



MICRO PRACTICE TOOLS FOR A MACRO WORLD: SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH DIRECT PRACTICE

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A Bit About Me...

- Education: Criminology & Political Science, MSW, PhD in Social Work
- Teaching: Policy, Research, Program Evaluation, Structural Social Work
- Research: Focus on impacts of structural violence
- First Nations Youth Suicide Prevention Curriculum (www.FirstNationsSuicidePrevention.com)
 - Empowerment
 - Fostering hope and resilience
 - Advocating for implementation





A BIT
ABOUT
YOU...

Learning Objectives for Today

Through today's session, you will:

1. Gain deeper understandings of social justice and structural violence
2. Gain insights into how you can apply social justice work in direct practice

Presentation Outline

1. Social Justice

2. Oppression

- Structural Violence

3. Privilege

4. How social justice work can be incorporated into direct practice

5. How you are incorporating social justice work into direct practice

Social Work & Social Justice (NASW)

Ethical Principle: *Social workers challenge social injustice.*

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' **social change efforts** are **focused** primarily **on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice.** These activities **seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity.** Social workers **strive to ensure access** to needed information, services, and resources; **equality** of opportunity; **and meaningful participation** in decision making **for all people.**

What is Social Justice?

“an ideal condition in which **all members of a society have the same rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits.** Implicit in this concept is the notion that **historical inequalities should be acknowledged and remedied** through specific measures. A key social work value, social justice **entails advocacy** to **confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequalities.**”

Social Work and Oppression

- Oppression is the major source of social problems
- Most social work is carried out with, or on behalf of, people experiencing oppression



Nature of Oppression

- Most people are oppressed in some aspects of their lives and oppress others in other aspects of their lives
- In addition to being **group-based**, oppression is also described as **relational** (only people oppress people)
- Oppression **is not accidental (nor is it usually intentional)**
- So, why does it occur?

Nature of Oppression (cont.)

- Because it benefits the dominant group!
- Oppression ensures that society reproduces itself and maintains the status quo.
- Most people do not consider themselves to be oppressors.

Oppression as Structural Violence

- Structural oppression may be overt and visible, such as when the state does not recognize gay marriages.
- However, **most oppression at the structural level today is covert or hidden.**

Oppression as Structural Violence (cont.)

- Covert oppression at the structural level is a powerful force in maintaining group-based hierarchies.

And...

- Leads to a slow, agonizing, unpunished, and premature death for countless numbers of subordinated people all over the world.

This is structural violence!

Structural Violence

- Social justice is about elimination of structural violence
- Structural violence = result of taken-for-granted, covert social arrangements and relations that put ppl and groups at risk of harm
- **Structural** b/c embedded within social institutions, **violent** b/c it causes avoidable suffering, injury, illness, and/or death

Time to take a break



TAKE 10
MINUTES 😊

Social Work and Privilege

- Oppression and privilege go hand in hand.
- Privilege largely ignored in social work literature
- Two reasons we ignore privilege:
 1. Implicates those with power
 2. More comfortable/easier to focus on fixing other people than ourselves

To challenge oppression, we must confront our own privilege!

The Nature of Privilege

- Privilege is about advantages that are granted systematically by society on basis of membership in a specific group
 - 2 Kinds of Advantages: **Earned (not privilege)** & **Unearned (privilege)**
- Privilege as a “moving target”

