpikkäät*¹⁵, a TV show run by two Sami women as a positive media representation of the Sami people. While this is a comedy show, it makes the Sami and

¹⁵ *Märät säpikkäät* [Wet Gaiters] was a TV show aired on Finnish television in 2012. The show offered a new, contemporary perspective on Sami culture. It was based on facts and fiction, and made jokes about the Sami and the Finns. The show creators are Suvi West and Anne Kirste Aikio (Helaakoski, 2012).

female perspectives visible. On the other hand, research participants from Finland spoke more about particular ethnic minorities, such as the Somalians and Russians, or the Finnish Swedes. Tarja and Sini mentioned the presence of Swedish language as the second official language in the public sphere and school curriculum, however, Tarja noted that there is usually little said about the Finnish-Swedish culture. In addition, Finnish Swedes are also subjected to stereotypes, even though they are seen as a privileged minority.

Hector said that while people need to be comfortable with differences, they should also be “aware of the things they don't like.” He conveyed that social workers may not be comfortable with every population,

If you don't agree with a certain lifestyle or if you feel uncomfortable talking to... I don't know, people with Down Syndrome. You know, because we're only humans. You can't just say, oh, you're a bad person, because... you feel uncomfortable about somebody with cerebral palsy or something like that. So, my point is - if you have people that are not comfortable with people being different than themselves or people who know their triggers... or the people they don't like... then you could have those people avoid certain populations.

However, Sini stated that “people can be of very different origins and this can be visible right away, the difference can be seen as acquired by birth or acquired or chosen later in life. But then all the different people have to be able to get along.” This ties in again with the concepts of “common humanity” and “treating people like people” that can be achieved by overcoming bias.

A. Raising Awareness and Creating The Dialogue.

As research participants stated earlier, oppressive attitudes in society towards certain minority groups often stem from lack of knowledge about these groups. Aino thinks that “we

could change the discriminatory behaviours a lot if we increased awareness.” Christine also said that “education and awareness are... one of the key factors in addressing oppression.” Zarmina said, “what’s going on with oppression is a lack of education, lack of information, and that stems from ignorance.” Aino specified that in Finland there is a need to find channels through which knowledge could be conveyed to the larger society and anti-oppressive attitudes could be created. Tarja confirmed that there is a need for raising awareness about diversity, “we should know more about the Romani culture so that we could speak about the issues openly.” She shared that in her home community there was not a lot of diversity, so it was “never a topic for conversation.”

Chris emphasized the importance of challenging problematic attitudes:

When we hear a racist judgement or a patient being judged by virtue of his or her social location, [we] would take a step back, be critical, reflect and try to develop ways and have to challenge that. Try to educate people that this is not the right approach. Try to educate people that we have to be more mindful about how we perceive [others] based on our social location; we have to speak our minds. ... We have to get our voices heard when we're trying to challenge it, because when we don't, then we're not really challenging it at all.

Julie and Liz brought up the issue of tension that may arise when having a conversation about oppression. They mentioned the Aboriginal Perspectives course in their program at the University of Manitoba, and both said that “there was a lot of tension.” However, Liz stated that it is important to have the discussion about colonial dynamics, even though it may be difficult.

Trying to raise awareness can be frustrating, as several participants have indicated. Chris noted that he sometimes gets in trouble for speaking his mind, and Tarja said that there is rarely a

time and place for countering discriminatory attitudes in speaking to her clients as “the focus is always on something else,” and Zarmina said she is “one against ten people, all the time” when she tries to stand up against oppression:

It’s easier to back down, turn around, and say, ‘Oh, I can’t even change their minds.’

But I can keep giving them information, and hopefully plant a seed, that one day it might grow, and they say, ‘Hmm, you know, this is what she said; I wonder if this has an impact’... And just really continuously saying, we need to have that compassion with one another, get to know that person before making a judgement.

Sini said she sometimes encounters clients who openly express their prejudice, for example, towards racial minorities in Finland. “It rarely helps saying that this is a stupid racist comment. ... I go on having a conversation about it and I ask them what is their opinion based on. ... Just having a discussion about this issue is, in my opinion, also anti-oppressive work.”

Finally, Sini identified the importance of creating a conversation at the community level and influencing policy-makers who will then make decisions that concern the lives of social work clients. Felix described one of the projects he worked on as a way of drawing government’s attention to the issue of immigrant credentials certification. Felix observed people he knew to “go through heartache” as a result of having trouble finding employment, and decided to spread awareness about this subject.

B. Power, Resistance, And Privilege.

Chris stated, “when I think about oppression, I only think about power. The dynamics of power.” Power inevitably brings on resistance, especially in circumstances of power difference. As Sanjeev said, “whenever we talk about power, we certainly talk about resistance as well.” This quote from Chris exemplifies the relationship between power, privilege and oppression:

It seems like the more powerful, the wealthier, people who have more control, people who are more dominant, can actually subdue, control, they can manipulate, and exploit. They can use, and utilize, and maximize the people, and the people who are of less strength. You know, people who are less valued, people who are less wealthy, people who are less powerful. And the power is imposed to actually gain more power from the oppressor's perspective, and to gain more wealth, to gain more enjoyment, to gain more satisfaction, fulfillment, and even just the acquisition of power itself is very satisfying experience for an oppressor... When I think about oppression, I only think about power. The dynamics of power.

Julie also felt that oppression is “an imbalance of power.” Sini said that the oppressor is the one with more power than the oppressed. However, Joonas stated that the dynamics of oppression are complex and can also happen within marginalized groups. He considered the notion of oppressive majority-oppressed minority to be simplistic, “because there are the excluded ones within the minority.”

Chris said it is important to be aware of one’s own privilege; “my power being in the other side of the healthcare spectrum, as opposed to being a client. Being a service provider definitely has more power, as opposed to being a client or being a patient.” This awareness is part of Chris’ reflective service provision. Liz had similar comments about her practice; “unfortunately, the whole counsellor dynamic is always something that I’m struggling with, so that seems to be a constant, how do you limit that sense of power imbalance. A lot of people will say to me, ‘well, you are the counsellor, you should have the answers’. Or, too, ‘you’re the one with the education, you went to school for this, you should have the answers.” Liz pointed out

that, contrary to these expectations, she is not trying to present herself as an expert and give answers to the client's lives.

Zarmina shared her experience that shows how people from a majority group could use their privilege to help her:

I'm a visible minority, I am a female, and... Muslim, so there is Islamophobia. And I went to the States, and I was with three of my friends, and the guard was really friendly at first until he opened my passport, and when he did that, he's seen that I was born in [her home country]. And his demeanor completely changed, I felt as though I was being isolated and racial profiled from the rest of the group, because he kept asking me a lot of questions, and no one else. So, at that moment I felt really... powerless, and I could not advocate or stand up for myself, because he held a lot of power over me... Going back and critically assessing that, I think that my friends, them being from the dominant culture, could have stepped in and said, 'Hey, is there a reason why you are asking her more questions?' And I think that's when you can kind of deconstruct oppression as others from the dominant culture standing up and being allies of those who are being targeted.

This quote from Zarmina shows the complex dynamics of everyday oppressive situations. On the one hand, her friends may have felt that they are in the same position as her, not having any power and being afraid of being interrogated themselves if they tried to step in. On the other hand, this situation looked completely different through the eyes of Zarmina who was a minority. She felt isolated and abandoned by her friends who could have collectively supported her, making this situation a lot less intimidating. Therefore, people who belong to the dominant group

in society may need to consciously exercise empathy and be mindful of how different the minority person's experiences may be.

Sini, Tarja and Chris all voiced the common idea that the norm or the desired characteristics in society are determined by groups with power and privilege. Chris' narrative was based on the LGBTTTQ community experience:

I think love is a very complex concept that is somehow defined by people who have more access to that... and mostly defined by straight people, and within the gay community defined by... gay men who fall within the top of hierarchy, because it's always gay men who can pass as straight and more white have more, power and are considered to be more valuable. And then you have the lesbian women who are white, who are very educated, and then as the pyramid goes down, then you can see that trans people are perhaps at the bottom of the pyramid. Most scholarly articles are done by either gay white men or lesbian white women... And I haven't seen a lot of representation from marginalized queer people like myself. So the concept of love itself... is very complex... And there's certainly a lot of hierarchy, and that journey towards looking for love, and, and finding that red heart can be very difficult, and can be highly frustrating.

The imbalance of power and subsequent disadvantage of certain groups results in resistance. As Sini said, "you have to literally take power in your own hands. And to resist what makes you feel bad." She provided an illustration of somebody's attempt to resist oppression. Sini's photograph [Figure 6] shows a scratched sticker that, in English, reads "Together against fascism on behalf of the free space." Tarja added that resistance is more productive when people unite for its purpose.

B.1. Freedom of speech.

Several participants raised the question of freedom of speech and censorship. Sini and Joonas spoke about voicing radical discriminatory opinions about minority groups. Joonas implied that expression of such opinions should be “limited in the name of peace”, however, he was not sure “where is the line” and “who should speak for whom.” Tarja asked what is hate speech and what is then freedom of speech. Sini agreed, implying that there is no clear-cut boundary between hate speech and voicing one’s opinion.

Hector was troubled by government control over what the citizens are saying. He gave the US as an example of “watching what people are saying and invading their privacy.” Hector said that he is most concerned with the implications this may have for the freedom of expression. As Hector put it, “if you happen to have ideas that are not mainstream, then you may not be able to express your ideas, because you have this big brother watching over you.” Sini said that since confidentiality is taken very seriously in Finland, this also has implications for the freedom of speech, since social workers cannot speak not only about specific cases, but the entire social issues that relate to individual clients. This controversial phenomenon may be relevant to the “culture of silence” that participants from Finland have described.