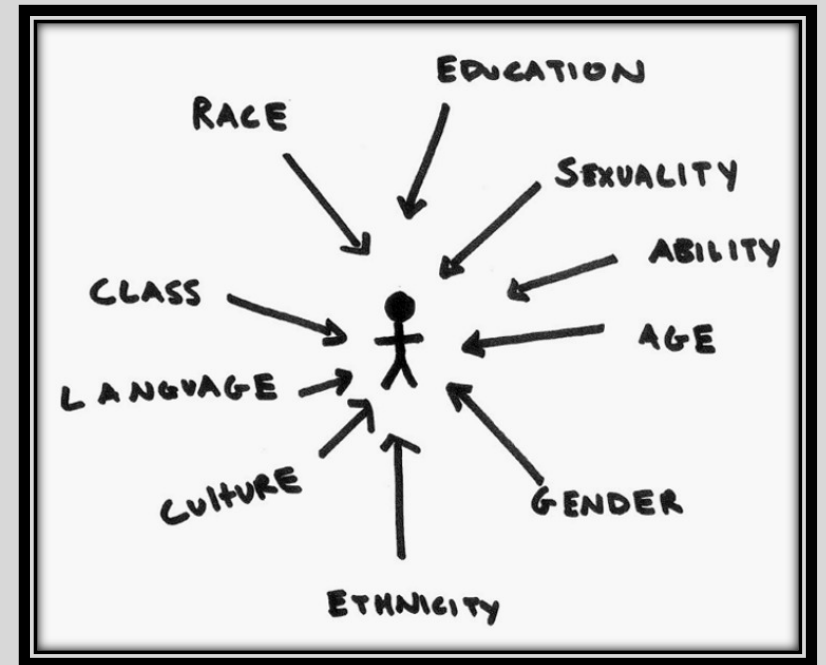
Privilege and Social Workers

- Privilege may lead professionals to assume certain things about service users
- Service users are usually aware of social workers' privileges even if social workers are not

Learning how to use power and privilege, rather than denying it, is part of the challenge in anti-oppressive work.

Intersectional Nature of Privilege and Oppression

- We usually belong in both privileged & oppressed categories
- Various forms of privilege and oppression are connected & interact with each other
- **We must be willing to examine many dimensions of privilege & oppression while staying present with our emotional reactions!**



Incorporating Social Justice Work into Practice: **Empowerment**

- Directly related to self-determination
- Support people in becoming stronger and more confident so they may be empowered to influence decisions and recognize and use their resources
- Entails **focusing on clients' strengths**, assets, and resources

Incorporating Social Justice Work into Practice: **Advocacy**

- **Advocacy:** activities that secure services for and promote the rights of individuals, families, groups, orgs., & communities
- Must understand clients' environments in order to advocate

Incorporating Social Justice Work into Practice: **Critical Reflection**

- Reflecting on our own privilege
- Reflecting on power dynamics within helping relationships
- Reflecting on the role(s) we are playing in oppression
- How privilege, power, and oppression impact our service to clients

Incorporating Social Justice Work into Practice: **Other Ways...**

- Strength-based approaches to practice
- Meeting clients where they are (literally & figuratively)
- Paying attention to language (and its power)
- Focusing on client's right to self-determination
- Accounting for how systemic (social, political, economic) factors are impacting client's presenting problem in assessment
- Respecting the dignity and worth of ALL persons

Small Group Discussions...

How have you (or are you currently)
incorporating social justice work into your
practice?

- Discuss in small groups
- ~15 minutes for discussion
- Pick someone in your group to report back to the group

How have you (or are you currently) incorporating social justice work into your practice?

Challenging Injustice – What Can We Do?

- Pay attention to issues related to oppression and privilege
- Keep an open heart and an open mind
- Engage with and involve diverse individuals and communities

Be willing to make mistakes, learn, and try again!



Do Something.

- Walk (or kneel) beside people experiencing oppression
- Find little ways of getting off paths of least resistance
- Dare to make people uncomfortable, starting with ourselves
- Engage in courageous conversations about oppression and privilege with others



This House

We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, “I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked Indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands. Unaddressed, the ruptures and diagonal cracks will not fix themselves. The toxins will not go away but, rather, will spread, leach, and mutate, as they already have.

When people live in an old house, they come to adjust to the idiosyncrasies and outright dangers skulking in an old structure. They put buckets under a wet ceiling, prop up groaning floors, learn to step over that rotting wood tread in the staircase. The awkward becomes acceptable, and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over the generations, we learn to believe that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be.

Questions & Open Discussion