VII. Views and concepts of oppression in social work education.

The research participants were asked how oppression and anti-oppressive practice were incorporated in their education on the Bachelor’s or Master’s level. Some similarities and differences between the perspectives of students from Finland and Canada emerged.

Aino provided an insight about social work studies at her university in Finland:

There are certainly many of these theoretical courses.... There is the Declaration of Human Rights, Declaration on the Rights of The Child, these UN declarations, the universal treaties where there is a lot of human dignity. ... And surely we have all of the theory courses where you can consider the ethical issues, mostly why social work is done, the ethical foundations of social work.... Every course dealt with the ethical issues. ... But it can be said that there are the behavioural courses which highlight how you should deal with the customers, how do you show respect.

Sini mentioned courses on multicultural social work and social work with Romani people. She was not happy with the latter one because of the content offered. Joonas spoke about content on cultural sensitivity and anti-oppressive social work, saying that it was taught to him in the courses that he attended. However, Sini specified that there were no courses that dealt solely with anti-discrimination or anti-oppression. She stated that while concepts of oppression are present in her studies, there is little content on what should be done about it, or anti-oppression. Sini said, “it is easy to determine what does not work, but it is harder to say what should be done about it.” Similarly, Maija reported that she took a readings course on marginalization and oppression, while Felix and Hector said that they took a course on anti-oppressive practice at the University of Manitoba.

Maija said that there were a lot of oppression-related concepts covered in her studies, such as racism, discrimination, and social exclusion. She identified marginalization as the most prominent topic. Similarly, Chris said, “there are courses that really address [anti-oppressive practice]... Well, Aboriginal perspectives and feminist perspective.” Tarja spoke about a concept of gender sensitivity in her studies as it related to gender representation in the workplace, and child protection practice. She also mentioned a concept of “talking back” that does not seem to

have a direct equivalent in the English-speaking literature, but refers to the process of reframing the image of marginalized identities (Markkula, 2009). Talking back enables people to take control over the labels or characteristics that refer to them, to give these labels a new meaning or prohibit them altogether.

Joonas spoke about the courses that he was taking at the time of the interview that covered the issues of stigmatization, mental health and homelessness. He said, “oppression and social exclusion are closely related to homelessness.” Sini also mentioned age, alcohol and health problems as factors causing exclusion that were covered in her courses. Tarja stated that the emphasis in her studies lies in practice and the ways of dealing with clients. However, Joonas considered the oppression-related concepts to be present in the practice courses as well as the theoretical ones. Maija voiced a similar opinion, “it was present a lot in social work studies.” This aspect of Finnish social work students’ education has a lot in common with Canadian students. Zarmina said that her whole program is “really much about anti-oppressive practices. Looking at policies, critically assessing them, how are the policies created, oppressing the groups that we’re working with. And I think there is a flavour of anti-oppressive practices in each and every one of our courses.” Hector also stated, “in all of the classes I've taken, we always talk about anti-oppression, and we talk about marginalization, and we talk about, feminism. All those things were there to an extent.” However, he felt that the discussion mostly related to “abstract concepts.”

Zarmina mentioned learning a lot about anti-oppressive practice in her Human Behaviour, Systemic theory (possibly meaning Systemic Inquiry), and Addictions and Mental Health courses at the University of Manitoba. Zarmina also specified that the information taught in her courses “really opened her eyes.” Christine also mentioned courses that “were geared

towards human behaviour”, although she felt that her policy courses addressed anti-oppressive practice to a greater extent. Julie mentioned her courses on family violence, and communities and networks as being a source of information about anti-oppressive practice. She was the only one to identify classism as being covered in her class, even though several other participants spoke about poverty in their interviews.

Felix and Zarmina spoke about courses on immigrants, refugees and visible minorities. Also, Felix mentioned favourably his field focus courses, stating that they covered the topic of becoming an ally, and overall, connected anti-oppressive concepts to practice.

Chris identified the concept of raising awareness as key in his studies,

It is a concept of raising social awareness that is most important and interesting, racism and other isms. And phobias, and discrimination, and marginalization, oppression as a whole. So, I think that is the concept that was covered in some if not all social work courses that was very helpful in addressing [oppression].

Unlike most participants, Liz did not find it easy to identify the discussion on anti-oppressive practice happening in her courses. Liz said there was, “nothing that really stands out for me... I’m sure that it was there, but maybe not to the extent that it probably could have been. That’s where my concern is. It’s even hard to say all these classes were anti-oppressive.”

Sini identified the diversity areas in her studies that were and were not covered:

[Homosexuality] is certainly a marginal phenomenon which does not belong anywhere to the conversation about it, so when there is a sexual minority client, then... Because we talk a lot about ethnic minorities, and we talk about taking age into account, that there cannot be age discrimination. But sexual orientation is a kind of a taboo.

Julie and Liz mentioned the tensions that arise in classes about Aboriginal peoples and feminist perspectives. Interestingly, social workers from Finland did not describe any conflict arising from class content, however, they spoke about issues arising from value differences in the workplace.

Finally, Sanjeev, who followed an individualized graduate program in Finland, shared an insight from his studies:

We talk about the questions of resistance and power. Whenever we talk about power, we also certainly talk about resistance as well. ... So, this is how we are looking at policies in a particular country, how they are harmonized and how they are influenced by other countries. ... We talk about questions of oppression, like, how these countries in Africa and Asia, they have to have compliance with certain guidelines of the developed countries. ... We are looking at this perspective from post-colonial thought, or maybe the issues that are centered to [developing] countries.

Overall, Canadian social work students seemed to experience more coverage of anti-oppressive practice in their curriculum. Students from Finland mentioned less specific anti-oppressive content, but spoke about oppression-related content taught to them. Also, they did not seem to have any courses on Indigenous issues, contrary to Canadian students, who emphasized content relevant to the Aboriginal population. Students from both countries reported exploring discrimination based on ethnicity and race, although more focus on racism seems to be present in the Canadian curriculum. Throughout the interviews, Finnish students alluded to the social work Code of Ethics as a foundation of anti-oppressive practice, but the Canadian students did not.

A. Putting theory to practice.

The research participants were asked if they feel capable of putting into practice the anti-oppressive theory that they learned in the classroom. Their responses differed drastically. Some students were confident in their knowledge and skills, for example, Felix, Christine and Zarmina answered with a firm “yes.” Maija’s answer was also positive, but she pointed out the external limitations to anti-oppressive practice, as well as her own bias that may hinder her efforts. Tarja considered herself capable of applying the knowledge she received in the classroom, but pointed out that this knowledge is not sufficient, and she was not taught concrete anti-oppressive work techniques. Aino said that her source of “ready examples” are books and reports about anti-oppressive work already being done in Finland, such as “culturally sensitive work or anti-racist work.” She stated that the literature is not just theoretical, but fairly practical, and she thought she is capable of applying her knowledge. Sanjeev said he has the expertise to understand what is oppressive and “what can be done against it.”

Felix stated, “how will I be able to intervene with the client if I don’t know the structural constraints, those cultural constraints that the client is going through?” He compared the anti-oppressive knowledge to a worker’s toolbox. Sini said that understanding anti-oppressive concepts and the general workings of society, such as the mechanisms of social exclusion, helps social work practice. She also provided a micro level example of using knowledge in the workplace:

About the little things, it is that you know that the client has, for example, concentration disorder, ADHD. If you know how to work best with this kind of a person, if you need to take care of something, then you would have a tool to do it,

then you'd be able in a way... not to get around this client's difference, but to present them with the means to work with you.

Chris was confident in his ability to apply acquired knowledge "to a degree." He stated, "it takes a lot of courage, I make a lot of mistakes, and I've had a lot of humbling experiences." Julie felt even less capable of putting her anti-oppressive knowledge to practice, or "bringing it to the outside of the classroom." She pointed out that understanding oppression depends not only on the information available, but also on the personal experience of the learner. Practical experience in the field helped Julie and Christine to understand their class material better. Liz also pointed out the importance of practice, however, she considered that there are risks to learn harmful things in the field as well, although she did not elaborate on what those harmful things are.

Hector criticized anti-oppressive practice as being purely theoretical, and questioned the appropriateness of the word "practice" in this term. He stated that "the social justice and stuff like that, to me it's more about talking, talking and talking, and less about doing ... You can talk about poverty, and trying to eliminate poverty, but then how do you do it?." Liz stated that the Faculty of Social Work does have some work to do in its curriculum, and in the way we go on to practice as well." She did not think her education equipped her for practice.

Finally, most participants stated that they strive to be anti-oppressive social work practitioners. They also indicated that they have provided anti-oppressive services themselves and they use their knowledge of oppression in their practice. Zarmina stated, "I was able to really put theory into practice, when I did my field placement." Some participants hesitated to call themselves anti-oppressive practitioners because of the external constraints imposed on them.

Liz offered an alternative point of view by saying that while she agrees with the ideas behind anti-oppressive practice, she does not like the negativity of the term.

Words are really important in context, so it's still even the word "anti-" is in there, anti, the word "oppressive" is still in there... For me, it still brings that energy about, of oppression, and for me it would probably have a different spin on it. ... I'm the type of person, who also doesn't really like the fight against cancer, because it's still the word "fight" is in there, and I realize the whole idea behind it... that it's to be empowering, and to show that strong energy, however, the fight thing doesn't sit well for me... I'm always wondering whether there is a different way of saying it. So my question is, is there a different way of even saying anti-oppressive practice?

Overall, most research participants felt that they are able to connect anti-oppressive theory to practice, and they were willing to do so. Several participants stated that they practice anti-oppressive principles at their workplace. However, not all of the students were happy with anti-oppressive content presented to them in the social work curriculum, or found it easy to apply their knowledge in practice. Some felt that their knowledge was not sufficient. Students from Winnipeg were more critical towards anti-oppressive practice than students from Finland. However, the Finnish students tend to use different terms in their education, and their understanding of anti-oppressive practice was influenced by trying to conceptualize it at the time of their interviews in this study.

5. Discussion and implications.

5. 1. Limitations of the study.

According to Campbell (2010), comparative case studies may present a challenge of selecting cases which are similar enough to be compared. It has to be acknowledged that the context of AOP is quite different in Canada and Finland, both in political factors and social work history. The AOP terminology used in the two countries is not the same. Even though the term “anti-oppressive practice” can be seen in English-language Finnish sources, the direct equivalent of the term is missing from Finnish-language sources.

Interviews with students from Finland were conducted in Finnish. Having to translate the data and terminology used may have presented an obstacle to comparison of the interviews conducted in different languages. Also, conducting two interviews via Skype could jeopardize the engagement between a researcher and a participant.

Participation in this study is based on students’ willingness to volunteer their time for research. Only very broad criteria for participation, such as being a social work student and having some practical experience are put in place. This brings in the possibility of engaging or excluding certain types of students. It can be implied that only students that are interested in anti-oppressive practice and perceive it mostly positively volunteered to participate. Only a sample of 13 students participated in this study. Also, all participants were in their 20s or early 30s. A distinct lack of involvement of Caucasian students on the Canadian side has to be noted, even though they represent the majority of the student body at the University of Manitoba. As a consequence, the opinions of these two groups of students may not be representative of the

general attitudes prevalent among social work students. Thus, the generalizability of study findings is limited by the characteristics and size of the sample.

Finally, it is likely that the researcher's behaviour and bias have influenced the findings. The researcher's values likely had some impact on how the findings were interpreted and presented, what was considered important, and what was left out.

5.2. Merits of the study.

This research provided the social work students with an opportunity to discuss the topic of anti-oppressive practice, share their experiences and thoughts, and, possibly develop new ideas about this topic. Participation in this research also may have advanced the students' understanding of qualitative interviewing, focus groups, and use of the photovoice methods. This knowledge can be useful in the students' further studies and conducting their own research later on. Positive feedback from research participants was received after the interviews. They enjoyed the opportunity to talk, have their voices heard, and some noted that it was a valuable experience for them to participate in a research project. Also, this study may have served to increase the international experience and expertise of research participants, and roused their interest in social work abroad. The participants were asking questions about social work in another country before and after the interviews were conducted.

The research interviews produced a vast amount of visual and textual data that revealed a complex and multifaceted picture of social work students' perspectives on anti-oppressive practice. It unraveled the students' values and approach to practice as well. The researcher was able to identify similarities and differences between the ideas that social work students hold in

Canada and in Finland. In addition, interesting data about the education system in Finland has surfaced, and it turned out to be quite different from the Canadian education system.

This study was based on participatory research principles (Hergenrather et al., 2009), hence the participants were given a significant amount of control over the process. This research method is progressive and transformatory, it contributes to social change and serves to dismantle the traditional power imbalance between the researcher and the participant.

5.3. Implications for social work education and practice.

5.3.1. Defining student's perspectives on anti-oppressive practice and their concepts of it as a theory.

Social work students who participated in this research had a rather clear idea about anti-oppressive practice, and they offered a range of observations, suggestions, and recommendations regarding social work education and practice.

In general, research participants viewed AOP as a set of values and behaviours that a social worker employs in their workplace. They saw AOP as a part of a larger theoretical framework, including social work ethics that guides social work practice. The social work students mostly had positive reflections on AOP and stated that they are employing it when serving their clients.

According to the research participants, the main elements of AOP are inclusiveness, advocacy, genuine engagement with the clients, and attention to the client's individual circumstances. The participants emphasized clients' agency over their lives, which is consistent with Dominelli's (2002) view on AOP as a perspective that gives voice and power to the clients.

Several participants mentioned that they pay attention to client's needs and redistribute resources available to suit each client's situation. Some considered affirmative action to be part of AOP.

Power and privilege dynamics is an integral part of AOP theory, as conceptualized by Dominelli (2002), Bishop (2002), and Starhawk (1987). Several participants voiced their awareness about the power inequality that exists between themselves and their clients. These participants tried to use their power with caution, and to avoid conveying some superiority towards their clients. By doing so, the participants recognized that social workers can be agents of oppression, as described by Baines (2007), Dominelli (2002), Rogers (2012), and Strega (2007). Almost all participants spoke about respect to the client, saying that the client's choice in life is their own, and a social worker can only guide them to the place where they want to be.

5.3.2. Social work students as anti-oppressive practitioners in the field.

All research participants except one identified themselves as, or stated that they are, striving to become anti-oppressive social work practitioners. Liz, who said she does not consider herself to be an anti-oppressive practitioner, explained that although she agrees with the AOP values, she does not like the term "anti-oppressive practice", because it sounds too negative to her.

Most students were able to provide practical examples of their use of AOP in the field, as well as describe situations when they witnessed oppressive treatment of the clients. Only Sanjeev did not go into detail of his frontline practice, concentrating on his research efforts and community development work. Anti-oppressive techniques used by students in their field practice include practicing cultural sensitivity, making themselves available to clients, taking the client's context into account, respecting the client and adjusting their practice to fit the client's

individual needs. Cultural sensitivity is described by many authors, including Williams (1999), Este (2013), Ford (2000), and Freeman (2007).

Research participants from Canada and Finland were often concerned with social work ethics at the workplace. They were dedicated to anti-oppressive values themselves and expected nothing less of their colleagues. At least two participants tried to raise the issue of their colleagues' unethical behaviour with the supervisor or other colleagues. Several participants were concerned about the language that their colleagues or other students use, and Thompson (2006) states that language is a powerful tool of oppression. The participants were critical of themselves to a similar degree, admitting to their own biases and actions that may have perpetuated oppression.

5.3.3. Social work students' experience of social work education related to anti-oppression.

All research participants remembered anti-oppressive content in their studies, although their perceptions of the quality and quantity of this content differed considerably. While some considered that their whole program was anti-oppressive, the others stated that there were hardly any elements of AOP theory in their courses. This could result from differences in perception as well as from the fact that the students took different courses and were at different levels of studies.

Students from Finland noted that their curriculum was lacking information about many ethnic minority and Indigenous groups. They noted a gap in knowledge regarding Romani issues, and pointed out that social workers frequently serve Romani clients. Despite this fact, there are very few Romani social workers in Finland. It can be assumed that this area requires heightened

attention in social work education in order to recruit Romani students into the program, and increase the level of knowledge and awareness about Romani people among the general population students.

Social work students in Canada felt that they were provided with theory in their courses, however, the connection between theory and practice was not always evident to them. This is consistent with Barnoff and Coleman's (2007) view on AOP as a largely theoretical perspective with unclear application in clinical practice. Also, most students tended to emphasize the importance of field practice, and stated that knowledge acquisition depends heavily on the field supervisors and colleagues. Liz offered restructuring of the architectural space of the university as a means to advance anti-oppression and demonstrate the values of inclusiveness to students. According to Liz, even small steps, such as sitting in a circle in class, can serve to create the atmosphere of unity and equality among social work students. De Montigny (2011) also called attention to power inequalities in social work education.

5.3.4. Similarities and differences found in perspectives on AOP of students from Canada and Finland.

While general patterns of theory and rhetoric can be differentiated between the small samples of students in Canadian and Finnish social work programs, it is important to remember that the research participants are not representative of their countries and may not hold the same opinions as the majority. Their perspectives, while influenced by their contexts, are also uniquely their own, therefore, definitive generalizations cannot be drawn.

Social work students in both countries approached the significance of oppression differently. While students in Canada emphasized the importance of awareness and knowledge

about oppression, students from Finland stated that their main premise is to “approach people as people.” This means that while equality and respect are valued in Finnish rhetorics, the recognition of oppression is not prioritized as much as in the Canadian perspective. Nonetheless, Finnish students demonstrated their awareness of the oppressive realities that minority groups face. Some were taking responsibility for discrimination, using the word “we” when talking about perpetrators of racism.

Different social locations of participants from Canada and Finland may have influenced their perspective. While most Finnish participants were members of the general population, the Canadian cohort of students was significantly more diverse, including visible and sexual minorities, immigrants, and Aboriginal people. Therefore, it can be implied that Canadian participants in this research had a much more extensive first-hand experience of oppression. This assumption may be backed up by the stories participants told and their testifying to being discriminated against. These experiences may partly account for a greater emphasis on oppression in Canadian participants’ interviews.

Finnish and Canadian similarities in students’ perspectives can be found in their connecting theory to practice. Students from both cohorts saw anti-oppressive services similarly, though not in the same way. They identified common elements of AOP that can be used in helping clients, such as respect, authentic engagement, or advocacy. However, students from Canada tended to mention reflexive practice, while Finnish students did not directly approach this concept. Also, students from Finland seemed more confident in their ability to apply their knowledge and skills of AOP in practice.

Obstacles to AOP were viewed similarly by students from both countries. Finnish and Canadian students mentioned budget constraints, as well as the oppressive nature of many social service agencies that their clients have to deal with. Participants in Canada also spoke about internal obstacles, such as their own biases.

There were participants who traveled to the ‘developing world’ in both cohorts. These students spoke at length about the realities they encountered in other countries. It was clear that these experiences served to enrich the students’ outlook. These participants tended to adopt a global view on oppression. Brown (2007) considers viewing social issues in a broader societal context desirable, as it helps to separate these issues from individual deficiency. Also, there were students in both the Canadian and Finnish groups who concentrated on their unique local issues.

Finally, most students in both countries had a positive opinion about AOP and strived to be anti-oppressive social work practitioners. In addition, both cohorts had members who presented critiques of AOP and social work in general.

Conclusion

In conclusion, some similarities and differences in perspectives on anti-oppressive practice were found among Finnish and Canadian social work students. Research participants from both countries were supportive of AOP values and ideas, and the majority identified themselves as anti-oppressive social work practitioners.

Social work students who participated in this research offered an extended discussion about oppression and AOP. They spoke about oppression on different levels and supported their assertions with practice examples, as well as their lived experiences. The participants also offered suggestions about how AOP could be better implemented in social work practice.

Local context has influenced the research participants' narratives. For example, students from Finland alluded to a mostly European phenomenon of neo-fascism, a violent ultra-right ideology that is narrowly supported. They referred to racial and ethnic minority groups present in Finland, and sometimes unique to Finland. Similarly, social work students from Canada used the Canadian, mostly Winnipeg context as their frame of reference. For instance, all research participants from Canada referred to the oppression of Aboriginal people. Participants from both countries referred to the history of the country they live in. Participants who have traveled a lot were likely to refer to global history. Also, the rhetoric used in the social work students' studies influences their perception and articulation of oppression-related concepts.

Further research can be done regarding the importance of language in qualitative research, the influence language has on the research process, and its role in the research participants' experience. Answering these questions becomes more relevant in our increasingly multicultural world. Also, this research would offer a more complete picture of the social work students' perspectives on AOP if more Canadian-born, Caucasian students agreed to participate and offer their insight. Research on social work students' perspectives on AOP could also be extended to other countries.

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Appendix 1

Informed consent for participation

Research Project Title: Social Work Students' Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Practice

Researcher: Olga Radzikh, graduate student, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

E-mail: xxx@cc.umanitoba.ca

Phone number: 1 (204) 000-0000

Research Supervisor: Dr. Tuula Heinonen, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

E-mail: xxx@ad.umanitoba.ca

Phone number: 1 (204) 474-9543

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research is to understand social work students' perspectives on anti-oppressive practice. As a social work student, you are invited reflect on your perspectives and understanding of anti-oppressive practice.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be involved in a photovoice project, followed by a focus group interview, or an individual interview. First, you will be asked to take photographs which reflect your views on oppression and anti-oppression. Please use your camera or phone for taking these pictures, but avoid including faces of people other than yourself.

After each participant has collected five or six pictures they are willing to share with the other social work students, a group interview will be held. You will be asked to show your pictures to the group and describe how they relate to oppression or anti-oppression. After a break, a focus group interview will follow. You will be asked to participate in a group discussion. The questions asked will refer to your understanding of anti-oppressive practice, and your experience of anti-oppressive practice in your education and social work practice.

1. The focus group will have seven to ten students.

2. The total time of the group meeting will be 2.5 hours.
3. The group discussion will be recorded with a digital recorder.
4. Light refreshments, such as pizza and coffee or tea, will be provided.
5. After the focus group process is over you will be asked to share your experience of participation.
6. The risk of harm to you is minimal. If the discussion about oppression makes you feel sad, angry or depressed, you will be supplied with a list of resources where you can seek further debriefing.

Your responses and any materials you provide will be kept confidential. These consent forms with your name and signature will be stored at the researcher's home. The group meeting recording and transcripts will be stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected file. All materials will be accessed only by the researcher and the research supervisor, and will be destroyed no later than December 31, 2015. All identifying information will be deleted or substituted when results are presented.

The results of this study will be a part of the researcher's thesis, completed in partial fulfillment of requirements of the Master of Social Work degree. In addition, these results may be used in conference presentations and/or journal articles.

Copies of photographs you provide will be kept by the researcher for three years for the purpose of further publication and presentation of this study. If you would like to be credited for your photos (to have your name included when your photo is shown), please choose this option in the end of this form. In this case the fact of your participation in this study will no longer be confidential.

The photovoice and focus group interviews will be held in Tampere, Finland in May 2013, and Winnipeg, Canada in September 2013.

Please provide your contact e-mail below if you would like to receive information on research results. The results will be disseminated to participants in December 2013, and will also be presented at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba.

Contact e-mail or postal address

You may refuse to answer any questions if you do not feel comfortable doing so. You may withdraw from participation in this study at any point, and ask for all data you have provided to be removed. No negative consequences are intended to follow this action.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued

participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Please put an “x” mark inside a box if you agree with a corresponding statement:

1. I have read and understood the Informed Consent Form •
2. I would like to have my name included when my photo is shown •
3. I give permission to my interview to be audiotaped •

Your name (please print)

Your signature

Researcher's name

Researcher's signature

Appendix 2

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Please introduce yourself. Are you undergraduate or graduate student?
What is your social work related experience?
2. How do you understand oppression?
 - a. What other words do you use for “oppression”?
 - b. Can you provide examples?
3. Describe examples you have observed of people being treated in an oppressive way:
 - a. in social services;
 - b. in other situations.
4. Was anti-oppressive practice or other concepts related to addressing racism, discrimination, marginalization, and/or social exclusion covered by instructors here during social work courses?
 - a. Which courses included discussion on anti-oppressive practice or related concepts?
5. What constitutes anti-oppressive services in your opinion?
 - a. have you worked in an agency which provides services from an anti-oppressive framework?
 - b. have you provided such services yourself? What makes them anti-oppressive?
6. Do you feel that you are capable of applying your knowledge of anti-oppression in the field?
 - a. are there any obstacles to providing anti-oppressive services?
7. Do you position yourself as an anti-oppressive social work practitioner?
Why or why not?

Appendix 3. E-mail scripts.

An e-mail script for participant recruitment at the University of Tampere:

Dear Student:

You are invited to participate in a photovoice project “Social Work Students’ Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Practice.” As a participant, you will be asked to take photographs and then share them with the researchers and other research participants during a meeting.

The group meeting will take place at the University of Tampere on May 7 and will be 2.5 hours long. The exact time and place of the meeting is to be determined.

The project is being organized by Olga Radzikh, a Faculty of Social Work graduate student at the University of Manitoba (Winnipeg, Canada). To participate or for more information, please contact Olga Radzikh at umradzik@cc.umanitoba.ca.

Please see the attached poster for more information.

An e-mail script for participant recruitment at the University of Manitoba:

Dear Student:

You are invited to participate in a photovoice project “Social Work Students’ Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Practice.” As a participant, you will be asked to take photographs and then share them with the researchers and other research participants during a meeting.

The group meeting will take place in Tier Building on September 20 and will be 2.5 hours long. The exact time and place of the meeting is to be determined.

The project is being organized by Olga Radzikh, a Faculty of Social Work graduate student at the University of Manitoba. To participate or for more information, please contact Olga Radzikh at umradzik@cc.umanitoba.ca or 1 (204) 000-0000.

Please see the attached poster for more information.

Appendix 4.

Photovoice Instructions

Welcome to the Anti-Oppressive Practice photovoice project. In this project you and the other social work students can express your thoughts, ideas, views, and experiences of anti-oppressive practice. You can pick different relevant aspects of anti-oppressive practice, such as oppression, marginalization, anti-racism, colonization, or any other as the basis of your photos.

You may take a picture of anything you want, for example objects, places, or nature. You can make an abstract photo without showing anything in particular. Your photo may be a timely captured moment, a spontaneous shot of your surroundings, or it may be staged. You can arrange objects as you like to convey your thoughts.

Please try not to take pictures of people's faces. Your photo may be publicly disseminated, and all people who can be recognized in the photographs would need to give their written consent to be photographed.

You can use your camera or your cell phone to take the pictures. Photographs of good quality are desired but not necessary. You can edit your shots, or just leave them as they are. Your photo can portray anything, as long as it serves as an illustration to your perspective on anti-oppressive practice. Things you have to say along with your photo are the most important.

You can take all pictures in one day or several days. Aim at having 5-6 pictures that you would like to present at the photovoice meeting. At the meeting, all photovoice participants will come together and speak about their photos. The photos will be shown to all research participants. A digital projector will be used for the presentation. After this discussion a focus group interview will follow. During this interview you and the other photovoice members will be asked about your views and experiences of anti-oppressive practice. The entire meeting is going to take 2.5 hours. Snacks will be provided.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact Olga Radzikh at xxx@cc.umanitoba.ca.

Happy photographing!

Social Work students are needed to participate in a

photovoice project
about

Anti-Oppressive Practice

- If you are a social work student with any relevant work experience (paid, field practice, or volunteer), you are welcome to participate in the photovoice project “Social Work Students’ Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Practice”.
- If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take several pictures with your camera or phone. The pictures have to reflect oppression or anti-oppression from your perspective.
- The pictures will be discussed with the researchers and other participants during a meeting. **Snacks will be available.** The meeting is going to last 2.5 hours.
- **Participation in this research is confidential.**
- Your participation in this project will help understand the students’ views, concept and experiences of anti-oppressive practice in Finland and in Canada, and learn about the differences in their perspectives.

Researcher:
Olga Radzikh,
Master of Social
Work Student,
University of
Manitoba, Canada

To participate, or for
more information,
please contact:

Olga Radzikh
xxx@
cc.umanitoba.ca



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Participants needed
for a

PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

ABOUT ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE



All social work students are welcome!

To participate, or for more information please contact Olga Radzikh, a graduate student:

XXX@UMANITOBA.CA
(000) 000-0000

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Photovoice Research

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